



## Fraternities, Sororities and Binge Drinking: Results from a National Study of American Colleges

Henry Wechsler, George Kuh & Andrea E Davenport

To cite this article: Henry Wechsler, George Kuh & Andrea E Davenport (2009) Fraternities, Sororities and Binge Drinking: Results from a National Study of American Colleges, NASPA Journal, 46:3, 395-416

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.5017>



Published online: 20 Oct 2009.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 618



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 5 View citing articles [↗](#)

# Fraternities, Sororities and Binge Drinking: Results from a National Study of American Colleges

Henry Wechsler  
George Kuh  
Andrea E. Davenport



*This study compares the drinking behavior of and correlates of fraternity and sorority members with non-members to determine if public perceptions of alcohol use by students affiliated with Greek social organizations are warranted.*

The majority of traditional-age college students use alcohol on a regular basis (Presley, Meilman, & Lyerla, 1993). Although most students experiment with alcohol in high school, there is a marked increase in the frequency and level of consumption when they get to college (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1994; Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994). It is, therefore, unsurprising that many incidents of hazardous alcohol use by college students are

---

This article was originally published in 1996, vol. 33, no. 4. At that time, Henry Wechsler was a lecturer and director of the college alcohol studies program, Department of Health and Social Behavior, Harvard School of Public Health; George Kuh was a professor of higher education at Indiana University-Bloomington; and Andrea E. Davenport\* was a research assistant at Harvard School of Public Health.

Currently, Dr. Wechsler is a lecturer in the Department of Society, Human Development and Health at the Harvard School of Public Health; and Dr. Kuh is chancellor's professor and director of the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

\*Unable to obtain updated information for Dr. Davenport.

reported annually (Hinnefeld, 1992) and that alcohol use is associated with many problems, including missed classes, low grades, physical altercations, property damage, automobile injuries, fatalities, and reduced productivity (Engs & Hanson, 1987; Gonzalez & Broughton, 1986; Wechsler et al., 1994). These consequences indicate that drinking among college students should be considered neither an adolescent rite of passage nor an unmanageable nuisance (Kuh, 1994).

Virtually every study of drinking in college shows fraternity members tend to drink more heavily and more frequently, and to have more alcohol-related problems than their fellow students (Faulkner, Alcorn, & Gavin, 1989; Globetti, Stem, Marasco, & Haworth-Hoeppner, 1988; Goodwin, 1990; Hendren, 1988; Kraft, 1985; Mills, Pfaffenberger, & McCarty, 1981; Miser, 1981; Presley et al., 1993; Tampke, 1990; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). In fact, the single best predictor of binge drinking in college is fraternity membership (Wechsler et al., 1994). This association between drinking and fraternity membership is counter to the norms of behavior accepted by fraternities (Kuh & Lyons, 1990), as, for example, expressed in the following official position of the National Interfraternity Conference Decalogue (Robson, 1977):

The college fraternity stands for excellence in scholarship [and] accepts its role in the moral and spiritual development of the individual. Recognizing the importance of physical well-being, the college fraternity aims for a sound mind and a sound body. (p.848)

Some research findings support this positive view of fraternity life, reporting, for example, that Greek affiliation is positively related to feelings of security and intellectual self-esteem (Astin, 1993). Other studies (Baier & Whipple, 1990), however find few differences between the academic achievement of fraternity members and other students. It appears that sorority membership may be positively related to academic achievement, while fraternity membership is either negative or neutral in its effect (Center for the Study of the College Fraternity, 1982, 1992; Malaney, 1990; Pike & Askew, 1990). Compared with students who do not belong to Greek letter social organizations, members of White fraternities (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, in press) scored lower on end-

of-the-first-year measures of reading comprehension, mathematics, critical thinking, and composite achievement; sorority members showed similar, though less substantial, negative effects after the first year on these four measures, with only the reading comprehension and composite achievement scores significantly lower than those of nonsorority women. For men of color, on the other hand, the study indicated that fraternity membership seems to have a modest positive influence on these outcomes. Additionally, Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (in press) found that fraternity or sorority membership also has a dampening effect on openness to cultural diversity after the first year of college.

Although the research evidence related to the impact of fraternity membership on academic achievement is mixed, it remains the case that fraternity members have been consistently found to drink more heavily and more frequently than nonfraternity students. As a result, many observers believe that the attitudes, values and behavior fostered by fraternities and sororities are antithetical to the educational mission of institutions of higher education (Marlowe & Auvenshine, 1982; Wilder, Hoyt, Surbeck, Wilder, & Carney, 1989).

