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PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES OF PEER ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG COLLEGE MEN

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Concepts of student peer accountability and intervention have largely focused on high-risk behaviors (i.e., substance use, sexual misconduct, hazing, etc.) or the institutional practices of conduct investigation. This study extends student involvement literature to explore how undergraduate men understand and engage in peer accountability behaviors. Further, this study examines the role involvement experiences play in how undergraduate men learn and practice peer accountability through a comparison of social fraternity members and unaffiliated students. To do so, a multi-institutional survey was conducted to gather insights from undergraduate students and draw comparisons through their involvement experiences.

Introduction

College serves as a pivotal stage for students' academic and professional development. The postsecondary setting also provides an environment to create and sustain interpersonal relationship skills with peers. While academic pursuits often are a priority focus, there are several ways campus involvement opportunities positively contribute to a student's developmental experience. Astin's seminal theory suggests that the level of student involvement in activities contributes to the level of developmental growth a student might experience while in college (1984). Therefore, the more time and energy devoted to an activity, the greater levels of developmental growth a student is likely to experience. Engagement in campus activities beyond the classroom creates opportunities for students to grow in several developmental dimensions beyond their academic and intellectual pursuits associated with the formal classroom environment.

One area of potential growth is moral development, which Kohlberg (1984) positions as the process by which individuals develop a conception of what is right and wrong and their reasoning for these determinations. Within the developmental phase of college, Kohlberg suggests that those in their adolescence and young adulthood are in the second stage of moral development, which focuses on fostering interpersonal relationships and maintaining social order. Pascarella and Terranzini (1991) further this theory to suggest that social, intellectual, and cultural experiences in college facilitate higher stage thinking environments necessary to progress through cognitive stages to develop moral and ethical decision-making. This perspective positions campus involvement as a means for social, intellectual, and cultural experiences that serve as environments to build interpersonal relationships and develop intellectual decision-making.

One involvement path deeply focused on the development of social connections is membership within a fraternal organization. Created with the purpose of bringing together individuals of similar values and ideals, fraternal organizations have existed as distinct spaces for members to gather, interact, and develop alongside one another. Pike and Wiese's (2024) study on the impacts of fraternity and sorority involvement found that members of fraternal organizations are more engaged in the college experience, more satisfied with their college experience, and more likely to experience learning gains compared to unaffiliated students. Fraternity membership is a campus activity that can serve as an opportunity for student development through peer interactions.

Beyond creating relationships with peers and expanding one's social network, college allows students to explore and practice critical interpersonal skills, including the ability to engage in accountability-oriented behaviors and discussions. Kohlberg's (1984) and Pascarella and Terranzini's (1991) theories on moral development suggest the quantity, frequency, and depth of the social experiences students have in college present opportunities to learn how to apply moral development principles to practice accountability. Further, engaging in socially-responsible leadership is positively influenced by participation in group-based campus activities, such as clubs and organizations (Dugan & Komives, 2010). However, ethical and moral practices, such as peer accountability and intervention, are not automatically applied. A study of first-year undergraduate students related to incidents with risk of sexual violence (Yule & Grych, 2017) found the most cited barrier to engaging in intervention behaviors included not believing it was their responsibility to do so. Diffusion of responsibility was found to be more prominent among first-year undergraduate men than their women counterparts (Yule & Grych, 2017).

Much of the research on intervention and accountability is situated around sexual violence prevention or academic accountability, leaving a gap in understanding of how undergraduate students learn and practice accountability and intervention beyond instances of sexual violence prevention or academic accountability. This also creates a narrow focus of how students might engage in accountability behaviors in proactive and productive manners to more robustly support the health, safety, and growth of their peers.

