The Influence of Cognitive Heuristics and Stereotypes About Greek Letter Organizations on Jury Decisions

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ABSTRACT. The current study utilized data from 140 participants ranging in age from 18–35 years old (M = 19.66, SD = 1.84) to test whether a defendant’s affiliation with a Greek letter organization would result in biased jury decisions. Participants read a short case summary about a college aged man arrested for driving under the influence. The defendant in question was described as either being a member of a fraternity, or an affiliation was not mentioned. Participants were then asked a series of questions regarding their perception of the defendant and asked to determine a final verdict. In addition to the defendant’s affiliation, participants’ affiliation with Greek life was also taken into consideration. Results indicated that nonaffiliated participants were less attracted to the defendant (p = .05). Main effects were also found for both participants’ affiliation and the defendant’s affiliation on guilty ratings. Guilty ratings were higher when the defendant was affiliated with Greek life, compared to when the defendant was not affiliated with Greek life (p = .04). Additionally, nonaffiliated participants rated the defendant as more guilty than affiliated participants (p = .03). Gender differences were also found, indicating that men were more lenient in verdict decisions compared to women (p = .002). These results can be used to understand factors that influence jury decisions, including the use of cognitive heuristics and biases within the court system.

When people hear the words fraternity or sorority, what are the first words that come to mind: drinking, partying, hazing? Due to how Greek life (i.e., activities performed by members of a fraternity or sorority) has been portrayed by the media, people might have begun to associate fraternities and sororities with problem behaviors such as binge drinking or hazing pledges. The overall belief about the perception of Greek letter organizations is often negative (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). This negative stereotype about the organizations and those affiliated with the organizations may have harmful implications both on and off campus. These stereotypes may not only contribute to distrust among member and nonmember students (Warber, Taylor, & Makstaller, 2011), but also have the potential to impact decisions made in a court of law.

The Sixth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America declares that every citizen has the right to a fair trial. However, jurors often succumb to implicit biases which can influence their decision-making processes (Colwell, 2005). Understanding the different factors that can lead to these biases is the first step in overcoming them. It is important to investigate these factors in order to ensure that the court system is upholding its duty to ensure fair and unbiased trials. The purpose of the current study was to understand the potential influence that stereotypes about Greek letter organizations have on jury decisions. More specifically, the study sought to determine whether disclosure of a Greek life affiliation of a defendant, accused of driving under the influence, would affect jurors’ perceptions of the defendant.

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Heuristics and Jury Decisions

Heuristics in the Court Room

Every U.S. citizen has the right to a fair trial according to the Constitution. Although unbiased trials cannot be guaranteed, one factor that can hinder this basic right is the use of heuristics by juries. People have the tendency to allow individual preferences, expectations, and experiences to influence the decision making process (Colwell, 2005). Cognitive heuristics are mental shortcuts often used when a person has to make a difficult decision (Saks & Kidd, 1981). Common heuristics used in court situations include the representative heuristic and availability heuristic (Colwell, 2005). Both of the aforementioned mental shortcuts involve making decisions based on faulty beliefs surrounding the probability of an event occurring. In the context of a court room, these faulty mental processes could manifest as jurors believing a prosecutor’s case simply because it fits into common beliefs held by the jury rather than being proven by the actual facts of the case. Consequently, this often results in unfair verdict decisions and evidence jail time or costly fines for the defendant in question.

Heuristics are most often employed when the decision making process seems difficult. Determining a verdict has the potential to be both challenging and stressful, particularly when a case is complex. A study by Cooper, Bennett, and Sukel (1996) found that jurors used mental shortcuts to come to a verdict when a case was difficult to understand. Jurors were exposed to an expert testimony given by either a person with high credentials (i.e., multiple degrees from prestigious universities, currently involved in research, 45 published articles), or a person with moderate credentials (i.e., degrees from small universities, not involved in research, few publications). Despite hearing the same testimony, jurors in the highly credentialed expert condition voted in favor of the plaintiff more often than jurors in the moderately credentialed expert condition. Jurors allowed perceptions of the expert witness to influence how they made their decision.