Fraternity leaders offer varying interpretations of the data on drinking and the possible antecedents and correlates (i.e., negative consequences of drinking). In recent years, they have expressed their concerns about the hazardous use of alcohol both to the fraternities themselves and to others and have promised to find ways of reducing levels of drinking in fraternities and getting members to live up to the values articulated in their charters.

Not all current and alumni members of Greek organizations, however, are persuaded by the evidence. They claim that too little systematic research on a national scale has been done, that too much of the criticism related to alcohol use by fraternity and sorority members has been based on anecdotes, and that rates of alcohol consumption and related behaviors of fraternity and sorority members differ little from college students in general. In the absence of empirical data, perhaps a disservice is done to fraternity members by attributing higher rates of alcohol consumption and associated behavior problems to them.

The purpose of this study is to compare the drinking and associated behavior of fraternity and sorority members to that of nonmembers. The project is national in scope, and its results can help determine whether public perceptions of alcohol use by students affiliated with Greek social organizations are warranted. This study will also lend some insight into whether legislative initiatives to reduce hazardous use of alcohol (e.g., PL 101-226, Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Amendments of 1989), campus-based substance abuse programs, and more rigorous enforcement of campus policies and civil laws by fraternities themselves have reduced the variance between fraternity and nonfraternity level of alcohol consumption and associated negative behaviors.

## Method

### Sample

A national sample of 179 colleges was selected from the American Council on Education's list of accredited 4-year colleges and universities. This sample contained few women-only colleges and few colleges with less than 1000 students. To correct for this bias, an oversample of 15 additional colleges with enrollments of less than 1000 students and of 10 all-women's colleges were added to the sample. Nine colleges were subsequently dropped because they were seminary schools, military schools, and allied health schools. One hundred and forty institutions (72%) of the final sample of 195 colleges participated; the primary reason for nonparticipation was an inability to provide the names and addresses of a random sample of students within the time requirements of the study. The participating colleges and universities represent a cross-section of American higher education: two-thirds are public and one-third private; they are located in 40 states and the District of Columbia, with 24% from the Northeast, 32% from the North Central region, 26% from the South, and 18% from the West. Approximately two-thirds are located in a suburban or urban setting and one-third in a small town or rural setting. Six are women's colleges and five are predominantly Black institutions. Depending on enrollment size, every xth student was selected from the students' registry using a random starting point. A sample of undergraduate students was provided by each of the 140

participating colleges: 215 students at each of 127 colleges, and 108 at each of 13 colleges, 12 of which were in the oversample.

### Instrument

To assess drinking behavior and associated problems, a 20-page questionnaire (Wechsler, et al. 1994) was developed, drawing on standardized measures used in other studies of alcohol use (e.g., Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1994; Wechsler & Isaac, 1992; Wechsler & McFadden, 1979). Questions were included to determine: (a) if students were members of a fraternity or sorority and where they currently resided (fraternity or sorority house, single sex or co-ed residence hall or dormitory, other university housing, co-op or university affiliated group house, or off-campus); (b) the extent to which students had experienced problems as a consequence of their drinking since the beginning of the school year (i.e., suffered from a hangover; missed classes; fell behind in schoolwork; did something they later regretted; forgot where they were or what they did; argued with friends; engaged in unplanned sexual activity; did not use protection when having sex; damaged property; got into trouble with campus or local police; got hurt or injured; required medical treatment for an alcohol overdose); and (c) if they experienced any problems caused by the drinking of other students (i.e., were insulted or humiliated; had a serious argument or quarrel; were pushed, hit, or assaulted; had their property damaged; had to "baby sit" or take care of another student who drank too much; had studying or sleep interrupted; received an unwanted sexual advance; were a victim of sexual assault or date rape).

### Procedures

Questionnaires were mailed beginning in February 1993 to 28,709 students. Four separate mailings were used: a questionnaire, a reminder postcard, a second questionnaire, and a second reminder postcard. For various reasons (e.g., incorrect addresses, withdrawal from school, leaves of absence), 3,082 of the prospective subjects could not be reached, reducing the target sample to 25,627. A total of 17,592 students returned questionnaires, yielding an overall response rate of 69%.

The data reported in this paper were provided by 14,756 students at the 115 institutions that had fraternities or sororities, or both (one college had a sorority only). Of this number, 12,108 (82%) were not fraternity or sorority members, 2,040 (14%) were members of a fraternity or sorority but did not live in the group's designated house (i.e., nonresident Greek members, 13% of whom were in fraternities and 14% in sororities), and 556 (4%) who lived in a fraternity or sorority house (i.e., resident Greek members, 5% of whom lived in fraternities and 3% in sororities).

