

Bidding for Better: Changing University Policy Regarding Hazing and Substance Abuse

A Research Paper submitted to the Department of Engineering and Society

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Engineering and Applied Science
University of Virginia • Charlottesville, Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

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Spring 2023

On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

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STS Research Paper

Introduction

On November 1st 2012, David Bogenberger died of alcohol poisoning in the basement of a Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity house at Northern Illinois University. David had enrolled at the NIU earlier that year and was in the process of joining the Pi Kappa Alpha brotherhood, one of the recognized fraternities of the university. During the mandatory pledging event, recruits were forced to drink copious amounts of vodka until they were unable to walk on their own, given vomit buckets, then placed into basement bedrooms. David died later that night, with a blood alcohol level of 0.43 mg/dl (Bogenberger, 2018). According to its website, the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity was founded “for the establishment of friendship on a firmer and more lasting basis; for the promotion of brotherly love and kind feeling” (Pi Kappa Alpha). The NIU Chapter president and an officer sent a text message to party attendees to delete any pictures or videos they had of passed out pledges. Members were instructed not to call 911 nor give medical care to anyone who had participated in the event (Bogenberger, 2018).

At their best, Greek life organizations can be an incredible asset to a university campus. The friendship, networking, and other social benefits can be extremely positive influences on a student’s experience. However, for these social benefits to be fully realized, universities must force their fraternities to confront the hazing and substance abuse issues that continue to run rampant. An analysis of the relationships between universities and their Greek life organizations are required in order to better understand what causes these problems and how they can effectively be addressed.

Methods

The problem of how to solve hazing and substance abuse issues is a complicated and challenging one - there are many stakeholders with often conflicting interests and values. To properly analyze this, an initial survey of the actors involved with the issue is conducted. Next, connections are made between the related actors. As much as possible, these connections are described in specific and quantifiable terms. This connection web is used to identify the most important and impactful groups associated with the problem. Once this is completed, deeper research into these groups and connections is conducted to determine their underlying motivations. This can be combined with a summary understanding of the problems at play and to develop some potential solutions that can be suggested and researched. Finally, once solutions are identified, they are compared against the interests of the identified actors to ensure that all related parties would support the proposals.

Fraternities and sororities, collectively known as Greek life organizations, have been a prominent feature of university campuses in the United States for over a century. While these organizations are often associated with community service and social opportunities, they have also been plagued by serious problems such as hazing and substance abuse. In recent years, there has been a growing concern about the negative effects of Greek life on college campuses, and calls for reform have become increasingly urgent. This research paper will explore the problems related to Greek life organizations, with a focus on hazing and substance abuse, and will suggest ways in which students and university administration can address these issues.

To analyze these problems, one main framework from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) is utilized. This paper uses Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to identify the various actors involved in Greek life organizations and their interactions. This framework is

used to help understand how different groups, including students, alumni, and university administration, influence and are influenced by Greek life organizations. Once the actors are identified, this research paper proposes several solutions to address the needs of all of the groups, or at least one that maximizes the positive effect across the entire network.

By using this framework, this research paper is intended to contribute to the understanding of the complex social and technological systems that shape Greek life organizations on university campuses. Insights into the challenges faced by these organizations are provided, and ways in which they can be reformed to better serve the needs of students while promoting a safer and more inclusive campus community are suggested. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions about the role of Greek life organizations in higher education and the ways in which they can be made more responsible and accountable to their members and the wider campus community. At the conclusion of the research, this paper recommends that universities shift their guidelines and rules from prohibition to harm-reduction to create a safer environment for their students.

Background Information

As spending four years at college has become a more ingrained part of the young adult experience, Greek life organizations have grown in America. In 2021, New Mexico University reported there are over nine million fraternity/sorority members or alumni nationwide (University of New Mexico, 2021). Unfortunately, the growth in membership has not always accompanied by a growth in safety - David Bogenberger's story is not as uncommon as it should be.

According to Hank Nuwer, a Ball State University professor, at least 104 students have died as a direct result of college hazing between the years of 2000 and 2022 (Nuwer, 2022), which does not include additional hospitalizations or health consequences. Hazing can also have disastrous consequences on pledges self-confidence, social well-being, and overall mental health.

In addition to hazing, Greek life has been directly linked to substance abuse among its members. In a paper published by students at William and Mary College, it was reported that “the odds of [Greek life] affiliated, first-year students binge drinking one or more times in a typical two-week period were 1.8 times greater than for their unaffiliated peers. For fraternity/sorority seniors, the odds of binge drinking one or more times in a typical two-week period increased to 2.4 times greater than those of unaffiliated seniors” (Asel, 2015). In addition to the health consequences of binge drinking, there are direct academic consequences. In the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (CORE) results “indicate students with a GPA of A drank an average of 3.3 alcoholic drinks per week, whereas students with a B drank 4.8 drinks, students with a C drank 6.1 drinks, and students with a D or F drank 9.0 drinks” (Presley et al.).