Another factor that could potentially influence a juror’s perception of a defendant and the accompanying verdict is the perceived attractiveness of the defendant. Early research showed that jurors tend to give more lenient verdict decisions to defendants they find physically attractive (Stephan & Tully, 1977), are less confident in their decision of guilt for defendants that are perceived as attractive (Efran, 1974), and rate defendants found to be socially unattractive as more guilty (Griffitt & Jackson, 1973). More recent research has also suggested that attractiveness leads to lesser sentences (e.g., Gunnell & Ceci, 2010). Results from these studies indicate that the social and physical attraction a juror feels toward a defendant could possibly influence the verdict decision.

A factor that also tends to promote the use of heuristics in the judicial system, is pretrial publicity. Many studies have examined the effect of pretrial publicity on jury decisions and how it may contribute to the use of availability heuristics (Daftary-Kapur, Penrod, O’Connor, & Wallace, 2014; Otto, Penrod, & Dexter, 1994; Platania & Crawford, 2012). Media coverage of certain court cases influences how common people believe those types of cases to be and creates the illusion that uncommon situations occur more frequently than in reality (Folkes, 1988).

Pretrial publicity can also influence how a jury perceives a defendant or plaintiff of a case. Mock jurors who read about negative aspects of a defendant’s character were more likely to rule that the defendant was guilty than jurors who did not read about negative characteristics, despite the information presented during the trials being the same (Otto et al., 1994). Jurors who read the negative information entered the trial with preconceived notions that the defendant was a bad person and allowed that information to bias the final verdict. This is often a side effect of pretrial publicity. Pre-existing beliefs also influence jury decisions (Daftary-Kapur et al., 2014). When participants read the trial proceedings of a case against a European American police officer accused of manslaughter of an African American male, the mock jurors with pre-existing beliefs that police were racists were more likely to vote that the police officer was guilty. The information presented during the trial did little to mitigate the jurors’ pre-existing beliefs. The tendency for people to use availability heuristics and pre-existing beliefs when making jury decisions is a major issue for the judicial system. Groups that have negative stereotypes fight a losing battle in court. Negative media surrounds certain groups of people and maintains the associated stereotypes that make fair trials difficult to obtain. One of those groups is members of Greek letter organizations on college campuses.

Stereotypes About Greek Letter Organizations

Due to information provided by multiple sources including the media (e.g., Neighbors, Animal House), people might have formed stereotypes about members of Greek letter organizations. Common
stereotypes that are associated with Greek letter organizations, fraternities in particular, are that members engage in excessive drinking, haze pledges, are sexually promiscuous, are arrogant, and pay for friends (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). Although research has supported that members of Greek life drink more than nonmembers (Baer, 1994; Eberhardt, Rice, & Smith, 2003), the other stereotypes about members are not empirically supported. The existence of these beliefs is often due to media coverage of extreme cases and can be explained using the availability heuristic described previously. Conversely, it can be argued that positive facts about those affiliated with Greek-life are rarely newsworthy. Another stereotype involving fraternities and sororities is that members are often assumed to be less intelligent than other students (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). People may assume that members’ focus is on the social aspect of college and not the academic aspect. However, members of Greek life have been found to develop more academically and personally during college than nonmembers (Pike, 2003). A study of 650 college campuses across the country found that students affiliated with a Greek letter organization had more interaction with faculty, were involved in more community service projects, participated in more co-curricular activities, and were more engaged in active learning than those not affiliated with a fraternity or sorority (Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002). As these studies show, there are many advantageous aspects to being a member of a fraternity or sorority that most people do not realize.

Although in reality there are many positive aspects of Greek letter organizations, a phenomenon called in-group favoritism could potentially contribute to the negative connotation surrounding fraternities and sororities due to a tendency for people to view those belonging to a different group as outsiders (Aronson & Aronson, 2012). The influence this concept has on how someone views others, can be seen in a study during which participants were randomly assigned to two groups and asked to rate participants in the opposite group (Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, & Ingreman, 1987). Participants rated those who were in the other group more negatively than those in their own group. The same phenomenon has been studied in reference to Greek life (Warber et al., 2011). Students who are not affiliated with Greek life hold beliefs that students affiliated with Greek life engage in more deviant behaviors and are less trustworthy. Wells and Corts (2008) examined reaction times on an implicit bias assessment where participants had to match pictures with the word good or bad. Participants had faster reaction times when the word bad was matched up with pictures relating to fraternities and sororities, indicating that participants had implicit biases toward members of Greek organizations. If a member of a fraternity or sorority was to be put on trial, these biases and stereotypes against Greek letter organizations could have detrimental effects on the final verdict.

