

Greeks and Prestige: On the Relationship Between Fraternity and Sorority Membership and Future Occupational Attainment

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INTRODUCTION

“All but two of the US Presidents, since 1825 have been Greek” (Researchers at East Carolina University, 2011). Information like this is widely available in recruitment materials for Greek Life. The purpose behind such statistics is promotional in nature and therefore the objectivity has to be questioned. As many of us know, statistics can be manipulated and this knowledge leads to the suspicious nature we lend to statistics associated with marketing materials. However, as will be exemplified more in the “Literature Review” section, there is a wide-listing of well-known Greek alumni. The availability of famous alumni leads to the question if there really is a correlation with fraternal organizations and some positive attribute of its members. The other possibility is that promotional statistics and anecdotal information causes this association between fraternal membership and fame. The next question would be why this matters. The influence of prestigious people, such as senators and national presidents, is far-reaching. If there is a high correlation between fraternal membership organizations and prestigious people then the effects of Greek membership is important for not just those involved in Greek Life but also for the many people they will later influence. This question is important in relation to future questions such as whether more people should be interested in the developmental and value effects of Greek Life and whether more people should be involved in deciding what programs and focuses those member organizations adopt.

‘Prestige’ is defined as “reputation or influence arising from success, achievement, rank, or other favorable attributes”

(Dictionary.com). Occupational prestige is the characteristic of influence associated with a career. Furthermore, occupational prestige can be measured and has been coded by the US Bureau of Census and the General Social Survey (G.S.S, 2009). As careers are highly associated with a person and occupational prestige is a more objective measure than personal fame and has a larger applicability, this study will adopt the question of whether there is a correlation between fraternal organization members and high occupational prestige. Furthermore, for clarification purposes, the terms “Greek Life,” “fraternal organizations,” and “fraternal membership organizations” will be used interchangeably to refer to the type of organizations named ‘fraternities’ and ‘sororities’ in modern culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overall, the research into fraternal organization effects is limited. The literature delves deeply into the aspects of the relationship between fraternal organization members and alcohol as well as a great deal of literature on stereotypes and risky behavior. There is a limited amount of scientifically authoritative research on the effects of membership and the development of those members. Less objective information is available on the internet, especially from the websites of fraternities and sororities, on how the groups help members develop. This information takes the form of mainly anecdotal and program information. There seems to be a definite lack of research in determining the actual effects of membership on members, and this research is even more limited in consideration of long-term effects such as

careers. In essence, it appears that the research of correlation between membership in fraternal organizations and occupational prestige will provide a valuable and unique perspective to this topic.

Research correlating fraternal organization membership with alcohol consumption is numerous in comparison to other studies of fraternal organizations. Two such published studies are "Alcohol behavior, risk perception, and fraternity and sorority membership" and "Fraternities, sororities, and binge drinking: Results from a national study of American colleges" (Tampke 1990; Wechsler, Kuh, Davenport 1996). There is extensive research into correlating alcohol consumption and other risky behaviors with fraternal organization membership. Some of this research does show a higher correlation (Wechsler, Kuh, Davenport 1996). Although this research has little relevance to occupational prestige scores, it is relevant in implying an additional area of effect on members. If both alcohol consumption and occupational prestige have a positive correlation with fraternal organizational membership, then further research should be done on long-term effects of fraternal organizations on the members and how these effects may affect the members' future areas of influence.

There is a large amount of evidence on the internet, especially in promotional materials, about the fame of fraternal organization alumni. It is important to note that the fraternal organizations consider its alumni as continuing members, although no longer collegiate members. Examples of fraternal membership organizations promoting prestige of alumni can be found on organizational specific websites, such as the "Sisters of Distinction" section of the website for the CSU Stanislaus chapter of Alpha Xi Delta National Women's Fraternity. An additional example is university websites under the student affairs

departments such as that of East Carolina University. Names listed under the Alpha Xi Delta chapter site include fashion designer Betsey Johnson, entertainment name Jane Henson, and even astronauts ("Sisters of distinction"). Statistics from the East Carolina University include the propensity of United States Presidents to have been Greek affiliated, as well as Supreme Court Justices, Fortune 500 Executives, and again astronauts (Researchers at East Carolina University 2011). The exact statements of the site on these prestigious mentions are "All but two of the US Presidents, since 1825 have been Greek," "40% of all Supreme Court Justices have been Greek," "30% of Fortune 500 Executives are Greek," and "All of the Apollo 11 astronauts were Greek" (Researchers at East Carolina University 2011). The promotion of such prestigious figures is commonplace in recruitment and promotional fraternity organization materials and is important for the need of this research question and its development.

