VectorSolutions

Fostering a More Safe and Inclusive Environment for all Members

Insights from 2022 NIC/Vector Solutions Research Partnership

Introduction

In our continued partnership with the North American Interfraternity Conference, Vector Solutions is again leveraging its robust national data sets to investigate issues that are important to fraternity and sorority life on college campuses. Given our findings from last year's research study related to non-member perceptions of Greek Life, this year's primary research question focused on members of sororities and fraternities and identifying ways for these organizations to foster safer and more inclusive environments for all members. Thus, we have investigated key data points related to safety and inclusion, and our analyses honed in on differences between the general population and historically marginalized groups (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity).

Fostering an Inclusive and Safe Environment for All Members

The goal of this study was to better understand members' perceptions of key issues on college campuses related to safety and inclusion, focusing on attitudes and beliefs related to sexual assault, alcohol use, and hazing. Given that the 2021 study resulting from this research partnership, related to non-members' perceptions of Greek life, indicated some minor differences among various groups of students, this year's study specifically focused on differences based on whether a student belongs to a group that has historically been marginalized and potentially experienced social consequences as a result (Frost, 2011; Jiang et al., 2019; Nadal et al., 2021). The findings discussed in this report only represent those that were statistically significant ($p < .05$), and the data were derived from two specific Vector Solutions courses during the 2021-2022 academic year.

The overall sample consisted of 62,209 fraternity and sorority members who took either our *GreekLifeEdu* or *CommunityEdu* course during the aforementioned timeframe. The groups that were included in the analyses for this study broke down as such: 64.8% (n = 40,335) identified as female and 33.2% (n = 20,643) identified as male, 80.6% (n = 50,161) identified as white and 22.4% (n = 13,915) identified as a member of a historically marginalized racial or ethnic group, and 81.5% (n = 50,704) identified as heterosexual and 10.2% (n = 6,354) identified as a member of a historically marginalized group based on their sexual orientation. Please note that these data do not include students who preferred not to answer the question, and that the final two categories (race/ethnicity and sexual orientation) were multi-select questions that allowed respondents to choose more than one option. Finally, these groups were analyzed in a binary fashion to ensure that sample sizes were powerful enough to test for statistically significant differences.

Group Differences Related to Sexual Assault, Alcohol Use, and Hazing

First, it is important to state that all Greek members surveyed on the following topics generally demonstrated socially-conscious beliefs that support inclusivity and safety. For example, overall, students agreed with the statement, "People can be sexually assaulted by the person they are dating." However, this study focused on analyses that measure differences for historically marginalized groups, and each of the following findings demonstrate a statistically significant (p < .05) result. As we examine these results, it is equally important to remember that the differences noted here reflect those that we see in our society as a whole (Allan et al., 2018), and that they are not directly attributable to the impact of sorority and/or fraternity life on college campuses or their students.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Sexual Assault.

While the sample generally agreed with the aforementioned statement regarding sexual assault, female-identifying students were more likely to agree with it, and this demonstration of higher socially-conscious values held true for multiple items related to this topic (see Table 1). While a pattern is clearly evident in these data, it is important to remember that our findings are representative of the culture of college campuses, and society, as a whole (Brubaker et al., 2017).

Table 1. Notable differences between male-identifying and female-identifying students in attitudes and beliefs about sexual assault (items rated from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree").

Item Text (Likert-type, 1-7 scale)	Male Identifying	Female Identifying	Statistical Significance
I don't think sexual assault is a significant problem in my organization.	M = 5.9 SD = 1.662	M = 5.54 SD = 1.794	p < .001
I have a good understanding of the definitions of sexual assault.	M = 6.33 SD = 1.159	M = 6.59 SD = .878	p < .001
It's not sexual assault if both people have been drinking.	M = 1.98 SD = 1.499	M = 1.54 SD = 1.23	p < .001
I am aware of resources for relationship violence.	M = 5.85 SD = 1.455	M = 6.08 SD = 1.334	p < .001
People can be sexually assaulted by the person they are dating.	M = 6.26 SD = 1.31	M = 6.63 SD = 1.04	p < .001
Silence can be interpreted as consent to have sex.	M = 1.85 SD = 1.444	M = 1.51 SD = 1.299	p < .001

Note: *M stands for mean, SD stands for standard deviation, and p stands for p-value.*

Behaviors, Attitudes, and Beliefs related to Alcohol Use.

