

## **Scream Queens: A Tool for Sparking Dialogue about Hot Topics on Campus**

Aneal Ramkissoon, Florida Atlantic University

*Scream Queens* (2015) is one of last fall's most anticipated new shows focusing on a struggling sorority, Kappa Kappa Tau, their new member class, and a masked murderer who kills them one by one. Created by Ryan Murphy, this fictitious, overly dramatic story helps to perpetuate stereotypes sorority women have been trying to combat for years. The purpose of this article is to provide fraternity and sorority advisors with ideas for using episodes of *Scream Queens* to open dialogue with students about important hot topics in our communities.

Homophobia, hazing, diversity, and relationships with campus administrators are all hot topics within sororities and fraternities on college campuses. Given *Scream Queens* is a hot new show, advisors can use the first full episode ("Pilot") to engage students in dialogue about these topics. After showing this episode, advisors can facilitate lively discussions with the questions provided in this article. Another option is to invite a panel of guest speakers to answer the questions and provide a variety of perspectives on the discussion topics.

### **Racism and Homophobia**

Ryan Murphy drew his inspiration for the series *Scream Queens* from a real life email that went viral: "The Most Deranged Sorority Girl Email You'll Ever Read," written by a member of Delta Gamma at the University of Maryland. Similar to the April 2013 email, *Scream Queens'* Chanel, the president of Kappa Kappa Tau, penned an email riddled with racist and homophobic rants. The fact a viral email portraying sorority women as vicious and self-absorbed was used as inspiration demonstrates the need to talk about *Scream Queens* and use it as a tool to educate. Sorority and fraternity life administrators can show the clip from *Scream Queens*, share the actual email from University of Maryland, and follow up by asking students questions such as:

- How would you react if someone from your chapter leadership sent this email?
- Do you think this email represents how sorority women speak to each other on this campus? Why or why not?
- How can we make campus and fraternities and sororities more accepting environments for gay and lesbian students as well as students of different races?

### **Hazing Prevention**

The irony the second episode, titled "Hell Week," aired during National Hazing Prevention Week is troubling. In fact, *Screams Queens* was trending on Twitter more than National Hazing Prevention Week, which means a show portraying hazing in a comical manner got more attention than the national initiative to combat hazing. In this episode, the women of Kappa Kappa Tau have their new members participate in their oldest hazing tradition, the Sexy Gopher Whore Head challenge, which involved the sisters of Kappa, "the Channels," burying their new members neck-deep in the backyard. After showing this clip, the following questions can be asked to provoke student discussion:

- Do you think because hazing is depicted as humorous in the show it makes it okay?
- Do you think the show could be as funny without hazing?

- How could the show have showcased alternatives to hazing?
- How can we change the public's perception that hazing is still the norm on college campuses?

### **Diversity**

The initiated members of *Scream Queens'* Kappa Kappa Tau are all Caucasian women, showcasing the lack of diversity in the chapter. With their new member class including a woman of color, an openly gay Asian woman, a woman with a neck-brace, and a deaf woman, it looks like the chapter may be becoming more open to diversity. However, the president refers to their new members as "the dreads of society." She adds, "I can't believe this, each one of these gashes are worse than the next." She gives them derogatory nicknames such as "neck-brace," "deaf Taylor Swift," and "predatory les." Questions to ask participants can include:

- What does diversity mean to your chapter?
- How could your chapter become more inclusive during and after recruitment?

### **Relationships with College/University Administration**

At some institutions, chapters feel as though the administration is working against them and not with them. In the pilot episode, the following is shared in the first interaction we see with Dean Munch, the Dean of Students, while speaking to the Kappa president: "I'm going to be honest. I hate sororities and I hate you. For years, I've seen the damage these so-called sisterhoods have had on young girls." This scene does little to combat the fear many affiliated members have regarding the administration's intentions to shut down fraternity and sorority communities, and their assumption that administrators are unwilling to help chapters or opposed to community growth. Questions for discussion following this clip can include:

- What resources and/or services does the administration currently provide that are helpful?
- What resources and/or services do you wish the administration would provide to help your chapter be more effective?
- How could fraternity and sorority chapters better work together with the administration?

### **Conclusion**

*Scream Queens* can be an excellent mechanism for sparking campus discussions about important hot topics such as homophobia, hazing, diversity, and relationships with administrators. By using examples from a current TV show (*Scream Queens* has been renewed, with Season Two set to air later this year), there is greater likelihood these discussions can be used to launch programming and initiatives to make fraternal communities safer and more inclusive. By engaging students in discussions about these topics, they can begin to come up with creative solutions to combat homophobia, hazing, diversity, and communication issues with administrators.

### References

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