While much of the existing research and literature focuses on student conduct and institutional accountability provisions, this study investigates the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of undergraduate men related to peer accountability. This study aims to:
1. Gain greater awareness of how undergraduate men understand peer accountability;
2. Identify the ways in which undergraduate men engage in behaviors associated with peer accountability;
3. Develop insight into how undergraduate men develop competence and motivation to engage in behaviors related to peer accountability;
4. Draw comparisons between the peer accountability experiences and behaviors of undergraduate men involved in fraternal organizations and their unaffiliated peers.
To achieve this aim, this study will answer the following research questions:
- What are the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of undergraduate men related to peer accountability?
- How do undergraduate men understand and engage in behaviors related to peer-to-peer accountability?
- What differences exist, if any, in the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate men who are members of fraternities and their peers who are not affiliated with a fraternal organization?

Methodology

This study employed an electronic survey methodology with a target audience of current undergraduate men studying at institutions of higher education in the United States in the Fall 2022 semester. The survey included 21 questions, of which nine questions focused on the characteristics and background of the respondent. The remaining questions focused on students' perspectives and experiences related to peer accountability and intervention. Five institutions of higher education in the United States participated in this study and met the following criteria:
- A fraternity/sorority community with strong engagement, which considered 11% or more of the undergraduate population involved in a fraternity or sorority organization;
- Fraternity residential facilities available;
- Diverse institutional geographical representation; and,
- A medium or larger undergraduate student population (i.e., larger than 5,000 students) based on the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (2023).

To protect the privacy of the participating institutions and undergraduate students, this study will refer to the institutions with numerical pseudonyms. Institutions 1, 3, 4, and 5 are public institutions. Institution 2 is a private institution. Institutions 1, 3, and 4 have large undergraduate student populations, classified as greater

than 20,000. Institution 2 is a small institution with fewer than 5,000 undergraduate students and Institution 5 is a medium-sized institution with roughly 14,000 undergraduate students. Institutions 1, 2, 4, and 5 are situated in the Southeast region of the United States and Institution 3 is located in the Southwest region.

Participants in this study were recruited through collaboration with campus professionals at the participating institutions. Campus professionals provided randomly selected samples of students who met the following criteria:

- Identified their gender as a man; and,
- Current undergraduate enrollment status with an academic year rank of Sophomore/Second-year, Junior/Third-year, or Senior/Fourth-year or Fifth-year.

Participating institutions provided random samples that included roughly an equal number of undergraduate men currently involved in a social fraternity and undergraduate men who did not hold current membership with a fraternity. Samples provided by participating institutions did not specify to which organization or council fraternity members belonged but was solely inclusive of men who are members of social fraternities.

Students were engaged via email to encourage participation in the study. Invitation and reminder messages were sent to contact lists of undergraduate men either by a campus administrator using an anonymous link or by a third-party organizational development firm through an electronic survey platform. Data was collected on a rolling basis throughout the Fall 2022 semester concluding prior to the Thanksgiving holiday. Invitation and reminder messages were sent based on guidance from campus professionals on appropriate engagement points due to campus programming, events, or academic breaks that would potentially impact response rates.

In total, 524 current undergraduate men responded to the survey. 203 students (38%) indicated current membership with a social fraternity, with 307 indicating they had never sought membership and an additional 14 who were former members. Those indicating former membership were included in the non-member population for analysis, which equated to 62% of respondents. Table 1 provides the detailed demographics, characteristics, and backgrounds of the study's respondents.

Table 1
Respondent Demographics

	Fraternity Members (n=203)	Unaffiliated Men (n=321)
	%	%
Academic Year		
First-Year	8	28
Sophomore	21	25
Junior	32	27
Senior or older	38	20
Racial/Ethnic Identity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	3
Hispanic or Latino	9	6
Asian	2	3
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0
Middle Eastern or North African	0	2
White (non-Hispanic)	82	75
Black (non-Hispanic)	3	8
Another race or ethnicity	0	1
Prefer not to respond	1	3
Residence Location		
On-Campus	44	55
Off-Campus	56	45

Type of Residence		
House, apartment, condo, etc.	63	51
Residence hall	14	47
Fraternity facility	22	-
Another residence type	1	2
Living Situation		
With roommate(s)	91	75
With parent(s)/guardian(s)	3	9
With spouse/partner	1	6
Alone	4	8
Other	1	1