"Binge drinking" was defined as having consumed five or more drinks in a row for men and four or more drinks in a row for women during the 2 weeks prior to the survey (Wechsler et al., 1995). The response rate was not associated with the rate of having engaged in binge drinking; the Pearson correlation coefficient between the binge drinking rate at the college and response rate was 0.06 with a *p* value of .46.

### Data Analysis

Two sets of chi-square analyses, one for men and the other for women, were employed to compare drinking behavior, alcohol-related problems, secondary binge effects, and institutional responses to drinking. For each set of attitudes and behaviors, three groups were compared: fraternity or sorority members who lived in their organizations' house (resident members), fraternity and sorority members who lived outside a fraternity house (nonresident members), and students who did not belong to a fraternity or sorority (nonmembers).

## Results

### Characteristics and Attitudes

Resident fraternity and sorority members were more likely than nonresident members and nonmembers to be 23 years old or younger, upperclassmen, white, and single and were less likely to work for four or more hours per day. No statistically significant differences were found among the three groups in either the number of hours per day spent studying or in grades (not tabled).

**Table 1**  
**Attitudes of Students by Fraternity or Sorority Status**

Attitudes of Students by Fraternity or Sorority Status						
ATTITUDES	Men %			Women %		
	Non- members (n=5262)	Non- resident members (n=849) <sup>b</sup>	Resident members (n=306) <sup>a,c</sup>	Non- members (n=6783)	Non- resident members (n=1186) <sup>b</sup>	Resident members (n=249) <sup>a,c</sup>
Drinking is important	13	25	41	7	15	21
Partying is important	27	54	69	20	41	45
Heavy alcohol use is a problem on campus	70	72	76	76	84	90
Sexual assaults are a problem on campus	40	35	39	48	51	69
Physical assaults are a problem on campus	25	27	27	34	37	44

*Note.* Sample sizes vary slightly for each characteristic because of missing values.

<sup>a</sup>Chi-square comparisons of resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the characteristics were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for physical assaults ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p < .01$ .

<sup>b</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the characteristics were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for sexual assaults ( $p = .014$ ), physical assaults ( $p = ns$ ) and heavy alcohol use ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparison of non-resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for physical assaults ( $p = .011$ ).

<sup>c</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. resident fraternity members and each of the characteristics were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for heavy alcohol use ( $p = .044$ ) and physical assaults ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. resident sorority members were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for drinking is important ( $p = .018$ ), physical assault ( $p = .038$ ), heavy alcohol use ( $p = ns$ ), and partying is important ( $p = ns$ ).

Residents of fraternity and sorority houses also were more likely to state that partying and drinking are important activities (Table 1), with about two-thirds (69%) of the fraternity-associated men and almost half (45%) of the sorority-associated women indicating that partying was important. About two-fifths of fraternity men and one-fifth of sorority women indicated that drinking was important to them.

The majority of the total sample considered heavy alcohol use to be a problem on their campus. More women resident members (69%) than



men resident members (39%) considered sexual assaults to be a problem. Similarly, 44% of residents of sorority houses but only 27% of fraternity house residents perceived physical assaults to be a problem on their campus (Table 1).

### Drinking Behavior

Virtually all fraternity and sorority members drink (Table 2). The majority (86%) of fraternity house residents engaged in binge drinking, compared with about 71 % of the nonresident fraternity members, and 45% of the nonfraternity men. Findings were similar for the women (Table 2). More than half (57%) of the fraternity house residents and almost half (43%) of the sorority house residents were frequent binge drinkers (i.e., had binged three or more times in the 2 weeks prior to the survey). Fraternity and sorority members under the age of 21 who lived in their group's house were also more likely than other students to use a fake ID to obtain alcohol (Table 2).

While over one-third of college students engaged in binge drinking in high school, two-thirds (60%) of resident fraternity members and 44% of nonresident fraternity members binged in high school. Few fraternity members stopped binge drinking when they got to college (Table 2). Of those fraternity house residents who binge in college, two-thirds (64%) were binge drinkers in high school. Many fraternity members who did not binge in high school became binge drinkers in college—78% of resident and 61 % of nonresident fraternity members as compared to only 32% of nonfraternity men.

a

In contrast, few experienced heavy drinkers join sororities. Two-thirds (65%) of sorority house residents did not binge in high school; among those who were binge drinkers in college, 38% were binge drinkers in high school. A very high proportion of sorority members, however, became binge drinkers in college—76% of sorority house residents who did not binge in high school did so in college, compared with 48% of nonresident sorority members and 25% of the nonsorority women (Table 2). Nevertheless, 14% of sorority house residents and 23% of nonresidents who binged in high school gave up binge drinking in college.