There is some research into the effects of fraternal organization membership on the developing collegians. Two examples of works examining the development of fraternity organization members are Hunt & Rentz's study *Greek-letter social group members' involvement and psychological development* (1994), and Asel, Seifert, and Pascarella's study *Effects of Greek affiliation on college experiences and outcomes: A portrait of complexity* (2009). The first study by Hunt and Rentz concluded that those involved in fraternities or sororities had an increased involvement level in their university and an increased motivation senior year toward completing the college degree (Hunt, Rentz 1994). Furthermore, the study reported an increased level of personal development garnered through their fraternal organization experience. In accordance with this

increased personal development was a clarified individual purpose. This study is one often cited by those involved in the discussion of fraternities and sororities as evidence of positive effects from fraternal organization membership, one example of which is the next study by Asel, et al (2009). Asel, Seirfert, and Pascallera added further research to the discussion of fraternal membership organizations with their survey of over 3000 collegian respondents (Asel, Seirfert, & Pascarella, 2009). The Asel study did not find a significant difference between fraternal organization members and non-members and academic engagement; however, the results did show that seniors reported a positive relation between affiliation and “the quality and impact of personal relationships with peers and student affairs professionals” (Asel, Seirfert, & Pascarella, 2009). Overall, these studies are relevant in reviewing the impact fraternal membership organizations have on collegians. The positive developments reported could supply some reasons for why there may be a correlation between occupational prestige scores and membership.

One study that did look into what may affect student’s future occupation was by Austin (1993). This study concluded that fraternity or sorority members had an increased likelihood of choosing a career in business or law (Austin 1993). In addition, involvement in fraternal organizations had significantly positive influences on students’ career relevant skills, such as leadership skills, public speaking abilities, and ability to influence others (Austin 1993). This study seems to directly support a correlation between occupational prestige and fraternal membership organizations. The age of the study and its brevity in regards to the career and influence limit its value, although its relevance is greater than other studies found.

Overall, after reviewing the limits of research in the subject matter of fraternal organization membership and its result on members, it can be concluded that the correlation between Fraternity Organization membership and prestige occupations will provide valuable and unique information in this area. In the future there may be more research on what are the affects of fraternities and sororities on their alumni members, the development of the collegiate members, and on society through their membership influence. Lastly, if a correlation is found between fraternal organization membership and occupational prestige, then, to fully value and understand this correlation, research will need to be done on whether it is the membership that causes the prestige or if those who will attain future occupation prestige are more likely to be interested in fraternal organization membership. Overall, if prestige is correlated with fraternal membership, then the affects of fraternal organizations may go beyond members and their development to influence those with whom the alumni membership has influence.

METHODS

This study will test the relationship between Membership in Fraternity Organizations with Occupational Prestige using regression analysis through the SDA and GSS Berkeley Computer-assisted Survey Methods Program. This research study will utilize a computer program hosted and developed by the Computer-assisted Survey Methods Program (CSM) of the University of California, Berkeley. The program is Survey Documentation and Analysis, or SDA, and it has the functionality to perform many different types of analysis, including multiple regression analysis. This study will utilize SDA and its multiple regression analysis function. Furthermore, the SDA has the ability to access the data and results of two

major National surveys: the General Social Survey and the American National Elections Survey. The General Social Survey (GSS) is a current and ongoing survey project of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Furthermore, the GSS is the dataset that will be analyzed for this research paper.

The stated purpose of the GSS is “to gather data on contemporary American society in order to monitor and explain trends and constants in attitudes, behaviors, and attributes... and to make high-quality data easily accessible to scholars, students, policy-makers, and others, with minimal cost and waiting” (Suter). This stated purpose is in line with the purpose of this research investigation and does not appear to have any inherent biases. The GSS has been a regularly undertaken personal interview national survey since 1971. The GSS was an annual survey until 1994 and has been biennial since. Also, in 1984 GSS became a part of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) which allows cross-national data to be compared. According to NORC, “Except for U.S. Census Data, the GSS is the most frequently analyzed source of information in the social sciences” (Suter).