This is not to present a one-sided perspective of the issue - fraternities also provide numerous benefits to universities and their students. Socially, Greek life can be an excellent way for new students to make lifelong friends and connections. According to a 2014 Gallup survey of over 30,000 college graduates, 54% of fraternity/sorority members reported feeling socially satisfied compared to 48% of non-affiliated members. In the same survey, Greek life graduates reported feeling more physically fulfilled, having a stronger sense of community and purpose, and more financially secure than non-members. Finally, 37% of fraternity graduates said they were prepared for life after graduation, while only 27% of other graduates identified as such

(Gallup, 2014). With these clear benefits, universities must work to ensure that Greek life remains safe and healthy enough to be a benefit on campuses.

STS Framework

This paper primarily relies on Actor Network Theory (ANT) to analyze the connections between Greek life organizations, fraternity and sorority members, universities, other university organizations, and non-affiliated students. This analysis can be used to gain a better understanding of the driving forces behind some of the problems that have arisen. ANT, developed by sociologist Bruno Latour, provides a robust framework for studying complex networks of relationships involving both human and non-human actors (Nickerson, 2023).

One of the key strengths of ANT is its ability to organize and map out the intricate web of relationships and influences among various entities. In the context of the fraternity problem, ANT can help identify the diverse actors involved, such as individual fraternity members, university policies, campus culture, and even non-affiliated students. By tracing these actors and their associations, ANT enables researchers to uncover the multiple influences that contribute to the persistence of problems within the Greek life system.

While ANT offers valuable insights, it is not immune to criticism. Some critics argue that ANT tends to overlook the larger social structures and power dynamics that shape interactions. They contend that by treating all actors as equal, ANT may disregard the impact of systemic inequalities and institutional forces that contribute to the problems associated with Greek life. However, proponents of ANT argue that its strength lies precisely in its ability to reveal the often hidden connections and relationships that perpetuate these problems, even if it requires further contextual analysis to address structural factors (Nickerson, 2023).

In practical terms, ANT can be used by universities to gain a more nuanced understanding of the negative influences affecting Greek life organizations and to develop targeted interventions. By applying ANT, universities can identify specific actors, such as particular fraternities, organizational practices, or social norms, that contribute to the problems. This knowledge can inform policy changes, educational initiatives, and support systems that directly address the identified influences. Additionally, ANT's focus on relationships and associations can help universities collaborate with non-affiliated students and other university organizations to create a more inclusive and responsible campus culture. Ultimately, ANT provides a valuable analytical framework for comprehending and addressing the complex dynamics within and around Greek life organizations (Nickerson, 2023).

Results & Discussion

The research conducted allowed for the creation of an Actor-Network theory map of the connections between universities, students, and Greek life organizations, among others. Once this actor map was created, the connections between various actors were analyzed, as well as their perspectives on the issues of student safety. Further research was done into ways that other organizations have addressed related public health problems. This led to the proposal of a few harm-reduction methods for universities to implement, encouraging Greek life organizations to prioritize the health of their students without fear of consequences. After the proposal is identified, the Actor-Network theory model was used to ensure that all participants would be satisfied with these solutions and general limitations of the model were identified.

Results & Discussion: Actor-Network Theory Analysis

Actor-network theory (ANT) is a theoretical framework that helps us to understand the complex relationships between various actors in a social system (Crawford, 2020). In the context of Greek life organizations and American universities, ANT helps contextualize how universities, non-affiliated students, Greek life organizations, affiliated students, and Greek life alumni are interconnected and how these connections affect hazing practices and substance abuse issues in Greek life.

At the center of the actor-network in Greek life organizations are the universities themselves. Universities are able to exert significant control over Greek life organizations. At the University of Virginia:

“In order to secure official recognition, fraternities and sororities sign an annual contract with the University – the Fraternal Organization Agreement (FOA) – which outlines the benefits and obligations of their relationship with us. While most chapters abide by University policies and Standards of Conduct, some incidents require investigation and subsequent accountability as determined by the University’s conduct processes, including the student-run University Judiciary Committee (UJC).”

(Statement on Suspension and Termination of Fraternity Chapters, 2022).

As described in the above statement, universities set policies and regulations that shape the conditions under which these organizations operate. For example, they may set minimum GPA requirements for membership in Greek life organizations, regulate the types of events that can be held, or restrict the use of alcohol and drugs during events. If fraternities and sororities fail to meet these standards, their status can be revoked by the university and they can be removed from campus.

