Attending Greek Life Events as an Indicator of Risky Alcohol Use, even for Nonmembers

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Introduction

Greek (i.e., fraternity/sorority) membership has a robust association with risky alcohol use (Barry et al., 2016; McBride et al., 2014; Tyler et al., 2017), including blackouts (Voloshyna et al., 2018) and elevated blood alcohol concentrations (BACs; Barry & Merianos, 2018). However, students may engage in Greek life activities without a formal association, such as attending parties hosted by fraternities or sororities. Nonmembers who attend Greek life parties may also be at risk; a recent field study found that students had higher BACs if they were at a Greek life party (Cross et al., 2017). One way students may mitigate harms associated with Greek life is by using protective behavioral strategies (PBS; e.g., alternating alcohol and non-alcoholic beverages). **The current study examined self-reported affiliations with Greek life, including membership and event attendance, and their associations with risky drinking outcomes as well as PBS.**

Method

Participants

- *N* = 543 emerging adult college students
- Mean age = 19.85, *SD* = 1.65, range 18-24
- 71.8% female; 52.8% Black, 40.0% White
  - *n* = 61 (11.2%) member/pledging a fraternity/sorority
    - *n* = 33 female, *n* = 28 male
  - *n* = 146 (26.9%) not a member but regularly or occasionally attends Greek social events
    - *n* = 111 female, *n* = 35 male
  - *n* = 336 (61.9%) not a member/does not attend Greek events
    - *n* = 244 female, *n* = 91 male

Materials

Alcohol Use

- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985)
- # of drinks each day of a typical week for the past 30 days
- Operationalized into: quantity (drinks per week), drinks per drinking day, peak drinks (highest number in a single day), if they binge drank (4+/5+ drinks for women/men in a single day), and typical and peak estimated blood alcohol concentration (eBAC)

Alcohol-Related Problems

- Young Adult Alcohol Consequences Questionnaire (YAACQ; Read et al., 2006)
- 48 problems/items (*yes*/*no*) for the past 30 days (α = .92)
- Single items for if they *passed out* during or after drinking, or *blacked out* (i.e., difficulty remembering things they said or did or events that happened while drinking)

Protective Behavioral Strategies (PBS)

- Strategy Questionnaire (SQ; Sugarman & Carey, 2009)
- 21 items (α = .92); response scale modified into exact frequency in a week, divided by # of drinking days (Braitman et al., 2015)

Procedure

- Part of a larger randomized clinical trial of college drinkers
- Recruited via psychology participation pool and student announcements
- Current examination used pre-intervention data from a computerized survey completed in the research lab
- Participants received their choice of research credit (for psychology majors) or $20 (all other students)