There are additional benefits of the General Social Survey that make it a good match for utilizing in this research study and strengthen it as a social science survey. One strength is the publication of the exact questions of the survey as well as possible answer choices. These are available for viewing to further educate the researcher about potential biases and implications of the questions. Furthermore, additional information is available such as a summary of respondent demographics, and weights are an option for viewing survey results if one demographic group was over-represented in respondents. The GSS data also provides the number of valid cases corresponding to specific questions. Also, as an ongoing project, there is access to the

data and results of every year since the project began. One aspect that limits the utilization of the yearly data for trends analysis is that the questions of the GSS are not all uniform per each year; part of the question base is changed yearly based upon areas of interest and need in the social sciences.

When utilizing the data set gathered by a survey set outside of the author, it is important to understand the affiliations, values, and purpose of the organization that sponsored the survey, which in this case is the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the sponsor of the GSS. NORC is an independent, not-for-profit academic research organization affiliated with the University of Chicago. NORC has been an ongoing research center since 1940. NORC’s mission “is to conduct high-quality social science research in the public interest” (NORC). Furthermore, NORC is involved in projects with many associations and esteemed companies as listed and available on their website. With the wealth of information available on NORC and as the GSS is NORC’s longest running project, it appears that the GSS is a valid and esteemed data set.

Approach to Analysis

The data of the GSS will be analyzed using regression analysis to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between fraternity membership and occupational prestige score. Regression analysis will be completed using the SDA, and statistical significance will be determined by a t-score above the absolute value of 1.95. The independent variable within this analysis will be membership in school fraternity, while the dependent variable will be occupational prestige and organizational position. In addition, to try to account for and remove the effects of the respondent’s family and socioeconomic class, as that has the

potential to be statistically significant as well, the fathers' occupational prestige score will also be set as an independent variable so as to serve as a control variable. This is being done to reduce the potential for omitted variable bias and improve the integrity of the results.

Variables

Fraternal Organization Membership.

The independent variable "Membership in School Fraternity" is defined as "MEMGREEK" in the GSS database. For asking respondents if they are fraternal organization members, the following statement is read: "We would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type." The respondent is then asked a list of organizations. For MEMGREEK, this list consists of "school fraternities or sororities." For MEMGREEK, the potential answers were coded: "Yes" (1), "No" (2), "Don't Know," "No Answer," and "Not Applicable" were all coded as missing variables.

Occupational Prestige. Occupational prestige is the first of two measures of occupational attainment. This variable was measured using the GSS variable "PRESTIGE." The variables incorporating an occupational prestige score were based on the US Bureau of the Census three digit occupation classification for 1970 or 1980 occupations. The three questions asked were the following: "What kind of work do you (did you normally) do? That is, what (is/was) your job called?", "What (do/did) you actually do in that job? Tell me, what (are/were) some your main duties?", and "What kind of place (do/did) you work for?" From this set of questions, the person giving the survey was trained to code the occupation. In coding the occupation, the GSS survey uses prestige scores determined

from a survey by Robert W. Hodge, Paul S. Siegel, and Peter H. Rossi (1963-1965) at NORC (G.S.S. 2009). The 1989 Prestige scores were updated and prepared by Robert W. Hodge, Judith Traes, and Keiko Nakao (G.S.S. 2009). The website address of the entire codebook is available in the Bibliography if further information is desired (G.S.S. 2009).

Organizational Level. Occupational level is measured by the GSS variable "TOTSUP," which measures the total number of people who report to the respondent. This variable was chosen as a proxy of organizational level. The more people who report to an individual at work the higher the likely position held by this person in the organization. Each respondent was asked, "Counting all of these levels, how many people are responsible to you both directly and indirectly?" The interviewer then coded the numeric variable. The range of responses in the GSS varied from 1 to 2,211 people reporting to the respondent.

Father's Occupational Prestige. The respondent's father's prestige score is referred to as "PAPRES80." The father's occupational prestige was coded using the same method as occupational prestige "PRESTIGE." Both prestige scores were asked the aforementioned general occupational questions and then coded from the occupations to the prestige score as shown in Appendix A and explained in the GSS codebook. All of this was done by the trained surveyors. This variable was included as a control variable. The research evidence shows that members of fraternal organizations typically come from higher socio-economic status than non-members. For this reason, controlling for the socio-economic position of parents is critical for this analysis.

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