

The Truth About Sorority and Non-Sorority Drinking: Who Drinks More?

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Abstract

College student alcohol consumption universally affects colleges and universities, regardless of size, location, and prestige. College students consume more alcohol more often than their non-college peers (Johnston et al., 2009). This may be because students beginning the college experience feel the need to consume alcohol in order to “fit in” to what society perceives college to be like. Furthermore, females planning on joining a sorority feel even more pressure to drink because those in sororities have the reputation of being heavy drinkers. Additionally, non-Greek members drink less alcoholic beverages on an average day than Greek members, and Greek members tend to binge drink more frequently than non-Greek members (Carey et al., 2007). Sorority members are more likely to consume more alcohol than those not affiliated, and they are more often “heavy” drinkers (Larimer et al., 2001). Additionally, females tend to overestimate how much men prefer their female friends to drink, and this leads to the increase in alcohol consumption, specifically for sorority members, in order to impress the opposite sex (Hummer et al., 2012). To replicate the previous literature, the current study sought to determine if sorority members consumed more alcohol than non-sorority members. To extend the previous literature, the current study sought to determine if sorority members were less willing to change their drinking behaviors than non-members. Data for this study were collected via an online survey. A total of 177 females (mostly Caucasian) at a Midwestern university took part in this study with 54.8% not in a sorority and 42.9% in a sorority. On average, sorority members reported drinking more alcoholic beverages in a typical week than those not in sororities, and sorority members reported drinking more days of the week. Sorority members are also less willing to change their behavior than those not in a sorority. Future intervention efforts could potentially use this information to tailor materials for sorority members. Messages could address the sorority members’ lower desire to change their alcohol consumption.

Keywords: Sorority, Drinking

1. Introduction

Drinking at the collegiate level remains universally problematic, regardless of the institution. Alcohol has been the cause of many deaths amongst college students. Additionally, alcohol use and its associated effects cost universities a great deal of expenses (For example, about \$500,000 per year alcohol-induced blackouts that require hospitalization, Mundt et al., 2012). These expenses come from university misconduct violations, repairing damage done by drunken students, loitering, etc. Collegiate level alcohol consumption is also a problem because the majority of college students are under the age of 21 -- thus making their actions illegal. Drinking at the collegiate level puts students at risk of getting into legal trouble, and a large number of students end up getting arrested.

Alcohol is also a problem amongst the Greek community. Research regularly indicates that the Greek community tends to have higher drinking rates than those who are not affiliated (Carey et al., 2007). While research may support the alcohol consumption difference between the Greek community and non-Greek community, it is unclear as to whether or not those in a sorority do actually drink more than those not affiliated. It might be made that sorority

women consume more alcohol than non-sorority women, and because of this, girls wanting to be in a sorority fall under the pressure of drinking based off of what they assume Greek life is like.

An additional manner for assessing alcohol consumption is readiness to change. According to the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982), individuals cycle through a series of five stages of change. The earliest stage, Precontemplation, is marked by not thinking about changing one's behavior. Contemplation is thinking about changing your drinking behavior in the distant future. Preparation is thinking about stopping your drinking behavior in the near future. People in the Action stage have recently changed their behavior. Finally, those in maintenance have changed their behavior long ago. Furthermore, it is unclear as to whether those affiliated or not affiliated with a sorority will have differences in their readiness to change their alcohol consumption.

Females tend to overestimate how much men prefer their female friends to drink. Women in general, regardless of whether or not they are affiliated with the Greek community, feel the need to consume alcohol in order for the opposite gender to be interested in them. The overestimation of how much the opposite sex actually drinks causes the drinking levels to rise because students feel the need to drink what is expected of them. These reflective norms were considerable more so in Greek-affiliated students (male or female) than non-Greek students (Hummer et al., 2012). Not only that, but Greek-affiliated females also form intentions to drink based on what they think their sorority sisters expect them to drink, thus causing them to drink more (Huchting et al., 2008). This is a problem because it is causing drinking levels to rise amongst students, thus increasing the negative effects that come along with alcohol.

It has been found in previous studies that Greek-affiliated students drink more heavily and more frequently than other students (Huchting et al., 2008). Furthermore, Greek-affiliated females have a misconception about their perceived control, thus causing them to drink more since they think they are in control (Huchting et al., 2008). Previous studies found that Greek members (male or female) exhibit higher rates of a constellation of alcohol consumption patterns (Carey et al., 2007). Furthermore, Greek-affiliated females have a much higher tendency to binge drink than those not affiliated (Carey et al., 2007).