Research has demonstrated that implicit biases towards members of Greek letter organizations exist (Wells & Corts, 2008), but the influence of these biases in situations other than personal interactions has not been studied. Previous research has also identified a variety of factors that can influence jury decisions such as race (Lynch & Haney, 2011), perceived similarity (Mitchell & Byrne, 1973), attractiveness (Weiten & Diamond, 1979) and pretrial publicity (Daftary-Kapur et al., 2014). What research has yet to examine is the effect of stereotypes about Greek life organizations on jury decisions. The current study added to research by bridging the gap between these two topics. We examined how jury decisions may be altered based on a defendant disclosing information of affiliation with a Greek organization or not. It was predicted that when the defendant disclosed being a member of a Greek letter organization, participants would judge the defendant as being more guilty and deserving of a more severe punishment. Participants were also expected to rate the affiliated defendant lower on interpersonal attraction. However, when the participant was also a member of a Greek letter organization, it was predicted that the defendant would be judged as less guilty, deserving of a less severe punishment, and higher on interpersonal attraction. These predictions were based on past research on how members of Greek letter organizations are perceived and how heuristics work within the court system.

Method

Participants

The data used in this study were collected from 140 undergraduate students from a private Northeastern University. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 35 years old (M = 19.66, SD = 1.84). There were 39 men, 100 women, and one participant who failed to report gender. The sample was comprised of 38.6% first-year students, 25% sophomores, 29.3% juniors, 6.4% seniors, and one participant (0.7%) who did not report a school-year classification.
Although many of the participants were humanities and social science majors, a variety of other majors were represented as well (see Table 1). Additionally, 37.1% (n = 52) of participants were members of Greek life (e.g., in a fraternity or sorority) or were in the process of becoming a member and 62.9% (n = 88) of participants were not involved in Greek life in any way. Participants were selected using both a convenience sampling of a research participation pool and a convenience sample of university students outside of the participation pool. Participants from the participation pool were awarded credits toward a research participation grade for their psychology classes. However, participants recruited from outside of the pool were not compensated. All participants followed a procedure approved by the participating university’s Institutional Review Board.

**Materials**

**Case summary.** Each participant was given a short case summary that described a fictional situation. The summary described the charge against a male college student accused of driving under the influence. The confrontation between the defendant and the arresting officer was described in addition to personal details about the defendant. The case summary was the manipulated variable in this experiment. For one group, being a member of a fraternity was included in the list of activities and organizations of which the defendant was a part (see Appendix A). In the case summary for the second condition, membership in a fraternity was not mentioned (see Appendix B). Participants were told to judge the defendant based on the details described in the case summary.

**Interpersonal Attraction Scale.** This study utilized a modified version of the Interpersonal Attraction Scale (McCroskey & McCain, 1974) to measure how participants perceived the defendant. Out of the three original subscales, participants completed the Task Attraction and Social Attraction subscales. The Task Attraction subscale included items such as “He is a typical goof-off at work” and “I could not get anything accomplished with him.” The Social Attraction subscale included items such as “We could never establish a personal friendship with each other” and “It would be difficult to meet and talk with him.” The two original subscales were analyzed together to create one interpersonal attraction score. The Cronbach’s α for this revised scale was .86. A total of 10 items, some of which were reversed scored, were on the questionnaire. Participants rated each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly agreed) to 7 (strongly disagreed). To score the questionnaire, all ratings were added up; low scores indicated that participants were less attracted to the defendant, and high scores indicated a higher attraction to the defendant.

**Final verdict.** The questionnaire given to each participant contained two items that comprised the final verdict. One item measured how guilty participants believed the defendant was. The item asked participants how guilty they found the defendant on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not guilty) to 7 (guilty). Each questionnaire also included a question to measure how severe participants believed the defendant’s punishment should be. This question was also rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (minimum punishment) to 7 (maximum punishment).

**Manipulation check.** An activities checklist was given for participants to fill out which acted as the manipulation check for the experiment. The list consisted of seven different activities and organizations of which the defendant could potentially be a member. Participants had to check off all of the activities or organizations that were listed in the case summary. The activity of interest was fraternity/sorority, which provided information on whether participants noticed that the defendant was in a Greek letter organization or not.