There are noteworthy distinctions in the background characteristics of participants. First, fraternity-affiliated students reported being further in their academic career with 70% in their junior/third-year or senior/fourth-year of enrollment compared to unaffiliated participants in which only 47% indicated in their junior/third-year or senior/fourth-year of enrollment. The fraternity members in this study had a longer tenure in college, in which they have likely had more opportunity to interact with peers. Additionally, fraternity members were also more likely to report living off campus (56%) and with a roommate (91%) compared to unaffiliated men who were more likely to be living on campus (55%) and had greater diversity in their situation of either living alone, with their family, or with a partner/spouse.

Among fraternity members, most reported being members of their organization for at least one year with the majority (55%) being members of their chapters for at least two years. The remaining 45% of fraternity members indicated being their first semester or first year of membership.

Campus involvement was examined due to the opportunities that exist for peer interactions within involvement activities (Table 2).

Table 2
Campus Involvement, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=183)	Unaffiliated Men (n=285)
	%	%
Club or organization related to major or minor	56	44
Intramural or club sports	80	34
Religious or interfaith group	32	19
Residence life or housing	14	15
Intercollegiate athletics	21	13
Professional fraternity	51	5
Political or social action groups	17	11

Membership with a club or organization related to a major or minor and participation in intramural or club sports were the most common forms of involvement. A greater percentage of fraternity-affiliated respondents report being involved in other organizations and activities on campus. Intramural or club sport participation was much higher among fraternity members (80%) compared to unaffiliated students (34%) as was participation in a professional fraternity (51% of fraternity members vs. 5% of unaffiliated students). Participating in a club or organization associated with an academic program was the most cited form of involvement among unaffiliated men (44%), but there was still a larger portion of fraternity members who indicated being involved in academically associated clubs and organizations (56%).

Measures
Background Information of the Respondent
To understand respondent characteristics, this study included categorical variables related to race/ethnicity, fraternity membership, campus involvement, location of residence while enrolled in school, residence type, and living situation. Academic year, age, and tenure in fraternity membership were constructed as ordinal variables.

Understanding and Perspective of Peer Accountability
Definitions for the concepts of accountability (i.e., "the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable" or "acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions") and intervention (i.e., "the act or fact of taking action about something in order to have an effect on its outcome") were provided within the survey to ensure participants had foundational knowledge of these two concepts and the differences between the two. To measure understanding and perspective on peer accountability, respondents were provided with a 7-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement with two statements:
- I know how to hold my friend(s)/peer(s) accountable.

- Practicing accountability with my friend(s)/peer(s) sometimes involves intervention.

The scale used to measure agreement ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" with a neutral middle point of "Neither agree or disagree." Responses of "Strongly disagree" were labeled as one and "Strongly agree" were labeled as seven. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure understanding and perspective of peer accountability was α = .73.

Comfort and Confidence in Engaging in Peer Accountability

To examine the level of comfort and confidence that undergraduate men hold related to providing accountability and intervening with friends and peers, participants provided a rating for a variety of topics using a scale from zero through ten. A rating of ten indicated the highest self-rating of "Very comfortable" or "Very confident." The scale also presented a middle point at five with help text indicating this rating would communicate being "Somewhat comfortable" or "Somewhat confident." Help text was also provided for a rating of zero, which would communicate the respondent is "Not at all comfortable" or "Not at all confident" in holding their peers accountable in the given area. A higher rating on the 10-point scale indicates a greater sense of comfort or confidence in engaging in peer accountability behaviors. Respondents used this rating scale to indicate their level of comfort and confidence in holding their peers accountable in the following areas:

- Academics
- Alcohol or substance use
- Dating or romantic relationships
- Sexual relationships
- Professional/career
- Personal goals
- Hazing

Inclusion of the topics of academics, professional/career, and personal goals is intended to provide a more robust depiction of the settings that students may interact with their peers to provide accountability or intervene. This intended to acknowledge areas outside of substance use or other risky scenarios that benefit from peer accountability and allow for students to practice these skills beyond high-risk or unsafe settings. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure Comfort Level was α = .78 and was α = .86 measuring Confidence Level.

