

To Pledge or Not to Pledge?

Aria is a first-year, out-of-state student at a large public university. She couldn't wait to arrive on campus but now finds herself overwhelmed by the vast student body. Seeking a smaller and more personal community, Aria has begun to consider following in her mother's footsteps by joining a sorority.

However, Aria has reservations, given some of her closely-held moral and political commitments. She has heard that the Greek system of sororities and fraternities sometimes perpetuates a culture of sexual assault, alcoholism, racial exclusion, oppressive gender roles, and conventional beauty standards. Her feelings are exacerbated by the fact that throughout high school Aria was dedicated to educating herself on social issues like racial justice and female empowerment. She was also an active member of many social and volunteer groups that vocally promoted these beliefs. Aria fears that joining Greek life will make her complicit in upholding an institution that goes against many of her core beliefs. She also wonders whether she can continue to consider herself an ally or activist if she isn't making choices in her personal life that align with the beliefs she supposedly stands for.

Even so, because of Greek life's prominent place on campus and the large amounts of money it brings into the school, Aria is sure that abolition movements will be unsuccessful. She believes that in joining, she may be able to create change from within and advocate for inclusivity and reform. In fact, in some senses, Aria sees that the best way to improve the institution is for more people like her to join. Additionally, Aria knows multiple admirable peers who are members of Greek life. These peers, along with her mom, have shared positive stories about their experiences in Greek life. Aria is excited by the possibility of making life-long friends, performing philanthropic work, and taking advantage of a sorority's networking and leadership opportunities. She also feels compelled to prioritize her mental health and happiness and feels certain that Greek life will help by providing close friends and a structured social calendar.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would it be wrong of Aria to join the sorority? Why or why not?
2. To what extent is one morally obligated to *only* act on choices that are compatible with their fundamental values?
3. In what ways, if any, is it possible for people to claim personal virtue while maintaining membership in morally ambiguous institutions?