**Demographics.** The last piece of information that participants filled out was a demographics form, which included information such as age, sex, major, and year in school. The demographics sheet also asked participants to check off one of two statements. The first statement was that the participant was a member of a Greek letter organization on
Design
The study was a 2 (Affiliation of Participant) x 2 (Affiliation of Defendant) factorial design. The manipulated variable was the Greek life affiliation of the defendant in the court case summary. In the summary, the defendant was either described as being a member of a fraternity along with involvement in other activities, or involvement in Greek life was not mentioned. Participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions. The second variable was the Greek life affiliation of the participants; this was not able to be manipulated. All participants indicated whether they were affiliated with a Greek letter organization or not affiliated. The dependent variables measured in the study were guilty ratings, severity of punishment, and interpersonal attractiveness of the defendant, which were all measured using questionnaire items.

Procedure
After institutional review board approval (#SP1730) was obtained, research sessions consisting of approximately eight participants at a time began. Upon entering the lab, participants were informed to sit in any available seat. Once all participants were present, two copies of the informed consent script were given to each student; one to sign and return to the researcher, and the other to keep. The signed consent form was then filed separately from all other data collected during the study. Participants were then given a brief scenario to read over describing the events leading up to a male college student being arrested for driving under the influence. In the scenario, the defendant was described as either being affiliated with Greek-life on campus or not affiliated with Greek-life on campus. Participants read the court case for 1 minute before the researcher collected it and handed each participant a questionnaire packet, including the modified Interpersonal Attraction Scale, final verdict questions, activities checklist, and demographics form. Upon completion of the packet, the researcher collected the questionnaires and provided all participants with a debriefing form to take home. Participants were told to read the debriefing form silently while the researcher read it out loud. The researcher then answered any questions and thanked participants for taking the time and effort to participate in the study as the participants left the lab. Due to an initial lack of participants affiliated with Greek life, additional participants were recruited from outside of the research participation pool. Participants recruited in this fashion were approached on campus and asked if they were a member of a Greek letter organization or were in the process of becoming a member. The researcher then asked students affiliated with a Greek letter organization if they would be willing to participate in a study. Students who agreed were given the same materials in the same order as all other participants. Informed consent and debriefing forms were also given and read in the same way as all other participants.

Results
Manipulation Check
Because this study aimed to investigate whether the Greek life affiliation of a defendant would influence jury decisions, a manipulation check was needed in order to ensure that participants noticed whether the defendant in the case summary was in a fraternity or not. An activities checklist was utilized as the manipulation check. Out of the total 140 participants, 92% (N = 129) of participants correctly identified the Greek life affiliation of the defendant in the case summary.

Guilty Ratings
The influence of Greek life affiliation on guilty ratings was examined using a factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). It was hypothesized that the affiliation of the defendant would influence guilty ratings. This hypothesis was supported $F(1,136) = 4.20, \ p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The defendant affiliated with Greek life was given higher guilty ratings than the defendant not affiliated with Greek life (see Table 2). It was also hypothesized that participants’ affiliation with Greek life would influence guilty ratings. This was also found to be significant, $F(1,136) = 4.75, \ p = .03$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Participants affiliated with Greek life rated the defendant as less guilty than participants not affiliated with Greek life. The last hypothesis regarding guilty ratings was that, when both a participant and the defendant were affiliated with Greek life, the participant would give lower guilty ratings compared to when a participant was not affiliated with Greek life and the defendant was. However, results did not support this hypothesis, $F(1,136) = 0.44, \ p = .51$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$. There
was no significant interaction between defendant and participant affiliation on guilty ratings.

**Punishment Severity**

The influence of Greek life affiliation on punishment severity was also tested. A factorial ANOVA was used to test this relationship. It was hypothesized that the Greek life affiliation of the defendant would influence the punishment severity recommendations given by participants. Results did not support this hypothesis, $F(1,136) = 0.02, p = .90$, partial $\eta^2 = .0001$. Participants did not recommend a more severe punishment to the defendant affiliated with Greek life compared to the defendant not affiliated with Greek life (see Table 3). Participants’ Greek life affiliation was also hypothesized to influence severity of punishment ratings. This was also found to be not significant, $F(1,136) = 0.49, p = .49$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. Participants in Greek life did not give lower severity recommendations than nonaffiliated participants. The interaction between Greek life affiliation and participant affiliation was also not significant, $F(1,136) = 1.90, p = .17$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. There was no significant difference between Greek life affiliation of participants and of the defendant and punishment severity recommendations.