The current study sought to determine whether or not sorority members drink more than those not affiliated, thus replicating previous literature. The current study sought to determine how many drinks sorority and non-sorority members consume on a typical day, and how many days in a week sorority and non-sorority members consume. Analyzing these results will give a definite answer to the questions posed. It is expected that the results will be similar to previous studies, and sorority members will report more drinking than those not affiliated. Furthermore, the current study sought to expand previous literature by determining whether or not sorority or non-sorority members are willing to change their drinking behaviors. By examining this, it can be determined what future intervention efforts should be made. It is expected that sorority members will be less willing to change their drinking behaviors than those who are not affiliated. Therefore, the current study had the following research questions: 1. Sorority members and non-members will consume different amounts of alcohol (e.g. on a typical drinking day, on a peak drinking occasion), and 2. Sorority members and non-members will differ across their readiness to change their alcohol consumption.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The current study surveyed college females ($n = 177$); most participants reported being Caucasian. The students were from a Midwestern university, and 54.8% reported to be not in a sorority while 42.9% reported being in a sorority. The mean age was 20.26 ($SD = 2.61$). Approximately 76.3% of those surveyed came from stable homes (parents still married). The participants also came from high-income families, with 23.3% having an income of above \$200,000.

2.2. Procedure

The authors' Institutional Review Board approved all procedures prior to commencement of the study. Data was collected via an online survey in the Spring of 2012. The online survey was housed behind the university's firewall on Prezza Checkbox. Participants were emailed an invitation to the study through a snowball method.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1 alcohol consumption

Participants were provided with the definition of a standard drink. They were asked the following questions: Have you ever had an alcoholic beverage to drink? (response options: yes or no); In a typical week, on how many days do you have at least one drink containing alcohol; How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking; During the last 30 days, what is the highest number of drinks that you drank on any one occasion?

2.3.2. *stages of change for binge drinking*

In addition, to the quantity and frequency measures, participants were assessed for their readiness to change their binge drinking. The single item measure was based on the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). The question was: In the last month have you had 4 or more drinks in a row? The response options indicated how ready the participant was to change their behavior. "Yes, and I do not intend to stop drinking 4 or more drinks in a row" reflected Precontemplation. "Yes, but I intend to stop drinking 4 or more drinks in a row during the next 6 months" is Contemplation. Preparation is "Yes, but I intend to stop drinking 4 or more during the next 30 days." Action is "No, but I have had 4 or more in the past 6 months." Maintenance is "No, and I have not had 4 or more in the past 6 months." A non-binger would select "No, I have never had 4 or more drinks in a row."

2.3.3 rating of Greek members

In addition, students were asked to use the definition of drink again. In these questions the participants were to indicate how much Greek members and non-Greek members on campus drank. The questions were: Rate members of the Greek community on typical or average drinking (in drinks per day). Think about each day of the week and average them over the past three months. (Sunday-Saturday); and, Rate students on this campus on typical or average drinking (in drinks per day). Think about each day of the week and average them over the past three months. (Sunday-Saturday)

3. Results

In a sample of female students from a medium sized Midwestern university, the drinking levels of those affiliated and not affiliated with Greek life were examined. Their willingness to change their behavior was also observed. According to the survey, sorority members drink more than those not affiliated. They also drink more days of the week, and overall they drink more alcoholic beverages in a typical week than those not affiliated. Furthermore, sorority members are less willing to change their behavior than those not in a sorority, and sorority members tend to binge drink more than those not affiliated.

It was also found that females in general (regardless of their Greek affiliation) tend to overestimate how much their male friends want them to drink, thus causing them to drink more in order to impress their male friends.

Greek-affiliated females reported drinking an average of 2.4 days a week while those not in a sorority reported 1.4 days a week. Greek-affiliated members also reported drinking 4.5 drinks on a typical drinking day, while those not affiliated reported 3.5 drinks. 4.8% of the Greek-affiliated population reported that they intended to stop change their drinking behavior, while 8.7% of the non-Greek population reported that they intended to change their drinking behavior.

4. Discussion

This study was designed to show the relationship between being affiliated with a sorority and drinking. While previous studies have already determined that sorority members drink more alcoholic beverages than those not affiliated, this study sought to extend previous literature by determining if sorority members are less likely to change

their drinking behaviors than those not affiliated with Greek life. To our knowledge, very few previous studies have looked at the differences in their willingness to change behavior, which makes the current study unique.

In analyzing the data and results, it can be seen that previous literature is indeed correct. By surveying female students only, both affiliated and not affiliated with Greek life, it was seen who does in fact drink more. Those affiliated with Greek life reported to drink more alcoholic beverages in a typical day, and they also reported to drink more days of the week than those not affiliated.

Limitations of the study include people not answering the survey truthfully, not knowing the answer to some of the questions causing them to guess or put down random numbers, self reports, and some people could have memory problems which cause the answers to be faulty. Also, it was difficult to measure the changes in the population because the survey only obtained data from one specific time. Students may not answer the survey truthfully because they fear that the information they provide will be linked back to their name, and they don't want to get into trouble. Also, if the student knew the person giving the survey, they might have lied because they don't want their friend to know their real results.

Overall, this study replicated and expanded on previous literature. It confirmed previous studies' results by finding that sorority members do in fact drink more in a typical week than do those not affiliated with a sorority. It also showed that sorority members are less willing to change their drinking behaviors. Because of these results, future interventions should be targeted at sorority members. Future interventions could use these findings to tailor materials for sorority members. Also, future interventions could target the sorority member's unwillingness to change their drinking behavior. It is important to analyze and understand these results in order to decrease the number of alcohol related consequences, such as death. These results can help reduce the problem of alcohol consumption at the collegiate level.

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6. Cite References

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