Greek Affiliation and Success in College

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Abstract

The Greek system has a long tradition in American colleges and universities, with various advantages suggested for those who join this social and intellectual community. This study used data from a survey of 60 preparatory school students to investigate correlates of Greek membership and found that while academic performance and self-reports of coolness were related to Greek membership, the number of reported close friends was not. No relationship was found between the number of close friends and academic performance. Similarities to previous findings and the contribution of the present results to an understanding of the contribution of Greek membership to academic success are discussed.

Greek Affiliation and Success in College

When students enter college, they have the choice of whether or not to enter the Greek community. But what are the possible academic and social advantages to be gained by entering this community? Dangler and Veed (2005) found that in one large Midwestern university, students that entered the Greek system had larger support systems and more friends than students that chose not to. This can impact a student by preventing feelings of loneliness. Loneliness has been linked to such problems as depression, homelessness and can even contribute to suicidal thoughts or actions (Achenbach, Cacialli, Conners & Inderbitzen-Nolan, 1983). Clearly, loneliness and the poor social support that can lead to it are very important issues to examine.

Also, when in college, having a functioning social support network, which can be obtained by joining the Greek system, can help the student achieve great things. Having friends to support them when they are stressed with work, can help students perform better in academic settings. In one study it was shown that GPA and number of close friends were positively correlated (Iturbide & Padilla-Walker, 1991). This study demonstrated this relationship in high school seniors. While Iturbide and Padilla-Walker's findings are important, they have yet to be demonstrated in a college aged sample. A college sample is more generalizable to adults and therefore this finding could be seen as more applicable to real world settings. The current study seeks to confirm this relationship in a college population.

What these two studies display is that social support networks, such as those gained by joining a Fraternity or Sorority, have many positive effects on number of friends. These findings also point to an increase in success in school and possibly beyond. Together they indicate that joining a Fraternity and/or Sorority can improve success in school. The current study is designed to assess the veracity of such statements.

The first hypothesis was that there would be a difference in number of close friends between Greek members and Independents. It was hypothesized that there would be a mean difference in number of close friends between those in the Greek system and those not, such that those in the Greek system report more close friends. This hypothesis is the same as what was found in the study by Dangler and Veed (2005). A related hypothesis was that Greeks would self-report higher levels of "social coolness" than would Independents. The next hypothesis was that there would be a significant correlation

between number of close friends and college grade point average (GPA), such that those with more friends would have higher GPA's. This is an attempt to replicate in a college population the findings of Iturbide and Padilla-Walker (1991). Therefore it was hypothesized that there would be a positive linear relationship between number of closes friends and GPA. Next, to provide a more direct test of the hypothesis that this study was founded on, it was hypothesized that there would be more Greek's with a high GPA than those with a low GPA whereas those not in the Greek system would be more likely to have lower GPA than higher GPA. It was hypothesized that there would be a pattern of relationship between High and Low GPA groups and Greek status.

Method

Participants

Sixty undergraduates from a large Mid-Eastern University participated in the current study. Twenty-six (43.3%) of these participants were male and 76% were Caucasian, 17.6% African American and 5% Asian American with the remaining 1.4% being classified as Other. They had a mean age of 21 years with a range from 20 to 24 years.

Materials

A self report survey that consisted of several questions including age, ethnicity, gender, if they are in a fraternity or sorority, current GPA, and number of close friends was created for this study. The Coolness Scale was also included in the questionnaire. The Coolness Scale has 25 nine point Likert-type items behaviors asking students to identify how similar they are to prototypically cool social behaviors (-4 not like me at all to +4 totally like me) Higher scores indicate the student things they are more cool (Pitt, Jackson & Travolta, 2000).

Procedures

The survey was administered during the orientation meeting held at the beginning of the junior year etiquette class. Each of the sixty students who attended that meeting provided complete data.

Results

Univariate statistics for variables collected on the survey ware shown in Table 1. The first hypothesis stated that Greek students would report more close friends than Independent students. Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant mean difference on number of close friends between

Greek students and Independent students $F(1,58) = 0.083$, $p = 0.775$, $Mse = 11.43$. The related

hypothesis that Greeks would self-report higher levels of coolness was supported, $F(1,58) = 9.23$, $p = 0.031$, $Mse = 7.65$. Table 2 summarizes the data for number of friends and social coolness for Greeks

and Independents.