**Interpersonal Attraction**

The last relationship examined was between participants’ Greek life affiliation, Greek life affiliation of the defendant, and interpersonal attraction. A factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the influence of participants’ Greek life affiliation and the defendant’s Greek life affiliation on interpersonal attraction. It was hypothesized that a main effect would be found for affiliation of the defendant such that participants would be more attracted to the defendant who was not a member of a fraternity compared to the defendant in a fraternity. This hypothesis was not supported, $F(1,136) = 3.53, p = .06$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. There was no difference in attraction score between the defendant affiliated with Greek life and the defendant not affiliated with Greek life (see Table 4). It was also hypothesized that participants in Greek life would be more attracted to the defendant than participants not in Greek life. Results supported this hypothesis, $F(1,136) = 3.98, p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Participants affiliated with Greek life scored higher on interpersonal attraction compared to participants not affiliated with Greek life. An interaction effect was also hypothesized so that attraction would be higher when both a participant and the defendant were affiliated with Greek life compared to when a participant was not affiliated and the defendant was. This hypothesis was not supported, $F(1,136) = 0.04, p = .84$, partial $\eta^2 = .0003$. The interaction between participant affiliation and defendant affiliation did not influence interpersonal attraction.

**Participant Gender**

Although not part of the original hypotheses, an
exploratory analysis was conducted to investigate whether sex influenced any of the verdict factors or interpersonal attraction. A t test was conducted comparing the means given by each sex on guilt, punishment severity, and interpersonal attraction. Significant differences were found between men and women’s ratings of punishment severity, t(137) = 3.17, p = .002 (two-tailed), effect size d = .59, and guilt ratings, t(137) = 2.56, p = .012 (two-tailed), effect size d = .46. Men rated the defendant lower on both suggested punishment severity (M = 3.33, SD = 1.49) and guilt (M = 4.21, SD = 1.84) compared to women’s ratings of punishment severity (M = 4.16, SD = 1.34) and guilt (M = 4.98, SD = 1.50). Overall, men gave a more lenient verdict than women.

**Discussion**

The goal of this study was to investigate potential biasing effects that occur when Greek life affiliation of a defendant is disclosed to members of a jury. The researchers hypothesized that, when a defendant disclosed information regarding an affiliation with a fraternity, the participants acting as mock jurors would give the defendant a higher guilty rating, recommend a more severe punishment, and be less attracted to the defendant compared to when the defendant’s affiliation with Greek letter organizations was not mentioned. Results found that participants gave higher guilty ratings to the defendant who was a member of a fraternity. Additionally, exploratory analyses revealed that men were more lenient toward the defendant, giving lower guilty ratings and lower severity of punishment ratings, compared to women. This finding warrants further research attention because sex differences in perceptions of guilt, as well as punishment recommendations, may have crucial implications in actual court cases.

**Implications**

Although previous research has not attempted to connect stereotypes about Greek letter organizations and their potentially biasing effects on jury decisions, there have been multiple studies on other factors that influence jury decisions. The findings from the current study tie into past research on the use of heuristics when making jury decisions in many ways. Past research has found that a main stereotype held about members of Greek letter organizations is excessive alcohol use (Baer, 1994; Tollini & Wilson, 2010). According to the representative heuristic, jurors are more likely to believe that a defendant committed a crime when that defendant fits into the stereotype surrounding those who typically commit that crime. Due to the belief that members of Greek life drink more frequently than nonmembers, jurors would be more likely to believe that a member of a Greek organization committed a drinking related crime. Findings from the present study supported this idea because participants rated the defendant affiliated with a fraternity higher in guilt compared to the defendant not affiliated with Greek life. The accusation under investigation was whether the defendant was drunk driving or not. Participants were more likely to believe that the defendant in the fraternity was guilty of drunk driving than the defendant not in Greek life, despite the details of the case being the same.