Greek life organizations are composed of both affiliated students and alumni. Affiliated students are members of the organization who participate in its activities and rituals. They may

be attracted to Greek life organizations for various reasons, such as the social connections they offer, the sense of belonging and camaraderie, the opportunities for leadership and community service, and the prestige associated with being a member. Alumni are former members of the organization who may continue to support it through donations, mentoring, and other means. In fact, Greek life alumni are shown to donate to their universities at a significantly higher rate than non-affiliated students (Barshay, 2021), making it important for universities to avoid alienating them.

Non-affiliated students are another important actor in the network. They are students who are not members of Greek life organizations and may have mixed feelings about these organizations. Some non-affiliated students view Greek life organizations as elitist, exclusionary, and promoting unhealthy behaviors (Smigelski, 2018), while others may see them as harmless social clubs that provide opportunities for networking and community service. Non-affiliated students can influence the reputation of Greek life organizations by spreading rumors or sharing stories about hazing or substance abuse incidents. Non-affiliated students also have significant influence on university leadership and can convince universities to take action against problematic Greek life organizations.

The relationships between these actors are dynamic and complex. Universities may regulate Greek life organizations in response to pressure from non-affiliated students, alumni, or the wider community. Affiliated students may push back against university regulations, asserting their right to self-governance and arguing that their activities are harmless or beneficial. Alumni may use their influence and resources to shape the policies and practices of Greek life organizations, or they may withdraw their support if they are dissatisfied with how the organization is operating.

These relationships are particularly important when it comes to hazing practices and substance abuse issues in Greek life. Hazing is the use of rituals or activities that are intended to humiliate or intimidate new members of a group (2020, StopHazing Research Lab). Hazing is often associated with Greek life organizations, although it occurs in other types of organizations as well. Substance abuse, including alcohol and drug use, is also a common issue in Greek life organizations. Both hazing and substance abuse can have serious physical and psychological consequences for the individuals involved. Figure 1, shown below, lists and categorizes a number of common hazing practices.

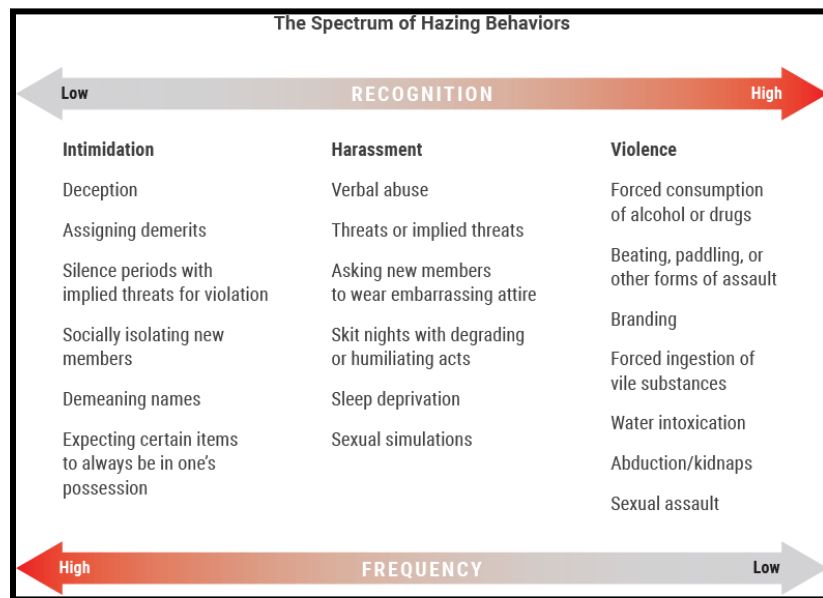


Figure 1: The Spectrum of Hazing Behaviors (Allen and Kerschner, 2020)

University policies and regulations can play a critical role in shaping the prevalence and severity of hazing and substance abuse in Greek life organizations. For example, universities may have strict anti-hazing policies that prohibit any form of initiation rituals, or they may require that all hazing incidents be reported and investigated. Similarly, universities may have policies that regulate or ban the availability and consumption of alcohol on campus, or they may

require that all events involving alcohol be supervised by trained staff (Baucom, Davis, and Hadley, 2022).

Non-affiliated students can also influence the prevalence of hazing and substance abuse in Greek life organizations. If non-affiliated students are aware of hazing or substance abuse incidents, they may report these incidents to university officials or the police. Non-affiliated students can also pressure universities to take action against Greek life organizations that engage in hazing or substance abuse.

Affiliated students and alumni are also important actors in the network when it comes to hazing and substance abuse in Greek life organizations. Affiliated students may resist university policies that they perceive as encroaching on their rights to self-governance and autonomy. They may also defend the tradition of hazing and substance abuse as a rite of passage that builds character and solidarity among members (Wright, 2012). Alumni, on the other hand, can provide financial and social support for Greek life organizations, but they may also perpetuate a culture of hazing and substance abuse by sharing stories of their own experiences with new members.