**Table 2**  
**Behavior of Drinking by Fraternity or Sorority Status**

Level of Drinking and Binging	MEN % <sup>a</sup>		WOMEN % <sup>b</sup>	
	Non- members (n=5159)	Non- Resident members (n=836)	Non- members (n=6594)	Non- Resident members (n=1164)
Past year abstainers/lifetime abstainers	16	6	17	6
Drank but did not binge	39	23	47	36
Binged 1-2 times in the past two weeks	27	35	20	30
Binged 3 or more times in the past two weeks	18	36	15	28
				43
Used my own fake ID to obtain alcohol in the past 30 days, among students under age 21	(n=1364)	(n=293)	(n=1851)	(n=478)
				(n=122)
High School Drinking Changes in College	(n=5085)	(n=822)	(n=6501)	(n=1148)
				(n=242)
Among all students: % binged in high school	34	44	28	35
Among high school bingers: % gave up binging in college	29	16	39	23
Among college bingers: % binged in high school	53	52	49	46
Among non-high school bingers: % started binging in college	32	61	25	48
				76

*Note.* Sample sizes vary slightly for each drinking behavior due to missing values.  
<sup>a</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-fraternity men, non-resident fraternity members, and resident fraternity members and each of the drinking behaviors and high school drinking changes were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for using a fake ID ( $p=.ns$ ), between non-resident fraternity members and non-fraternity men. <sup>b</sup>Chi-square comparison of non-sorority women, non-resident sorority members and resident sorority members were significant at  $p<.01$ .

Table 3  
Alcohol-Related Problems by Fraternity/Sorority Status

	MEN %		WOMEN %	
	Non- members	Resident members	Non- members	Resident members
Reporting problem since the beginning of the school year, among students who had a drink in the past year	(n=4363) (n=792) <sup>b</sup> (n=302) <sup>a,c</sup>		(n=5568) (n=1102) <sup>b</sup> (n=244) <sup>a,c</sup>	
Have a hangover	57	74	50	67
Do something you regret	30	45	27	40
Miss a class	25	44	21	37
Forget where you were or what you did	23	37	19	32
Get behind in school work	20	28	15	26
Argue with friends	20	28	16	24
Engage in unplanned sexual activity	20	31	14	22
Damage property	14	22	3	4
Not use protection when having sex	10	16	7	14
Get hurt or injured	9	16	7	10
Get into trouble with campus or local police	6	10	2	2
Require medical treatment of alcohol overdose	1	1	<1	<1
Have five or more alcohol-related problems since beginning of school year**	17	31	11	20
Driving behavior in a 30 day period	(n=5260) (n=847) (n=304)		(n=6776) (n=1182) (n=247)	
Drove after having five or more drinks	14	21	5	8
Rode with a driver who was high or drunk	19	30	16	23

**Table 3 (continued)**

*Note.* Problem occurred not at all or one or more times. Sample sizes vary slightly for each problem because of missing values.

\*\*Excludes hangover and includes driving after drinking as one of the problems. Driving percentages are based on all student. Driving behavior occurred one or more times in the past 30 days.

<sup>a</sup>Chi-square comparisons of resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the problems were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for trouble with campus/local police ( $p = ns$ ) and alcohol overdose ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for hurt or injured ( $p = .011$ ), argue with friends ( $p = .025$ ), damage property ( $p = ns$ ) and alcohol overdose ( $p = ns$ ).

<sup>b</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the problems were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for alcohol overdoses ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for damage property ( $p = ns$ ), trouble with campus or local police ( $p = ns$ ), and alcohol overdose ( $p = ns$ ).

<sup>c</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. resident fraternity members and each of the problems were significant at  $p < .01$ , except for do something you regret ( $p = .010$ ), unplanned sex ( $p = .014$ ), hurt or injured ( $p = .014$ ), not use protection when having sex ( $p = ns$ ), trouble with campus/local police ( $p = ns$ ), alcohol overdose ( $p = ns$ ), and driving after five or more drinks ( $p = ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. resident sorority members were not significant, except for hangover ( $p < .01$ ), trouble with campus/local police ( $p < .01$ ), miss a class ( $p = .043$ ), and riding with a driver who was high or drunk ( $p < .01$ ).

## Risks and Problems Associated with Drinking

A small proportion of Greek house residents indicated that they ever had a drinking problem—21% of fraternity house residents, 18% of nonresident fraternity members, and 14% of nonfraternity men. In contrast, 10% of sorority house residents, compared to 9% of the nonresident sorority members and 10% nonsorority women, reported ever having a drinking problem.