Our data demonstrate additional disparity between marginalized groups when considering alcohol use. Given that drinking rates among college students increased during the global pandemic (Julien et al., 2021), examining their behaviors and attitudes related to this issue provides a meaningful opportunity for intervention. While there were notable differences among all historically marginalized groups which were included in our analyses, they were most prominent among the LGBTQIA+ community (see Table 2). Additionally, non-white and female-identifying students were less likely to have consumed alcohol within the past year as well as within the past two weeks.

These students were also less likely to "See no need to change the way I consume alcohol" and more likely to be "Currently trying to consume alcohol in healthier and safer ways." Additionally, they were more likely to report engaging in safe drinking practices, such as: reducing the number of times they drink per week, pacing drinks to one or fewer per hour, setting a limit on the number of drinks they will have, and alternating non-alcoholic with alcoholic beverages. The behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs reported by Greek members on this topic do not vary from what we see in the general population, nor as it compares to historically marginalized groups (Wade, 2020). Generally, as it pertains to alcohol use, these groups report safer practices and more healthy attitudes, but also seem more concerned about potential consequences – particularly those that are social in nature.

Table 2. *Notable differences between heterosexual students and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about alcohol use (items rated from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" or "Very unimportant" to "Very important").*

Item Text (Likert-type, 1-7 scale)	Heterosexual Community	LGBTQIA+ Community	Statistical Significance
During the past year, have you consumed alcohol (i.e., had more than a few sips of beer, wine, or liquor)?	M = 1.33 SD = .470	M = 1.31 SD = .461	p = .05
During the past two weeks, have you consumed alcohol (i.e., had more than a few sips of beer, wine, or liquor)?	M = 1.26 SD = .436	M = 1.32 SD = .465	p < .001
How important to you is the following reason for drinking alcoholic beverages?: Feel connected with the people around you	M = 3.44 SD = 1.818	M = 3.33 SD = 1.853	p = .048
Drinking is against my personal or religious values.	M = 2.73 SD = 1.957	M = 2.42 SD = 1.926	p < .001
I don't want the image of a drinker.	M = 4.06 SD = 2.156	M = 3.9 SD = 2.24	p = .003
I have been taken advantage of sexually as a result of a drinking situation.	M = 1.18 SD = .705	M = 1.29 SD = .897	p < .001

Note: *M stands for mean, SD stands for standard deviation, and p stands for p-value.*

Behaviors, Attitudes, and Beliefs Related to Hazing.

Our *GreekLifeEdu* and *CommunityEdu* course surveys ask multiple items related to hazing, and students were aligned in their responses to many of them. However, there were some meaningful differences that do provide further evidence of privilege among students that have not been historically marginalized. Primarily, female students and members of the LGBTQIA+ community were aligned on several key items. They were more likely to support a no-hazing policy for their Greek organization, indicating that they see more of a need for one to exist. Additionally, these students were less likely to agree with the statement, "Hazing creates a sense of unity among the members of my organization."

These surveys also ask students whether they have ever chosen to not participate in hazing and, if so, what their primary reasons were in avoiding participation. While all students selected these options as reasons why they have chosen not to participate in hazing, female students and members of the LGBTQIA+ community were more likely to rate the following as important to them: not wanting to cause emotional harm to someone, hazing going against their personal values, not wanting to be held legally responsible if hazing results in harm, and wanting to be well-liked by other members. The data demonstrate clear differences for these historically marginalized groups, but these problems are indicative across all types of student organizations on college campuses and tend to be more prominent when considering gender identity and sexual orientation (Allan et al., 2018; Tingley et al., 2018).