In summary, actor-network theory can help us understand the complex relationships between universities, non-affiliated students, Greek life organizations, affiliated students, and Greek life alumni, and how these relationships affect hazing practices and substance abuse issues in Greek life. University policies and regulations, non-affiliated student opinions and actions, and the attitudes and behaviors of affiliated students and alumni all play critical roles in shaping the culture of Greek life organizations. To address the issues of hazing and substance abuse in Greek life, all actors in the network must work together to create a culture of safety, respect, and accountability.

Results & Discussion: Policy Suggestions

Hazing and substance abuse are significant issues on college campuses, particularly in Greek life organizations. Despite efforts to curb these behaviors, they persist, resulting in physical and psychological harm to students. To address these issues, universities should modify their approach from outright bans to harm reduction policies.

Harm reduction is a public health strategy that aims to minimize the negative consequences of risky behaviors rather than outright prohibition. In public health studies, like treating addiction, harm reduction policies have shown great improvement over prohibitive policies (Erickson, 1997). In the context of hazing and substance abuse, this means that universities should focus on reducing harm rather than prohibiting the behaviors. This approach is more effective in reducing harm because it allows students to seek help during health crises without fear of retributive punishment.

One way universities can adopt harm reduction policies is by instituting no-consequence ambulance calls. This means that students who call for medical assistance for themselves or their peers will not face disciplinary action. This policy will encourage students to seek medical help without fear of reprisal, reducing the risk of fatalities resulting from overdose or alcohol poisoning.

Moreover, universities should provide resources that people can reach out to without being reported. This approach recognizes that hazing and substance abuse are often symptoms of deeper issues, such as social pressure, mental health issues, and lack of support systems. By providing confidential resources, universities can help students address these underlying issues before they lead to harmful behaviors.

Non-affiliated students, Greek life organizations, affiliated students, and Greek life alumni are all actors that have an influence over Greek life organizations. Non-affiliated students may be concerned about the impact of hazing and substance abuse on the wider student body, while Greek life organizations may be concerned about their reputation and legal liability, in addition to their student's safety. Affiliated students may be concerned about peer pressure, while Greek life alumni may be concerned about the legacy of their organization. By adopting harm reduction policies, universities can address the concerns of all these actors.

Another way universities can improve their policies is by providing education and support to students about the risks and consequences of hazing and substance abuse. Universities can organize workshops and seminars to educate students on the dangers of hazing and substance abuse and provide resources for safe partying and responsible drinking. Furthermore, universities can encourage students to form support groups and seek counseling to address underlying issues that may lead to hazing and substance abuse.

In addition, universities can improve their policies by working closely with Greek life organizations to promote harm reduction strategies. Universities can create partnerships with organizations that promote harm reduction, such as Students for Sensible Drug Policy (*History of SSDP*, 2023), and work with them to develop policies and programs that promote responsible behavior among students. Moreover, universities can create a task force that works closely with Greek life organizations to ensure that they adhere to harm reduction policies and practices.

Finally, universities can improve their policies by creating a culture of accountability among students. Students should be encouraged to speak out against hazing and substance abuse and report any incidents of these behaviors. Universities can create anonymous reporting mechanisms to encourage students to come forward without fear of reprisal. Furthermore,

universities can work with law enforcement agencies to hold students who engage in hazing and substance abuse accountable for their actions.

Results & Discussion: Limitations

This paper has some significant limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, the data available on hazing and substance abuse in Greek life organizations are limited. This research paper has relied solely on existing literature and case studies, which may not be representative of the entire population. As a result, the solutions proposed may have unknown limitations and not be equally applicable to every Greek life organization or university.

Secondly, the proposed harm-reduction approach to hazing and substance abuse is relatively new, and there is limited evidence on its effectiveness. While existing research strongly supports the use of harm reduction to address other types of substance abuse, more research is needed to determine its effectiveness in the context of Greek life organizations.

Finally, the proposed solutions may not be easily testable. Implementing harm reduction policies and strategies requires buy-in from all stakeholders, including university and Greek life leadership. Implementing these solutions may require significant resources and political will. It may be challenging to persuade these individuals to support harm reduction policies instead of prohibition, and it would be very difficult to construct test cases that could change their opinions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, universities should modify their approach to hazing and substance abuse in Greek life organizations by adopting harm reduction policies. These policies, such as no-consequence ambulance calls and confidential resources, will address the underlying issues

that lead to these harmful behaviors, reducing harm and improving the overall wellbeing of students. By doing so, universities can address the concerns of all actors involved, including non-affiliated students, Greek life organizations, affiliated students, and Greek life alumni. Furthermore, universities can provide education and support to students, work closely with Greek life organizations, and create a culture of accountability to promote responsible behavior and reduce harm. By adopting these harm reduction policies and strategies, universities can create a safer and healthier environment for all students on campus that promotes a culture of responsibility and accountability.

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