

## Social Impacts of Greek Life

Tina Murtagh, former sorority president at the University of Nevada, defines Greek life as “groups of students who belong to and participate in certain on-campus organizations. These organizations are often split into gender subsets with fraternities for men and sororities for women” (Murtagh 2023). Such organizations can impact people’s social lives and other aspects of their lives or the overall social and cultural scene at universities across the United States. This is because nearly all colleges have fraternities and sororities to appeal to all different types of students. Overall, Greek life at college can impact peer drinking, cultures due to different houses founded for specific demographics, and one’s social life and abilities.

Hanneke A. Teunissen et al., Member of the Department of Developmental Psychopathology at Radboud University Nijmegen, defines peer drinking: “adolescents’ perceptions of the quantity and frequency of peers’ drinking behavior, and approval of drinking” (Teunissen et al. 2014). There are many causes attributed to this drinking. Lori A.J. Scott-Sheldon et al., from the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior member at the Alpert School of Medicine of Brown University, write about the enabling environment at fraternities. They state, “Some fraternities allow members to consume large quantities of alcohol under relatively unsupervised conditions” (Scott-Sheldon et al. 2016). This contributes to social drinking as the lack of supervision makes it easier for members to drink. The authors further state that students who drink heavily will search for friends with similar habits and increase the amount they drink to receive group approval. This is due to the new members believing that the norms of being a member include heavy drinking (Scott-Sheldon et al. 2016). These drinking norms at Greek life organizations cause unintentional but dangerous social drinking, which can lead to negative impacts later on in life for members. The Gateway Foundation, an organization

established for those affected by substance abuse disorder, states, “College students who have lived in a sorority or fraternity are more likely to continue binge drinking and marijuana use through early midlife. By age 35, close to half of fraternity members living in college housing facilities had symptoms of an alcohol use disorder” (“Bingeing on Greek Life: Substance Abuse among Sororities & Fraternities” 2020). Furthermore, Megan Hull, specialist in recovery for people who have suffered from substance abuse, states that 1,400 members of Greek Life organizations die yearly due to their decisions to binge drink with friends (Hull 2024). As demonstrated, decisions to drink heavily by members of Greek life houses are highly impacted by peers and social norms. For some, these decisions can cost them their lives.

Emma Brownstein, a Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication student at Arizona State University, writes, “Greek life offers a sense of community that many students crave, but some do not feel as represented as they should” (Brownstein 2024). However, this has both positive and negative impacts on the overall community. Mia Everding and Ally Sargus, who both have degrees in journalism from the University of Nebraska, state, “The demographics for the Greek community [at the University of Nebraska] during the 2017-18 school year include 3,777 white members, 206 Hispanic members, 73 Asian or Pacific Islander members and 45 African-American members” (Everding and Sargus 2025). As depicted here, there is a lack of diversity in Greek life due to the ratio of White members to others. Because of this, new houses have been founded for these cultural groups, leading to separation among houses. Tina Murtagh, former sorority president at the University of Nevada, states that new cultural fraternities, such as African-American or Jewish, were founded for those excluded from typical houses (Murtagh 2023). As depicted here, the high number of Caucasian students compared to other demographics separates groups. According to Mitchell Chang and Lisa

DeAngelo, professors at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Pittsburgh, this lack of diversity is detrimental to the racial climate on campus (Chang and DeAngelo 2002). In contrast, Grace McCabe, writer for Times Higher Education Student, argues that the houses founded specifically for African American people benefit the community. She states, “They are a huge part of the campus culture at these institutions and are focused on giving back to the community and developing cultural pride while tackling issues that are critical to the black community” (McCabe 2022). Such houses emphasize their culture and race, which benefits communities as a whole. The lack of diversity amongst Greek Life houses at colleges around the United States may negatively impact inclusion at these houses. However, it allows specific communities to come together for their benefit.

Being a member of a Greek community tremendously impacts one’s social life and social skills. Brian Robben, University of Miami graduate who saw how Greek life impacted his peers, writes about the social skills one gains from joining a fraternity or sorority. He states, “[One] can have more opportunities to better understand different types of people, step out of your comfort zone, find common ground with people who seem different from you, speak up when necessary, and navigate social events” (Robben 2025). Such skills can help people in several different public situations once they finish college, demonstrating the positive impact of joining a fraternity. Furthermore, Lee Shulman Bierer, former writer for the Chicago Tribune and current writer for College Admission Strategies, writes about the social benefits of Greek life. She states it provides “a built-in set of activities and a social circle” (Shulman-Bierer 2023). Students Similarly, Abby Faeth, a student at Villanova University and editor of the Villanovan Magazine, interviewed sorority member Talia Calabrese about the impact being in a sorority has had on her. Calabrese states, “[It has] been so rewarding because it has introduced me to so many new

people that I wouldn't have met otherwise" (Faeth 2022). These two quotes demonstrate how joining a Greek life house contributes to one gaining new peers and expanding their social circle, positively impacting students due to these social benefits. On the other hand, Alan Reifman, Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences at Texas Tech University, discusses a quote from author Alexandra Robbins about the negative impacts. He writes about sororities and states that although some girls may increase their confidence and self-esteem, another girl's confidence is destroyed (Reifman 2024). As seen, Greek life may benefit some socially at the cost of others' self-worth. This trade also demonstrates the impact of Greek social life on mental health. Anne Gold, who has a Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Loyola, Chicago, states that low self-esteem can cause various mental health conditions like depression and anxiety (Gold 2016). This further enhances the negative impacts of Greek life on one's overall well-being. To close, Greek life may teach people new social skills and introduce them to new peers, but it can also negatively affect others as they may lose confidence due to the, sometimes, harsh environment at such houses.

