

Is There More to Greek Life than Parties and Alcohol?: An Examination of Emotional Intelligence and Greek Affiliation

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Abstract

Greek organizations are one of the many extracurricular activities students can join when they enter college. In the United States, nine million students are members of a Greek organization². Students decide to become affiliated with Greek life for many different reasons, both positive and negative to their health. By being part of a fraternity or sorority, students are able take on leadership roles within their organization, create a broad networking system, have dedication to philanthropy, improve social skills, make lifelong friends, and much more. Additionally, these Greek life opportunities correlate to aspects of emotional intelligence (i.e., the ability to identify and manage one's emotions) such as; recognizing, understanding, and managing one's own emotions as well as the influences they have on other people⁸. However, these positives often get over-looked by the negative risky behaviors of this lifestyle. Greek members consume more alcohol, are more likely to smoke cigarettes and marijuana, and engage in more sexual activity than non-Greek members⁶. Emotional intelligence has been noted as an important aspect in determining leadership effectiveness as well as aligning with goal achievement and satisfaction in the workplace⁸. Since Greek organizations offer various leadership opportunities, this study aims to extend the literature by examining the relationship between being a member of a social Greek organization and emotional intelligence. Data was collected via an online survey that was administered to undergraduate students at a mid-sized Midwestern university in the United States. Participants included 273 students. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between Greek affiliation and emotional intelligence; however, a multiple regression determined that Greek affiliation did not significantly predict levels of emotional intelligence ($p = 0.604$). Implications will be discussed.

Key words: Emotional intelligence, Greek affiliation

1. Introduction

Two-thirds of college students feel they will not possess the skills and level of intelligence needed in order to be successful in the work force⁷. With that being said, it is important for college students to immerse themselves in activities, organizations, and experiences outside of the classroom that can provide them with addition skills relevant to life after schooling. Evidence shows that emotional intelligence, more than knowledge, technical skills or traditional measures of intelligence, determines individual effectiveness and successful business outcomes³. Therefore, this foundation differentiates high performers and propels leaders and organizations to higher and more sustainable levels of success³. One form of membership that students can become a part of when entering college is a Greek organization. Greek organizations are made up of fraternities and their interfraternity council, as well as sororities and their panhellenic council. Membership in these organizations can foster the camaraderie of a "brotherhood" or "sisterhood" are provided with the opportunity to take on many leadership roles within their organization, create broad networking systems, have dedication to philanthropy, and improve social skills. These opportunities correlate to aspects of emotional intelligence such as; recognizing, understanding, and managing one's own emotions as well as the

influences they have on other people. Emotional intelligence has been noted as an important aspect in determining leadership effectiveness as well as aligning with goal achievement and satisfaction in the workplace. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the relationship between Greek affiliation and emotional intelligence. It was hypothesized that Greek affiliation will positively correlate to emotional intelligence due to the reasons previously mentioned.

1.1 Greek Organizations

Student self-governance is an aspect of various organizations in college, but Greek-letter societies are the oldest form and have been on college campuses in the United States since 1852. Members of sororities and fraternities share similar ideals in which they promote scholarship, leadership development, and service to others⁹. Over nine million students nationwide are members of the Greek community². Typical Greek events, such as recruitment, provide college students with the ability to improve their social skills, grow their network, improve time management, and allow them to engage in decision-making experiences.

1.2 Emotional Intelligence

The ability to identify and manage one's emotions as well as the influences they have on other people is known as emotional intelligence⁸. There are three adaptive abilities associated with emotional intelligence that include appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilization of emotions in solving problems⁵. Appraisal and expression of emotion, both within oneself and others, can be further divided into verbal and non-verbal perceptions. The third ability of utilization of emotions revolves around the idea of flexible planning, creative thinking, and redirected attention and motivation⁵.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and membership in a Greek organization. It is hypothesized that students who are involved in a Greek organization will report higher levels of emotional intelligence than those who are not affiliated due to the vast opportunities to hold leadership positions, conduct decision-making, and engage in various social settings.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Participants of this study were 273 college students from a mid-sized university in the Midwest. Of these participants, 74.7% were female and 21.6% were male. Furthermore, participants between the ages of 18 and 31 were included, but the average age of the sample is 20.2 years old. Of the sample population, 89% are Caucasian or white, 4.8% are Asian or Asian American, 6.2% are Hispanic, and 5.5% are African American. When looking at Greek affiliation, 39.9% of students are initiated members of a sorority or fraternity, 4.4% are uninitiated members, and 3.3% are deactivated members.