While all respondents generally demonstrated healthy attitudes as well as an understanding of the possible negative consequences related to sexual assault, alcohol use, and hazing, historically marginalized groups are clearly more cognizant of these issues and are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that foster a non-threatening environment for all students. While these data do not indicate a problem that is specific to fraternities and sororities, they do provide an opportunity for Greek organizations to proactively take the lead on college campuses in an effort to create environments that are more inclusive and safer for all students.

Summary and Limitations

Sexual assault, alcohol use, and hazing are consistently and rightly prominent in the postsecondary zeitgeist due to the dangers they pose to all college students. The robust data collected by Vector Solutions related to these issues allows Greek organizations to gain unique insight from their members and build on their already strong efforts related to hazing education and prevention. Thus, there is an opportunity to continue as thought leaders in the collegiate space as it pertains to making proactive efforts to make students feel safer and more included in their campus experience. Generally, the differences related to socially-conscious behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes discussed as a result of this study are related to gender identity and sexual orientation, with race/ethnicity primarily only a factor as it pertains to alcohol use. While this might suggest a need to not be concerned about variance among students based on race/ethnicity, the data and supporting literature suggest that this is merely indicative of even greater gaps that are related to gender and sexuality due to social stigma (Frost, 2011; Jiang et al., 2019). Again, overall, the students (i.e., Greek organization members) who completed these surveys demonstrated socially-conscious, healthy, and appropriate attitudes and beliefs that promote safety and inclusion on college campuses as well as within their fraternities and sororities.

The depths to which this study could investigate the primary research question were limited by a few factors. First, while the overall sample size was quite robust and had plenty of statistical power, we needed to combine different groups of students based on race/ethnicity as well as sexual orientation in order to be able to conduct meaningful and reliable analyses. This resulted in an inability to analyze these groups specifically, including potentially testing for statistically significant differences among them. Additionally, it is important to remember that this study was quasi-experimental in nature, so causality cannot be derived from any of these findings. These insights are based on large data sets that are aggregated, cross-sectional, and self-reported. However, this sample is not representative of the collegiate population nor the general population, and the differences identified are person-related and not attributable to any manipulation or controllable factor on our part. Finally, it is vital to keep in mind that these data are representative of a snapshot in time. College students are constantly learning, growing, and evolving, and these data do not capture that.

Possible Directions for Future Research

This study was conducted during the second year of a multiyear partnership, but additional data, better sampling methods, and improved survey design and implementation should allow for even more meaningful and generalizable analyses in the future. Several improvements have been made to the already strong methodology at Vector Solutions and, given that, there are several directions that this research partnership could go in the future. This is particularly true when considering that 2023 will allow for analyses that include up to three years of data across multiple courses.

The following explain multiple possibilities for future collaborative work:

- Trend analyses could be conducted in a couple of different ways (year-over-year data, spanning 3 years).
    - Revisiting, and adding to, the 2021 partnership study related to non-members perceptions of Greek life.
    - Digging deeper into the topics covered in this year's study, but examining changes during the global pandemic.

- An extension of this year's study, digging deeper into various demographic and historically marginalized groups. This could include:
    - Investigating items related to mental well-being.
    - Comparing non-members to members on items of emphasis from this year's study.
        - For example, our AlcoholEdu for College course includes many of the items that are also included in *GreekLifeEdu* and *CommunityEdu*.
        - In late fall 2022, Vector Solutions launched a new course called Hazing Awareness and Prevention for Students, and many of the items investigated in the current study related to hazing are also asked of non-members in that course's surveys.

- Collaboration with some specific Greek organizations to obtain data related to student success (e.g., GPA, graduation rate, retention rates) and melding that with our data could allow for important insights.

- Our analyses of 2023 data and beyond will be based on improved data collection processes and methodology.
    - Effective in fall 2022, Vector Solutions has updated and standardized our "demographic" questions across all courses and surveys in our Vector LMS platform, including alterations to better reflect inclusivity and allow for findings that are more representative of the general population.
        - For example, we now ask respondents which pronouns they prefer versus the gender identity with which they best identify.
    - We have also standardized courses in terms of when demographic questions are presented to students, having our pre-course and follow-up surveys (given after a 45-day intercession period) aligned, and ensuring that the length of the surveys are representative of the workload associated with the course.

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