Prior Experiences with Peer Accountability

This study also investigated how students engaged in peer accountability and intervention behaviors, including their past experiences providing accountability to peers. To understand their history of accountability behaviors, respondents were asked to what extent they had engaged in a variety of behaviors while in college. Participants were able to indicate their experiences using a scale with options such as "I have not engaged in this activity," "I have to some extent," or "I have engaged in this activity." This intended to frame accountability as an everyday behavior beyond formal conduct environments or education/training. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure Confidence Level was α = .91.

Participants were asked about the specific actions and behaviors they have taken to provide accountability or engage in intervention. These findings are reported as a categorical variable sharing the percentage of respondents who had engaged in various accountability/intervention

related actions.

Training and Awareness of Accountability Policies
Training was measured by whether a respondent indicated they had received or participated in a prior educational experience related to peer accountability or intervention (i.e., yes or no). Those who indicated participation in prior training were asked to specify all of the settings or organizations they previously received training related to accountability. These findings are reported as a binary variable sharing the percentage of respondents who had engaged in previous training related to accountability in various settings or environments.

Motivations and Barriers for Accountability
This study explored factors that serve as motivation as well as barriers or challenges to intervening. Barriers or challenges were measured using a 4-point scale in which respondents indicated if various perceived outcomes would serve as a barrier to engaging in peer accountability or intervening in a situation. This 4-point scale included responses such as "Not at all a barrier/challenge," "Somewhat of a barrier/challenge," "Moderate barrier/challenge," or "Extreme barrier/challenge." The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure barriers/challenges was α = .88.

Participants were asked to rate various forms of motivation as to why they would engage in peer accountability or intervention activities on a 3-point scale. These scale options included "Does not motivate me," "Somewhat motivates me," and "Greatly motivates me." The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale used to measure motivation was α = .87.

Perspectives of Belongingness and Community
The concepts of belongingness and commitment to a community on campus were measured by asking participants to select answers that best describe their agreement with five statements. These statements focused on feeling of belongingness on campus, feeling valued as a member of the campus community, and feeling responsible to support the health and safety, personal development, and professional development of their friends/peers. The 7-point Likert scale used to measure agreement mirrored that which was previously used to measure understanding of accountability concepts. The Cronbach's Alpha for this set of variables was α = .91.

Analysis
Demographic variables were analyzed using descriptive methods to determine frequency. Independent t-tests were used to analyze reported means to draw comparisons between fraternity members and unaffiliated men. Cross-tabulation analysis was used to determine differences between fraternity affiliated men and unaffiliated men related to categorical variables. A significance level of 95% ($p>.05$) was utilized to conduct analyses.

Results

Understanding of Accountability and Intervention

On average, the undergraduate men in this study reported agreement that they know how to hold their friends/peers accountable (M=5.77, SD=1.37). They also reported agreeing with the statement that practicing peer accountability sometimes involves intervention (M=5.70, SD=1.26).

of these independent t-tests conducted on both items are outlined in Table 3. Fraternity members report a mean higher level of agreement in their belief that they know how to hold their friends/peers accountable compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men. Additionally, fraternity members report a higher level of agreement in the belief that practicing accountability with friends/peers sometimes involves intervention compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men.

Table 3
Perceived Understanding of Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity members			Unaffiliated men					
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*df*	*t*
I know how to hold my friend(s)/peer(s) accountable.*	181	5.97	1.18	279	5.65	1.90	0.0012	457	2.5483
Practicing accountability with friend(s)/peer(s) sometimes involves intervention.*	181	5.88	1.19	279	5.59	1.70	0.022	457	2.2977

*Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.