Compared with other students, residents of fraternity houses experienced many more problems as a consequence of their drinking, and nonresident fraternity members had more problems than nonfraternity men (Table 3). More than half of the residents of fraternity houses reported that at least once since the beginning of the school year they had a hangover, did something they regretted, missed a class, or forgot where they were or what they did. Compared with nonfraternity men, nearly twice as many fraternity house residents reported they had gotten behind in school work, argued with friends, engaged in unplanned sexual activity, damaged property, not used protection when having sex, or got hurt or injured. Forty-five percent of the residents of fraternity houses experienced five or more alcohol-related problems, compared with 31% of nonresidents of fraternity houses and 17% of nonfraternity men. Residents of sorority houses also reported more problems compared with those not affiliated with a sorority (Table 3).

Compared with non-Greeks, Greek house residents were more likely to drink and drive or ride with a drunk driver after bingeing. Twice as many residents of fraternity houses, 39% compared to 19% of nonfraternity men, reported riding in a car with an inebriated driver. Similar results were found for residents of sorority houses (Table 3). The frequency of debilitating problems was lower among residents of sorority houses and nonresident sorority members than among their fraternity counterparts. The exceptions were having a hangover, getting into trouble with the campus or local police, and alcohol overdoses.

## Secondary Binge Effects

More than half of the fraternity house residents reported that their studying or sleep was interrupted, or that they had to take care of a

drunken student, had a serious argument or quarrel, or were insulted or humiliated by someone who was inebriated (Table 4). Almost all the fraternity members had experienced at least one of these eight secondary binge effects: 97% of the residents of fraternity houses and 83% of the nonresident fraternity members, compared with 64% of nonfraternity men (Table 4).

Similarly, 40% or more of sorority house residents reported taking care of a drunken student, having their studying or sleep interrupted, being insulted or humiliated, experiencing an unwanted sexual advance, or having a serious argument or quarrel. Like their fraternity counterparts, sorority members also experienced at least one of these eight possible secondary binge effects: 96% of sorority house residents, 84% nonresidents, and 62% nonsorority women (Table 4).

### Institutional Responses

Despite the large number of problems reported by respondents who lived in their group's house, residents of Greek houses reported few consequences from college disciplinary procedures associated with their drinking behavior. Twice as many residents of fraternity and sorority houses report being asked to be less disruptive or were at a party that was "shut down" because of alcohol (Table 5); however, disciplinary action was rare in that only 8% or less of residents of Greek houses and nonresident Greek members reported receiving warnings or fines, or being required to participate in an alcohol education program, perform community service, or referred to an alcohol treatment program.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study three conclusions about fraternity and sorority members' use of alcohol are warranted.

First, fraternity and sorority house environments appear to tolerate hazardous use of alcohol and other irresponsible behaviors. For example, house residents are the group most likely to binge drink and use a fake identification card to obtain alcohol. This directly contradicts the claim that the members of fraternities and sororities that belong to a national organization exhibit more responsible

Table 4  
Secondary Binge Effects by Fraternity or Sorority Status

Secondary Binge Effects	Men %		Women %	
	Non- members (n=5248)	Non- resident members (n=842) <sup>b</sup>	Non- members (n=6752) <sup>b</sup>	Non- resident members (n=1175) <sup>b</sup>
Had your studying/sleep interrupted	42	53	38	56
Had to take care of drunken student	39	61	40	66
Been insulted or humiliated	25	36	25	39
Had a serious argument or quarrel	21	35	19	33
Had your property damaged	14	23	8	10
Been pushed, hit, or assaulted	13	23	10	15
Experienced an unwanted sexual advance	13	24	23	36
Been a victim of sexual assault or date rape	1	1	2	3
Experienced at least one of the above problems	64	83	62	84

Note: Experience occurred not at all or one or more times. Sample sizes vary slightly for each secondary binge effect because of missing values.

<sup>a</sup>Chi-square comparisons of resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the secondary binge effects were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.15$ ). Chi-square comparisons of resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.15$ ). <sup>b</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the secondary binge effects were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.15$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for property damaged ( $p=.15$ ) and victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.024$ ). <sup>c</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. resident fraternity members and each of the secondary binge effects were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for unwanted sexual advance ( $p=.15$ ) and victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.15$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. resident sorority members were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for being in an argument ( $p=.043$ ), property damage ( $p=.039$ ), unwanted sexual advance ( $p=.025$ ), been insulted or humiliated ( $p=.15$ ), been pushed, hit or assaulted ( $p=.15$ ) and victim of sexual assault or date rape ( $p=.15$ ).

behavior than groups that are not affiliated with such organizations. Such behavior is decried by national fraternity leaders, though they seem powerless to do anything about it.