2.2 Procedures

Data was collected using the snowball method of sending out an email to students with a link to an online survey that they were asked to complete and had the opportunity to be entered into a chance to win a \$50 gift card.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 *emotional intelligence*

Students' emotional intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). This is a 33-item Likert-scale that assesses perception, understanding, expression, regulating and harnessing of emotion in both oneself and others. A scale of 1-5 was used to score the responses where 1 indicates "strongly agree" with the statement and 5 indicates "strongly disagree" with the statement. The individual scores are added together, which means higher emotional intelligence is correlated to a higher score. The average score for men was 124.78 (SD

=16.52), while the average score for women was 130.94 ($SD = 15.09$). The scale is divided into four subscales including emotion perception, utilizing emotions, managing self-relevant emotions, and managing others' emotions. Sample statements include "I have control over my emotions," "I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them," and "Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not." The SSEIT has good internal reliability in the literature (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$).

2.3.2 greek affiliation

In order to determine a participant's affiliation or non-affiliation with Greek Organizations, they were asked whether or not they are a member of a sorority or fraternity. Responses included yes (they are an initiated or not yet initiated member), they were a member but deactivated, and not a member of a Greek organization.

3. Results

The Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) was used to measure participant's level of emotional intelligence. It was shown that students who are currently or have ever been members of a Greek organization had a higher average score ($M = 127.8$, $SD = 15.6$) than those who have never been affiliated ($M = 125.5$, $SD = 14.7$). However, an independent t test determined that members of social Greek organizations, on average, do not have significantly higher levels of emotional intelligence, $t(175) = 1.02$, $p = 0.31$. The mean for the entire scale used in this study was also found ($M = 126.5$, $SD = 15.11$). This indicates that Greek affiliated students do not possess more emotional intelligence than other students. The Cronbach's α for the 33-question scale from this study was computed to be $\alpha = 0.915$, which shows good internal reliability.

4. Discussion

It was hypothesized that students who are involved in a Greek organization will report higher levels of emotional intelligence compared to those who are not affiliated due to the environment of bonding and belonging as well as the vast opportunities to hold leadership positions, conduct decision-making, and engage in various social settings. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the results; there was not a statistically significant relationship between Greek affiliation and emotional intelligence.

A limitation of this study is the survey method of collecting data. The survey, along with the use of the SSEIT, reflects self-reported answers. Due to the fact that self-reported answers are based on the participant's honesty and not observations or direct questions, the results may be skewed. Selection bias also plays a role in collecting data by survey. It is possible that students who are more involved on campus would be more inclined to participate in research surveys. These non-significant results could be due to participant's involvement in other organizations or extracurricular activities that provide students with similar opportunities and leadership, therefore increasing their emotional intelligence. In addition, further selection bias could have played a role in the unexpected results due to all of the participants being from Miami University, which tends to provide education to students who come from higher socioeconomic statuses. Parents who have higher a socioeconomic status are often more likely to be attentive to their children and classify as an authoritative parent, which corresponds to higher levels of emotional intelligence in their children¹. Furthermore, the respondents of the survey were characterized by a majority of females and Caucasian students. Gender factors could have increased the overall average emotional intelligence score because it has been found that females score higher than males⁴. Due to the social norms, society often views emotional women as socially acceptable and often expects them to more be in touch with their emotions than when compared to men. This can result in parents providing more information about feelings to their daughters, which allows them to master the language faster, be more experienced in expressing their emotions, using more skillful words to describe their emotions, and replace words for physical reactions⁴.

Further studies that include comparison of Greek affiliation to others specific, clubs, sports teams, and other organizations could be useful in determining more specific relationships between college students and emotional intelligence. It would also be beneficial to expand the demographics of students surveyed as well as access other limitations of the study. In conclusion, Greek affiliated students had a higher average emotional intelligence when compared to non-affiliated students. However, this difference was not statistically significant and could possibly be attributed to the limitations discussed previously.

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