Past research has also found that perceived similarity and attraction toward a defendant influenced jury decisions (Mitchell & Byrne, 1973). The lack of significant interaction effects in the present study goes against past findings that jurors are more lenient toward defendants similar to themselves. Participants affiliated with Greek life did not give different ratings for guilt, attraction, or punishment severity to the defendant affiliated with Greek life compared to the defendant not affiliated with Greek life. However, significant differences were found between men and women regarding guilt and punishment ratings. Men gave lower ratings in both categories compared to women. Similarity could play a role in these results due to the defendant also being a man around the same age as participants. The inconsistent results on similarity could indicate that perceived similarity does not play as big of a role in influencing jury decisions as other factors such as attraction. In the present study, attraction was found to have an influence on guilty ratings. Participants affiliated with Greek life were more attracted to the defendant and also rated the defendant as less guilty compared to participants not affiliated with Greek life.

The current study also strengthened the literature on the biases surrounding Greek life organizations on college campuses. Results indicated that participants gave the defendant who was a member of a fraternity higher guilt ratings. This can be tied into past research that has found that students believe members of Greek letter organizations are more likely to engage in deviant behavior (Warber et al., 2011). These results also support the concept that people have implicit, negative biases toward members of Greek letter organizations (Wells
& Corts, 2008). Participants were more likely to believe that the defendant was guilty of drinking and driving when the defendant was described as being in a fraternity.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Although the results of the current study contributed to the understanding of how heuristics are used in court decisions, there are some limitations that need to be discussed. The current study utilized a relatively small sample size, which might have affected the power and limited the study’s ability to find significance. The study also has limited generalizability to the outside world. Participants were expected to act as mock jurors and react to the situation as if it was a real trial. However, the testing environment did not mimic a true court environment. Testing sessions were conducted in a lab at a university, and participants were not able to discuss their opinions with each other. In reality, trials take place in a courthouse, and jurors are encouraged to discuss the case in order to come to a conclusion. Also, participants might not have taken their decision as seriously as real jurors do because, participants’ verdict decisions in the study had no real impact on the defendant’s life.

Another limitation was the methodology of the study. Due to the hybrid nature of the study, participants’ Greek life affiliation could not be manipulated, and the researcher was not able to ensure an equal and sufficient number of participants in each experimental group. To mediate this restriction, participants outside the initial participant pool had to be recruited.

All participants being from the same midsized university was also a restriction. The view participants held of Greek life may not be the same as those held by students at a school with more prominent Greek life involvement such as large universities in the south. Participants might not have been exposed to as many events that support Greek life stereotypes such as large parties, which would limit their biases toward members of fraternities and sororities. A final limitation of the current study was that it did not ask for additional demographics outside of questions such as age and sex (e.g., race and ethnicity of participants was not obtained).

Despite the limitations just mentioned, the study had many strengths as well. The experimental control exhibited throughout the study was one of its many strengths. All materials presented to participants were exactly the same in all conditions aside from one sentence added to half of the case summaries indicating that the defendant was a member of a fraternity. Additionally, all sessions were conducted in the same lab location and everything was presented in the same order. An already established measure was also used to measure the interpersonal attraction each participant felt toward the defendant, and despite slight modifications to the questionnaire, the measure was found to be reliable. The manipulation was also successful with a majority of participants recognizing whether the defendant they read about was in a Greek organization or not. Another strength of the study was that it studied a new concept not yet covered by past research. All findings added to the understanding of factors that influence the use of heuristics in jury decisions and possible implications of being a member of Greek life.

**Future Directions**

It is important to continue research on this topic to further the understanding of the relationship between a defendant’s affiliation with Greek life and how that information may influence jury decisions. Future studies should attempt to create a more realistic jury setting in order to increase external validity. Also, more information should be given about the defendant and the case itself on which participants can base their decisions. Researchers should consider taping a fake trial consisting of opening statements, testimonies, and closing remarks to make the case seem more realistic and capture participants’ attention.