Second, the efforts to reduce hazardous use of alcohol on college campuses (e.g., campus regulations and educational programs, legislation) seem to have had little effect on members of social fraternities and sororities. Fraternity and sorority members engage in binge drinking to a much greater extent than college students in general. Sorority women in particular are placed at the greatest risk, since they have the least experience with consuming alcohol but are among the most likely to take up binge drinking when they get to college.

Third, there is little evidence that campus officials hold fraternity members accountable for their irresponsible, and often illegal, behavior. Even though fraternity and sorority members report much higher levels of underage drinking, attendance at social functions that get warnings from authorities, and more frequent experience with the firsthand and secondary effects of bingeing than their nonmember counterparts, they report very few official institutional sanctions. This is particularly surprising and disappointing, given the amount of heavy drinking in which fraternity members engage and the frequency of the negative side effects they report. Institutions are sending mixed messages to fraternities and other students by not holding fraternity and sorority members to institutionally-approved standards of acceptable behavior.

## Implications

Some observers have concluded that social fraternities and sororities (as contrasted with groups associated with professional associations) are not conducive to the educational process (Maisel, 1990; Strange, 1986). The reason for such a position is that the behavior of members of social fraternities is inconsistent with the goals of higher education as well as antithetical to the espoused values of the organizations themselves. In large part, the behavioral issues often related to hazardous use of alcohol contribute to this public perception.



Table 5  
Institutional Responses to Drinking by Fraternity or Sorority Status

	Men %		Women %	
	Non- members (n=5258)	Non- resident members (n=846) <sup>b</sup>	Non- resident members (n=6769) <sup>b</sup>	Resident members (n=249) <sup>a,c</sup>
Institutional Responses to students' drinking				
I was part of a drinking group and we were asked to be quieter or less disruptive.	26	40	18	38
I was at a campus party that was "shut down" because of alcohol.	12	19	9	22
I received a warning.	5	8	3	4
I was fined.	1	2	<1	2
I was required to attend an alcohol program.	1	3	<1	4
I had to perform community service.	1	2	<1	1
I was referred to an alcohol treatment program.	<1	1	<1	<1

Note. Sample sizes vary slightly for each school action because of missing values.

<sup>a</sup>Chi-square comparisons of resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the school actions were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for receiving a warning ( $p=.ns$ ) and being referred for alcohol treatment ( $p=.ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for receiving a warning ( $p=.ns$ ), performing community service ( $p=.ns$ ), and being referred for alcohol treatment ( $p=.ns$ ). <sup>b</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. non-fraternity men and each of the characteristics were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for performing community service ( $p=.016$ ), and being referred for alcohol treatment ( $p=.ns$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. non-sorority women were significant at  $p<.01$ , except for receiving a warning ( $p=.ns$ ), and performing community service ( $p=.ns$ ). <sup>c</sup>Chi-square comparisons of non-resident fraternity members vs. resident fraternity members and each of the characteristics were not significant, except for being part of a drinking group that was asked to be quieter ( $p=.014$ ). Chi-square comparisons of non-resident sorority members vs. resident sorority members were not significant, except for being part of a drinking group that was asked to be quieter ( $p<.01$ ) and being part of a party that was shut down ( $p=.0210$ ).

Some institutions have withdrawn formal recognition for social fraternities when the behavior of their members has exceeded the limits of tolerance. Despite these efforts, the cultures of most groups encourage, and their members practice, irresponsible drinking. Too often, works addressing Greeks and their undergraduate experience mention issues related to alcohol use but rarely go beyond repeating calls for local chapter reform and increased emphasis on responsible use of alcohol, alcohol education programs, and the like (Bryan & Schwartz, 1983; Kuh, 1982). At the national level, an organized effort is needed, something more than one campus, one chapter at a time (Ackerman, 1990), which the fraternities seem to be promoting.

One of the reasons continued inappropriate use of alcohol persists unabated is the manner in which new members of social Greek organizations are inducted to these groups and what they learn about alcohol use in terms of its frequency, setting, and amount. To understand this process, institutional agents and fraternity professionals must understand and address the cultural norms that support alcohol use (Kuh & Arnold, 1993). At many institutions fraternities and sororities recruit members immediately upon the arrival of new students. Such students are the most susceptible to the powerful conforming influence of fraternities as “outposts of rebellion ... [where] excessive use of alcohol during new member socialization may be so deeply embedded in the psyche of some groups” (Kuh & Arnold, 1993, p. 333). When used in combination with hazing episodes, alcohol becomes interwoven into a complicated system of rewards and sanctions to which newcomers must conform during the early days of their membership, even though for many groups this period is supposed to be “dry” or alcohol free. In this way, fraternities are able to produce in their pledges a “custodial orientation” (Schein, 1990, p. 116) whereby newcomers conform and become unusually cohesive, and learn to be loyal to the group in resisting external threats including institutional sanctions.

