

The Role of Greek Life Participation on Student Risk Taking Behaviors and Perceptions

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that participation in social organizations, particularly Greek life, correlates with an increased usage in substances and substance-related behaviors like driving under the influence or engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse. For this study, it was predicted that members of fraternities and sororities would also be more likely to engage in other risky behaviors as compared to their non-Greek peers. Students (N=67) completed the Domain Specific Risk-Taking Scale (DOSPERT) to measure their likelihood to engage in risky behaviors as well as their perception of how risky those same behaviors are and the benefits that could be received from them. Results are presented below.

Introduction

Past research has linked Greek participation with an increase in use of alcohol and drugs. It has been well documented that in college students, members of Greek organizations have higher rates of substance use, particularly in a social context, primarily including alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana (Collins & Liu, 2014). These social risks were positively correlated with greater risks of health/safety like driving under the influence, engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse, and engaging in physical fights (Ragsdale et al., 2012).

However, risky behaviors are not limited to social and health/safety. The categories of recreational, ethical, and financial risks have been scarcely studied in academic literature. Although there is some evidence to show that Greek participation is a risk factor for an increase in gambling (Caldeira et al., 2017), there is no definitive correlation between the two.

Current research also lacks input from students' perceptions of these types of risks and how great of benefits they could expect from engaging in each of them. This study intends to explore all aspects of risk and how Greek participation influences it.

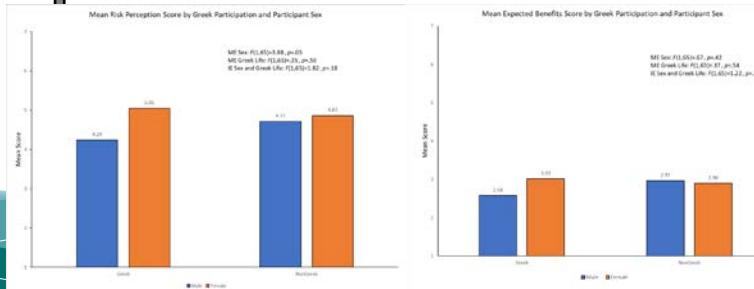
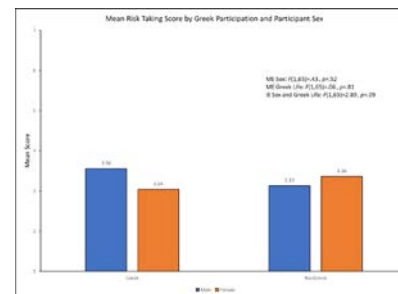
Hypotheses. 1) Greek participation significantly increases the likelihood of engagement in risky behaviors, decreases the perceived risk of those behaviors, and increases the expected benefits. 2) Male fraternity members will be most likely to report engagement in recreational, ethical, and financial risk. 3) Female sorority members will be most likely to report engagement in social and health/safety risks.

Method

College student participants (N=67) took a Domain Specific Risk-Taking Scale (Blais & Weber, 2006), a survey consisting of 30 items of risk scored three times in likelihood to engage in, perception of, and the expected benefits of each risk. Each of the items was one of five types of risk: social, health/safety, recreation, ethical, or financial to create a comprehensive data set of participants' relationships with risk and risky behaviors. Each participant also answered demographic questions such as age, sex, race, Greek life participation, and year in school. Data was collected in the Spring 2022 semester. The sample was primarily comprised of women (67.2%). Greek life participation was 26.9% of the sample, 77.8% of which were sorority and 22.2% were fraternity.

Means for each of the 3 surveys of the DOSPERT were calculated, as well as each of the subcategories, to determine statistically significant differences between Greek and Non-Greek affiliation and males and females.

Figures



Results & Discussion

Although the pattern of results was consistent with predictions, there were no significant effects for overall risk taking, risk perception, expected benefits, and Greek participation and sex. There was marginally significant interaction effect in risk taking ($p=.9$), but the other two dependent variables were not significant.

Within risk taking, however, there were two subscale categories that were either marginally significant or significant. The main effect for sex was marginally significant for social risk taking ($p=.08$), with females more likely than males to engage in these behaviors, but there was no significant difference for Greek participation. The interaction effect for financial risk taking was statistically significant ($p=.02$), and consistent with the hypothesis in that Greek males were most likely to engage in financially risky behaviors.

Other statistically significant results included Greek males having the lowest perception of financial risk ($p=.04$) and Greek women having the highest level of social expected benefits ($p=.01$), both of which were results consistent with the hypothesis. There were no significant results in health/safety, recreational, and ethical risks subgroups.

Since many of these results are inconsistent with the hypotheses, it raises questions of why Greek participation has the reputation that it does. This study has shown that in many aspects, Greek students are not perceived to be significantly more risky than the rest of the university population. The results may be applied to help better target risk education towards groups of students who need it, particularly students who are thinking about or in the process of joining Greek organizations.

Selected References

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- Ragsdale, K., Porter, J. R., Mathews, R., White, A., Gore-Felton, C., & McGarvey, E. L. (2012). "liquor before beer, you're in the clear": Binge drinking and other risk behaviours among fraternity/sorority members and their non-Greek peers. *Journal of Substance Use*, 17(4), 323–339. <https://doi.org/10.3109/14659891.2011.583312>