Future studies should also focus on collecting data from a more diverse sample such as including multiple universities of different sizes, or utilizing a sample of participants who are no longer in college to test whether stereotypes about Greek life change later in life. Additionally, different types of crimes should be studied to investigate whether jurors are more likely to use heuristics for certain crimes. Some crimes to consider for future studies are robbery or financial fraud. Studies examining these criminalities may find different results because there is no Greek life stereotype supporting fraud like there is for drinking and driving.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to discover whether jurors utilized cognitive heuristics when making a jury decision about a defendant who was involved in a Greek letter organization. Although results did not support the idea that jurors based decisions
for punishment severity off of stereotypes and pre-existing biases, the results did support that Greek life affiliation influenced guilty ratings. Participants in Greek life rated the defendant as less guilty than participants who were not affiliated. Additionally, higher guilt ratings were given to the defendant when involvement in a fraternity was mentioned compared to when an affiliation with Greek life was not mentioned. The findings of this study also supported the hypothesis that participants affiliated with Greek life would score higher on interpersonal attraction toward the defendant than participants not in Greek life. Further analyses revealed that men gave lower guilt ratings and more severe punishment ratings in comparison to women. Results indicated that personal characteristics of both a defendant and a juror can influence how a juror will perceive a defendant. This in turn can encourage the use of cognitive heuristics when making a jury decision and result in biased, unfair verdicts.

References


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APPENDIX A

Case Summary With a Nonaffiliated Defendant

The defendant in question is a 22-year-old male college student. On campus he is involved in the television station, student activities board, and the club soccer team. Around 2:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 13, the defendant was pulled over in his car for speeding by Officer Morgan. The speed limit on the road was 45 mph, and the defendant was reportedly going 65 mph. When Officer Morgan approached the car, he asked where the defendant had been coming from. The defendant reported that he was on his way home from hanging out with a small group of friends. After asking a few more questions, Officer Morgan noticed that the defendant was having a difficult time focusing on what was being said to him, and was slightly slurring his words. When asked if he had been drinking earlier that night, the defendant denied that he had any alcohol and claimed he was just tired and wanted to go home. After further questioning, Officer Morgan arrested the defendant for driving under the influence.

APPENDIX B

Case Summary With an Affiliated Defendant

The defendant in question is a 22-year-old male college student. On campus he is an active member of the fraternity Delta Psi Beta, involved in the television station, student activities board, and the club soccer team. Around 2:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 13, the defendant was pulled over in his car for speeding by Officer Morgan. The speed limit on the road was 45 mph, and the defendant was reportedly going 65 mph. When Officer Morgan approached the car, he asked where the defendant had been coming from. The defendant reported that he was on his way home from hanging out with a small group of friends. After asking a few more questions, Officer Morgan noticed that the defendant was having a difficult time focusing on what was being said to him, and was slightly slurring his words. When asked if he had been drinking earlier that night, the defendant denied that he had any alcohol and claimed he was just tired and wanted to go home. After further questioning, Officer Morgan arrested the defendant for driving under the influence.
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Psi Chi’s Network for International Collaborative Exchange has partnered with StudySwap, an online resource that shares research projects seeking collaborators. This program is open to everyone, regardless of whether your college has a Psi Chi chapter. Find a project, or post your own.

Recruit Online Participants for Your Studies.
www.psichi.org/?page=study_links
Psi Chi is dedicated to helping members find participants to their online research studies. Submit a title and a brief description of your online studies to our Post a Study Tool. We regularly encourage our members to participate in all listed studies.

Explore Our Research Measures Database.
www.psichi.org/?page=researchlinksdesc
This database links to various websites featuring research measures, tools, and instruments. You can search for relevant materials by category or keyword. If you know of additional resources that could be added, please contact research.director@psichi.org
Call for Submissions

This spring, consider submitting research to *Psi Chi Journal* that is related to help-seeking behavior. Psi Chi is launching a new 2018 initiative, which will establish a toolkit of resources that encourage people to feel comfortable seeking help concerning a mental illness, bullying, sexual harassment/abuse, tutoring, test taking, etc.

Will you support the [#Help_HelpedMe](https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN23.1.2) Initiative by helping us expand Psi Chi’s collection of help-seeking articles? As always, student and faculty authors are welcome, and submissions will remain open for all other areas of psychological research.

Experience our rigorous, yet supportive and educational, peer-review process for yourself. Our high visibility across the field and dedication to transparent, replicable research practices makes our journal the place to submit your research today!

Learn more about the Help_HelpedMe Initiative at [https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN23.1.2](https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN23.1.2)

“What if we lived in a world where seeking help was considered as noble as offering help? . . . Let’s work together toward a future where seeking help is universally perceived as a psychological strength.”

R. Eric Landrum, PhD
Psi Chi President

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