

Factors Associated with Fraternity/Sorority Perceptions

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As individuals invested in fraternity and sorority work, whether we want to admit it or not, public perceptions about these organizations can take a toll on us. Based on all of the negative media attention fraternities and sororities receive and the many conversations I have had exposing the mixed views of colleagues and friends on fraternity/sorority life, I wanted to find out more. I wondered how the general public feels about members of these fraternal organizations and also how these general feelings impact the fraternal community.

Through simple statistical analysis using a publically available data source, I found those who live in the Northeast, males, and those who “don’t know or refuse to answer” about their political identification are statistically more likely to care about fraternity/sorority involvement than others. The dataset I used (the March 2013 CBS News/60 Minutes/Vanity Fair National Poll) asked a variety of questions through a phone survey ranging from political beliefs to brand preference to a national sample of people over the age of 18. The main variable used in the study asked respondents how they would think of a colleague or friend if they found out they had once been a member of a fraternity or sorority in college. Response options included “immediately think more of them,” “immediately think less of them,” “base your opinion on which fraternity/sorority they attended,” “not care either way,” or “don’t know/ not applicable”. Because of a relatively low sample size ($n = 861$), responses were categorized into either caring or not caring about fraternity/sorority affiliation. By comparing the main variable with other variables, I wanted to see if there were any trends in opinions about those affiliated with fraternities and sororities based on both demographic and non-demographic factors.

Through comparison of the main variable with a geographic region variable, I found that study participants in the Northeast region are more likely to care about fraternity/sorority affiliation of a friend/colleague than those in any other region. Around 22% of participants in the Northeast were likely to care while around 10% were likely to care for all other regions (South, North Central, and West). Another difference I found with significance at the .05 level is the variation between men and women. In this study, I found that males are more likely to care about fraternal involvement of a colleague or friend (16.5%) than females (9.3%). The last variable I found statistically significant differences with was a political identification variable. I found approximately 11% of those who declare a party affiliation care about fraternity/sorority affiliation, while approximately 23% of those who responded they “didn’t know or didn’t care to disclose their party affiliation” cared about fraternity/sorority affiliation. While I found some interesting differences for some variables, I was also surprised at the lack of difference I found for other variables including level of education (college experience or no college experience) and race.

While this project was a start in the area of public opinions about fraternity and sorority membership, there were many flaws in the dataset that hindered my data analysis. Probably the most obvious problem with my data set is the relatively small number of cases included in the study. While 861 cases has potential, after combining all of the “care” categories in the fraternity/sorority question (Q33), two of which were conflicting with one another (immediately

think more of them and immediately think less of them), I still only had 111 respondents who cared about fraternity/sorority affiliation. Another obvious problem with my data is that there was no question asking about the respondent's involvement with fraternity/sorority life. It would have been nice to know if the respondent was a member of fraternal organization, what their level of knowledge was concerning the groups, and what their level of interaction was with fraternal organizations.

Through this project, it was discovered that those who live in the Northeast, males, and those who "don't know or refuse to answer" about their political identification, are more likely to care about fraternity/sorority involvement than others. As with most statistical findings, the reasons behind these results can only be speculated. Because of this, this project has left me with more questions than I had originally started with. What do you think? Why do you think I got the results I did? Are the results positive, or do they show a need for improvement? How do/can we apply these results to our everyday work? Finally, how do these findings affect us on a personal level?

References

Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). (2013). CBS News/60 Minutes/Vanity Fair National Poll, March #1, 2013. Retrieved February 2015, from <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/34995/version/1>.