To counter the powerful conformist cultures of fraternities and sororities, decisive institutional action is needed by presidents, student affairs administrators, and group advisors (American Council on Education, 1989). To modify the drinking behavior of fraternity members, rush should be deferred until at least the final month of the first year of college, with any novitiate member activity (pledge ship)

delayed until the second year. Although fraternities argue that this policy will have a severe negative financial impact, a stricter live-in policy for upper class members would alleviate such potentially debilitating consequences. At present, large numbers of seniors move out of their fraternity's houses, in part because the more mature upper class members are no longer willing to tolerate the juvenile, irresponsible behavior of younger members, including the unseemly secondary effects of frequent binge drinking. To the extent this interpretation is correct, the message should be obvious to Greek organizations as well as to individuals—living in the house is antithetical to responsible behavior. Actions such as this are needed before additional avoidable alcohol-related accidents occur, including those leading to multiple injuries or deaths.

Given the widespread irresponsible, hazardous use of alcohol among fraternity members, it is understandable that institutions have attempted to distance themselves legally from fraternities and sororities. Threats by wealthy, influential alumni to withdraw support if their group is sanctioned are another reason institutions are reluctant to take bold action. Colleges and universities, however, cannot escape their ethical obligations to teach students to behave responsibly. Data about the amount and frequency of alcohol use by Greeks and the negative consequences of such behavior must be shared with alumni members as well as others in a position to help the groups change their cultures. Surely, among highly visible alumni, there are strong leaders who can convince the groups and their supporters to set aside their sentimental views of college life and examine the data that show that the behavior of many fraternity men and sorority women put them at great risk.

Women are at greatest risk in the present system because they are the least experienced with using large quantities of alcohol prior to coming to college; when they get to college, however, many soon start binge drinking and report negative consequences of this behavior. The magnitude of this problem is rarely recognized by either sororities or institutional action.

The absence of any difference in reported grades is perplexing, given the host of other problems fraternity members report being associated

with their alcohol use. It is possible that fraternity and sorority members learn coping strategies from their groups—activities such as going to class and completing academic assignments—that help them compensate for excessive use of alcohol. This skill is probably learned from supportive peers who help individual members ameliorate the more negative consequences of their actions, i.e., assist them in completing academic assignments and, in other ways, help their irresponsible brothers and sisters” clean up the mess they made.” In this sense, many students are “enabled” by other members of the group to manage their behavior, as evidenced by the data indicating the high proportion of fraternity and sorority members who report having to deal with drunken peers.

## Conclusion

Participants in this study confirmed the perception that at the highly publicized drinking parties traditionally associated with Greek life (Malaney, 1990) are very much alive. Not only does fraternity and sorority membership provide frequent opportunities to party, but binge drinking is standard practice. In part, this is because a disproportionately high number of students who were binge drinkers in high school become members of fraternities. A much larger proportion of women who did not binge in their senior year of high school do so after joining a sorority. This behavior is not only hazardous to the drinker’s health but also creates problems for other house residents and nonmembers.

The frequency of binge drinking by fraternity men and sorority women is cause for great concern and immediate action at every institution that hosts such groups. At the least, the favored status afforded to fraternities and sororities related to alcohol use must be challenged. The excessive drinking of members must be placed in the spotlight until institutional leaders acknowledge and take action to drastically reduce the intolerable risks to individuals and to the institution. Given the deplorable state of affairs in some groups, the only way to bring about the needed change may be to remove from the institution those organizations and their members that refuse to live up to the standards of behavior the institution deems appropriate.

## References

- American Council on Education. (1989). *Greek organizations on the college campus: Guidelines for institutional action*. Author.
- Ackerman, J. (1990). The survival of Greek life: Concerns and solutions. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 78–81.
- Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Baier, J. L., & Whipple, E. G. (1990). Greek values and attitudes: A comparison with independents. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 43–53.
- Bryan, W. A., & Schwartz, R. A. (1983). *The eighties: Challenges for fraternities and sororities*. Carbondale, IL: American College Personnel Association.
- Center for the Study of the College Fraternity. (1982). *Status of the college fraternity and sorority—1982*. Author.
- Center for the Study of the College Fraternity. (1992). *Status of the college fraternity and sorority—1992*. Author.
- Engs, R. C., & Hanson, D. J. (1987). College students' drinking patterns and problems. In J. S. Sherwood (Ed.), *Alcohol policies and practices on college and university campuses* (pp. 57–68). Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Faulkner, K. K., Alcorn, J., & Gavin, R. B. (1989). Prediction of alcohol consumption among fraternity pledges. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 34, 12–20.
- Globetti, G., Stem, J. T., Marasco, F., & Haworth-Hoeppner, S. (1988). Student residence arrangements and alcohol use and abuse: A research note. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 18(1), 18–33.
- Goodwin, L. (1990). Social psychological bases for college alcohol consumption. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 36, 83–95.
- Hendren, C.E. (1988). *A comparative study of alcohol problems among Greek and independent collegians* (Doctoral Dissertation, United States International University, 1988). Dissertation Abstracts International, 49, A1760.
- Hinnefeld, S. (1992, February 19). IU Fraternity, 26 students face disciplinary charges. *The Herald Times*, pp. A1, A8.
- Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., & Bachman, J. G. (1994). National survey results on drug use from the monitoring the future study, 1975–1993. Vol. 2: *College students and young adults* (NIH