The third hypothesis stated that number of close friends would be positively correlated with GPA.

Pearson's correlation between GPA and number of close friends was $r(58) = -0.215$, $p = 0.099$. There

was no linear relationship between number of close friends and GPA. This result did not support the

research hypothesis that students with a higher number of close friends would have higher GPA's.

The fourth hypothesis stated that more Greek students would have High GPA's than Low GPA's

and Non Greek students would be more likely to have Low GPA's than High GPAs. GPA was divided into

High and Low by recoding all students with GPA 3.0 or lower as having Low GPA's and those with above

a 3.0 as having High GPA's. Table 3 shows the resulting contingency table for theses variables. More

students had High GPA's than Low GPA's and more students were Greek then were not Greek. There

was a relationship between GPA and Greek affiliation, $X^2(1) = 5.07$, $p = 0.024$. Inspection of Table 3

shows that, as hypothesized, Greek students were more likely to have High GPA's than Low GPA's and

Non Greeks were more likely to have Low GPA's than High GPA's.

Discussion

The results from these analyses were provided support for portions of the research hypotheses.

The first and second hypotheses were not supported, showing no difference between number of close

friends for Greeks and Non Greek and no positive correlation between number of close friends and GPA.

However, the last hypothesis was supported showing the Greeks were more likely to have High GPA's

than Low and Independents were more likely to have Low GPA's than High GPA's. These findings were

very interesting because they had contrary findings to Dangler and Veed (2005). In this study, the Greek

students did not report more friends, indicating more social support, which was found in this earlier study.

The findings were also contrary to Iturbide and Padilla-Walker (1991), in that no relationship was found

between GPA and social support, as represented by number of close friends. The related hypothesis that

Greeks would report themselves as more cool was supported.

It was found that Greeks were more likely to have High than Low GPA's and Independents were more likely to have Low than High GPA's. This finding was very interesting because it indirectly supports the previous research by substituting GPA, which was found to be positively correlated with number of close friends, for social support and comparing it for Greeks versus Independents. These results are very helpful when considering entering the Greek system. Results of whether or not joining a house can help you to be successful in college are inconclusive. It appears that just because someone is a member of a House, does not mean that they consider their fellow Greek members to be close friends. It also shows that having close friends might not be enough or even the most effective form of social support in order to boost success in college. When considering all that was found in this study, there are many aspects that increase our cumulative knowledge about social support. While it was shown in past research that students in the Greek system had reported more close friends than Independents, perhaps there are more factors that influence friends rather than just belonging to the same House. In this population, there was no difference in number of friends for both groups. Family members and significant others might be more influential than friends when considering success.

In order to look into the differences between this study's findings and previous findings, it is proposed that a population of working adults be looked at. By getting permission to hand out surveys at a local retail store, the sample size could be increased to nearly two hundred participants with a large age range. A survey could be handed out including questions about marital status, gender, number of close friends, if they are/were a Greek member, and the results of their last evaluation at their job. By doing this, the implication of being in a House can be looked at in respect to success, friends, and marital status. The relationship between social support (marital and friend) could also be reexamined. It is hypothesized that participants that were in the Greek system will report a higher number of friends (regardless of whether they are currently in the House or not). It is also hypothesized that participants in stable relationships (married) will report higher evaluation results on their last evaluation. This new research could help to elaborate and explain the findings of this study in relation to past research as well as adding to the understanding of how social support may impact success.

References

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Table 1.
Summary of Greek Affiliation, GPA, and Number of Close Friends

Variable		Univariate Statistic	
Greek Affiliation		Greek	34 (56.7%)
		Independent	26 (43.3%)
GPA grouped		High GPA	27 (45%)
		Low GPA	33 (55%)
GPA	$M = 3.01$	$SD = 1.07$	$N = 60$
Number of Close Friends	$M = 5.93$	$SD = 3.35$	$N = 60$

Table 2.
Means (and standard deviation) Number of Close Friends and Coolness Self-Reports for Greek (n=34) and Independent (n=26) Students

Affiliation	Independents	Greeks
Number of Close Friends	6.08 (3.21)	5.82 (3.50)
Coolness Self-Reports	-1.82 (1.34)	2.87 (1.28)

Table 3.
Summary of High and Low GPA's for Greeks and Independents

	GPA		
Greek Affiliation	Low	High	Total
Independent	16	10	26
Greek	11	23	34
Total	27	33	60