All in all, Greek life impacts one's drinking habits due to peers and social norms, culture due to a lack of diversity, and social skills and peers due to their fraternity brothers or sorority sisters. Many people have suffered both physically and mentally from their decisions to join Greek fraternities and sororities. However, many have also benefited socially from these choices. An article published by the University of New Mexico states that there are about 750,000 participants in Greek life ("Fun Stats: Fraternity & Sorority Life | the University of New Mexico" 2025). Due to this high number, it is imperative to ensure that participants are set up for a positive Greek life experience. This can ensure that Greek life organizations worldwide continue to thrive and develop, which benefits not only the community but also the lives of

members after college. To close, the social aspect of Greek life has a tremendous impact on people's lives and futures after college.

## Works Cited

- “Bingeing on Greek Life: Substance Abuse among Sororities & Fraternities.” *Gateway Foundation*, 6 Jan. 2020,  
[www.gatewayfoundation.org/blog/underage-drinking-in-college/](http://www.gatewayfoundation.org/blog/underage-drinking-in-college/). Accessed 7 Jan. 2025.
- Brownstein, Emma. “Students at ASU Support More Diversity Initiatives in Greek Life.” *The State Press*, 29 Mar. 2024,  
[www.statepress.com/article/2024/03/community-diversity-initiatives-greeklife#](http://www.statepress.com/article/2024/03/community-diversity-initiatives-greeklife#).  
Accessed 25 Jan. 2025.
- Chang, Mitchell J, and Linda DeAngelo. “Going Greek: The Effects of Racial Composition on White Students’ Participation Patterns.” *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1 Jan. 2002,  
[www.researchgate.net/publication/234679371\\_Going\\_Greek\\_The\\_Effects\\_of\\_Racial\\_Composition\\_on\\_White\\_Students](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/234679371_Going_Greek_The_Effects_of_Racial_Composition_on_White_Students). Accessed 25 Jan. 2025.
- Everding, Mia, and Ally Sargus. “Greek Life and Racial Inclusivity.” *The Daily Nebraskan*,  
[projects.dailynebraskan.com/greek-life/diversity/](http://projects.dailynebraskan.com/greek-life/diversity/). Accessed 8 Jan. 2025.
- Faeth, Abby. “Opinion: Is Joining Greek Life Worth It?” *The Villanovan*, 13 Apr. 2022,  
[villanovan.com/20574/opinion/opinion-is-joining-greek-life-worth-it/](http://villanovan.com/20574/opinion/opinion-is-joining-greek-life-worth-it/). Accessed 9 Jan. 2025.
- “Fun Stats: Fraternity & Sorority Life | the University of New Mexico.” *Greeks.unm.edu*,  
[greeks.unm.edu/join-a-fraternity-or-sorority/parents/fun-stats.html](http://greeks.unm.edu/join-a-fraternity-or-sorority/parents/fun-stats.html). Accessed 25 Jan. 2025.

- Gold, Anne. "Why Self-Esteem Is Important for Mental Health." *NAMI*, 12 July 2016, [www.nami.org/family-member-caregivers/why-self-esteem-is-important-for-mental-health/](http://www.nami.org/family-member-caregivers/why-self-esteem-is-important-for-mental-health/). Accessed 25 Jan. 2025.
- Hull, Megan. "Substance Abuse and Greek Life." *The Recovery Village Drug and Alcohol Rehab*, 30 Aug. 2024, [www.therecoveryvillage.com/resources/college-students/greek-life/](http://www.therecoveryvillage.com/resources/college-students/greek-life/). Accessed 8 Jan. 2025.
- McCabe, Grace. "Studying in the US: Fraternities and Sororities Explained." *Student*, 16 June 2022, [www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/studying-us-fraternities-and-sororities-explained](http://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/studying-us-fraternities-and-sororities-explained). Accessed 8 Jan. 2025.
- Murtagh, Tina. "The Pros and Cons of Greek Life in College | Honor Society - Official Honor Society® Website." *Www.honorsociety.org*, 4 Apr. 2023, [www.honorsociety.org/articles/pros-and-cons-greek-life-college](http://www.honorsociety.org/articles/pros-and-cons-greek-life-college). Accessed 7 Jan. 2025.
- Reifman, Alan. "How Fraternities and Sororities Impact Students (or Do They?)." *Psychology Today*, 2024, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/on-the-campus/201109/how-fraternities-and-sororities-impact-students-or-do-they](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/on-the-campus/201109/how-fraternities-and-sororities-impact-students-or-do-they). Accessed 9 Jan. 2025.
- Scott-Sheldon, Lori A. J., et al. "Alcohol Interventions for Greek Letter Organizations: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, 1987 to 2014." *Health Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 7, July 2016, pp. 670–684, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5112154/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5112154/), <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000357>. Accessed 7 Jan. 2025.

Shulman Bierer, Lee. “Is There More to a Happy College Social Life than Greek Life?”

*Bierercollegeconsulting.com*, 16 Mar. 2023,

[bierercollegeconsulting.com/is-there-more-to-social-life-than-greek-life/](https://bierercollegeconsulting.com/is-there-more-to-social-life-than-greek-life/). Accessed 9

Jan. 2025.

Teunissen, Hanneke A., et al. “An Experimental Study on the Effects of Peer Drinking Norms on

Adolescents’ Drinker Prototypes.” *Addictive Behaviors*, vol. 39, no. 1, Jan. 2014, pp.

85–93, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4624402/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4624402/),

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2013.08.034>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2025.