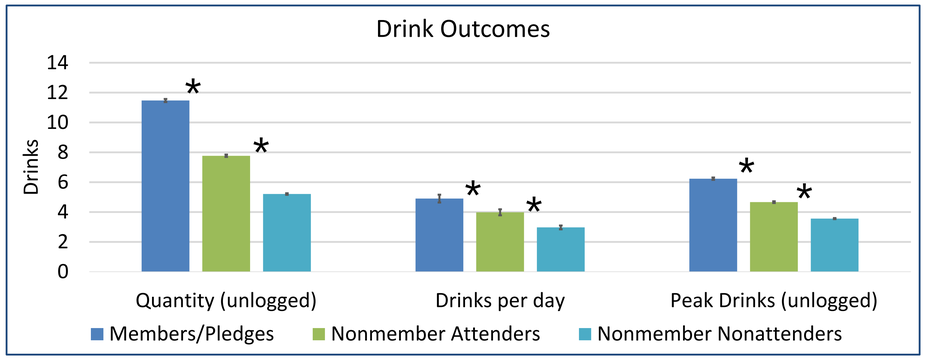
Analyses

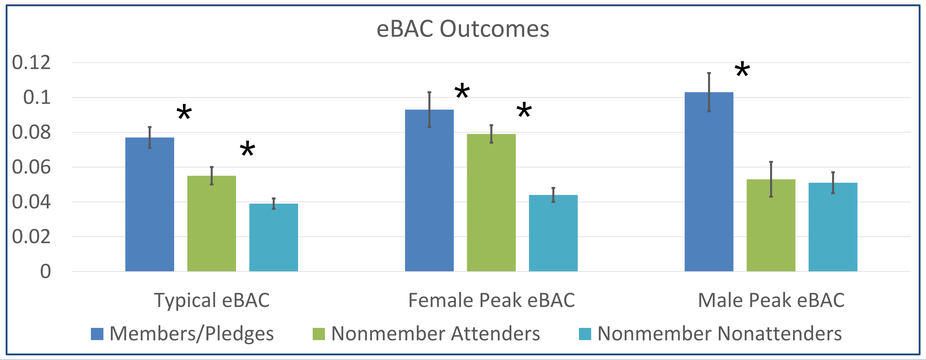
- A series of two-way ANOVAs included Greek status, sex, and their interaction to predict:
  - Quantity (natural log), drinks per drinking day, peak drinks (natural log), typical eBAC, peak eBAC, problems, and PBS
- Chi-squares examined the associations between Greek status and:
  - Passing out (p=.003), blacking out (p<.001), and binge drinking (p<.001)

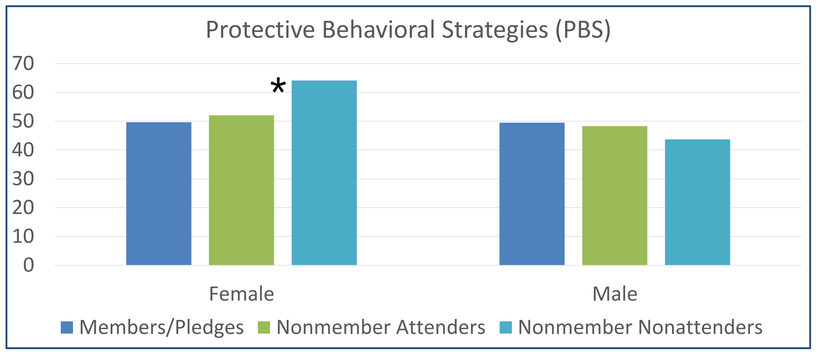
Results

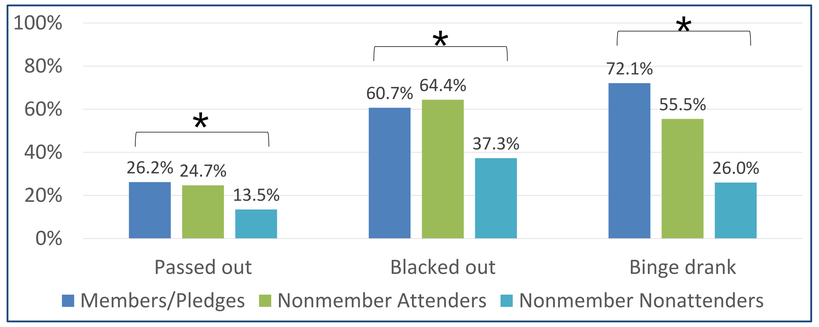
Table 1. *p*-values for Sex, Greek Status, and their Interaction for Factorial ANOVAs

	Quantity	Drinks per Day	Peak	typical eBAC	peak eBAC	Problems	PBS
Sex	**<.001**	**<.001**	**<.001**	.585	.617	.849	.085
Greek Status	**<.001**	**<.001**	**<.001**	**<.001**	**<.001**	**<.001**	.616
Sex * Greek	.063+	.137	.140	.086+	**.030**	.064+	.082+









Discussion

Analyses revealed that nonmembers who attend events have almost equally high alcohol use, particularly high-risk indicators, as members/pledges, and avoiding these events was a strong protective factor. Specifically, nonmembers who do not attend Greek events were less likely to pass out because of drinking (13.5%, compared with members [26.2%], or nonmember attenders [24.7%]). Similarly, they were less likely to black out (37.3%, compared with members [60.7%], or nonmember attenders [64.4%]), or to binge drink (26.0%, compared with members [72.1%], or nonmember attenders [55.5%]). Nonmembers who do not attend events also consumed fewer drinks per week, fewer drinks per day, had lower peak drinks, had lower BACs, and experienced fewer problems (p's<.05), controlling for sex. Interestingly, there was a marginally significant sex by Greek affiliation interaction for PBS use, where female nonmembers who do not attend events used significantly more PBS than members or nonmember attenders. However, Greek affiliation did not have an impact on PBS for male participants. Overall, we found that nonmembers who attend Greek events are at a similar level of alcohol-related risk as members for the riskiest outcome (e.g., passing out or blacking out). Future prevention and intervention efforts may include information about attending Greek life events in programs for all students instead of targeting Greek life members specifically. Future research should also explore the sex differences for PBS use across Greek context.

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