- Publication No. 93-3597). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Kraft, D. P. (1985). *The prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug problems on a college campus*. Paper presented at the Tenth Anniversary Symposium, Alcohol/Drug Studies Center, Jackson State University.
- Kuh, G. D. (1982). *Enhancing the quality of Greek life*. Bloomington, IN: Center for the Study of the College Fraternity.
- Kuh, G. D. (1994). The influence of college environments on student drinking. In G. Gonzalez and V. Clement (Eds.), *Research and intervention: Preventing substance abuse in higher education* (pp. 45-71). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Kuh, G. D., & Arnold, J. A. (1993). Liquid bonding: A cultural analysis of the role of alcohol in fraternity pledge ship. *Journal of College Student Development*, 34, 327-334.
- Kuh, G. D., & Lyons, J. W. (1990). Greek systems at involving colleges. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 20-29.
- Maisel, J. M. (1990). Social fraternities and sororities are not conducive to the educational process. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 8-12.
- Malaney, G. D. (1990). Student attitudes toward fraternities and sororities. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 37-42.
- Marlowe, A. F., & Auvenshine, C. D. (1982). Greek membership: Its impact on the moral development of college freshman. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 23, 53-57.
- Mills, K. C, Pfaffenberger, B., & McCarty, D. (1981). Guidelines for alcohol abuse prevention on the college campus: Overcoming the barriers to program success. *Journal of Higher Education*, 52, 399-414.
- Miser, K. (1981, Spring). The fraternity and alcohol abuse: A challenge for the 80's. *Phi Gamma Delta*, 1-6.
- Pascarella, E., Edison, M., Nora, A, Hagedorn, L., & Terenzini, P. (In press). Influences on students' openness to diversity and challenge in the first year of college. *Journal of Higher Education*.
- Pascarella, E., Edison, M., Whitt, E., Nora, A, Hagedorn, L., & Terenzini, P. (1996). Cognitive effects of Greek affiliation during the first year of college. *NASPA Journal*, 33, 242-259.
- Pike, G. R., & Askew, J. W. (1990). The impact of fraternity or sorority membership on academic involvement and learning outcomes. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 13-19.

- Presley, C. A, Meilman, P. W., & Lyerla, R. (1993). *Alcohol and drugs on American college campuses: Use, consequence, and perceptions of the campus environment, Vol. 1: 1989–1991*. Carbondale, IL: Core Institute.
- Robson, J. (Ed.) (1977). *Baird's manual of college fraternities, bicentennial edition* (17th ed.). Manasha, WI: Baird's Manual Foundation.
- Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist*, 45, 109–119.
- Strange, C. C. (1986). Greek affiliation and goals of the academy: A commentary. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, 519–522.
- Tampke, D. R. (1990). Alcohol behavior, risk perception, and fraternity and sorority membership. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 71–77.
- Wilder, D. H., & Hoyt, A. E. (1986). Greek affiliation and attitude change: A reply to Jakobsen and Strange. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, 527–530.
- Wechsler, H., Davenport, A, Dowdall, G. W., Moeykens, B., & Castillo, S. (1994). Health and behavioral consequences of binge drinking in college. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 272, 1672–1677.
- Wechsler, H., Dowdall, G. W., Davenport, A., & Castillo, S. (1995). Correlates of college student binge drinking. *American Journal of Public Health*, 85, 921–926.
- Wechsler, H., & Isaac, N. (1992). “Binge” drinkers at Massachusetts colleges: Prevalence, drinking styles, time trends and associated problems. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 267, 2929–2931.
- Wechsler, H., & McFadden .M. (1979). Drinking among college students in New England. *Journal of Studies in Alcohol*, 40, 969–996.
- Wilder, D. H., Hoyt, A. E., Surbeck, B. S., Wilder, J. C., & Carney, P. I. (1989). Greek affiliation and attitude change in college students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, 510–519.