Comfort and Confidence in Engaging in Peer Accountability
Comfort Levels

Related to their level of comfort in engaging in peer accountability, undergraduate men reported being most comfortable holding their friends/peers accountable regarding their personal goals (M=7.29, SD=2.5) followed by academics (M=7.08, SD=2.22) and alcohol or substance use (M=7.00, SD=2.67). They reported lower aggregate mean comfort levels for providing accountability related to hazing (M=6.84, SD=3.49), professional/career (M=6.72, SD=2.55), and dating or romantic relationships (M=6.27, SD=2.66), but feel the least comfortable providing accountability related to sexual relationships (M=5.70, SD=3.02).

When factoring the role of fraternity membership, statistically significant differences were found in the mean comfort levels between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men (Table 4).

Table 4
T-test Analysis for Reported Mean Comfort Level in Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	M	SD	M	SD	p	df	t
Academics*	7.54	2.00	6.77	2.30	0.0005	433	3.5351
Alcohol or Substance Use	7.24	2.57	6.83	2,72	0.117	433	1.5671
Dating/romantic relationships	6.49	2.36	6.12	2.82	0.156	433	1.4209
Sexual relationships*	6.05	2.71	5.46	3.18	0.046	433	1.9979
Professional/career*	7.06	2.39	6.50	2.63	0.025	433	2.2445
Personal goals*	7.65	2.15	7.06	2.67	0.015	433	2.421
Hazing*	7.84	3.15	6.19	3.55	0.0001	433	4.9394

Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.

The following statistically significant differences between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men were observed:
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to academics.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to sexual relationships.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to professional/career-related topics.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to personal goals.
- Fraternity members reported a higher mean in their comfort level in providing accountability to their peers related to hazing.

Confidence Levels
As an aggregate group, undergraduate men reported confidence levels of holding their peers accountable to that of their comfort levels. Undergraduate men report being most comfortable in holding their peers accountable related to academics (M=7.14, SD=2.35), personal goals (M=7.13, SD=2.50), and alcohol and substance use (M=6.88, SD=2.70). They report lower confidence in holding their peers accountable related to hazing (M=6.70, SD=3.40), professional/career (M=6.68, SD=2.57), and dating or romantic relationships (M=6.35, SD=2.79). Similar to their comfort levels, undergraduate men feel least confident in their ability to hold their peers accountable related to sexual relationships (M=5.78, SD=3.07).

Through examining respondents based on their affiliation with a fraternity, independent t-tests indicated statistically significant differences in means confidence levels of undergraduate men to provide accountability in all areas studied (Table 5). Fraternity members reported higher levels of confidence in holding their peers accountable related to academics, personal goals, alcohol and substance use, hazing, professional/career, dating or romantic relationships, and sexual relationships compared to their unaffiliated peers.

Table 5

T-test Analysis for Reported Mean Confidence Level in Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Members (n=170)		Non-Members (n=265)				
	M	SD	M	SD	*p*	df	t
Academics*	7.60	2.13	6.85	2.67	0.015	433	3.2843
Alcohol or Substance Use*	7.42	2.42	6.52	3.55	0.0001	433	3.4373
Dating/romantic relationships*	6.73	2.53	6.11	2.44	0.001	433	2.2743
Sexual relationships*	6.34	2.82	5.42	2.81	0.0006	433	3.0816
Professional/career*	7.11	2.36	6.40	2.92	0.023	433	2.8367
Personal goals*	7.59	2.15	6.83	3.17	0.002	433	2.3727
Hazing*	7.90	3.01	5.92	2.66	0.004	433	6.1814

Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.

Prior Experiences & Methods Used in Peer Accountability Behaviors
Prior Experiences with Peer Accountability

As an aggregate group, nearly half (44%) of the undergraduate men reported providing accountability to a friend/peer related to academics. Further, roughly one in three undergraduate men have intervened when a friend/peer was behaving unsafely (39%) or provided accountability related to health and safety (37%), professional goals (33%), alcohol or substance use (33%), and dating or romantic relationships (32%). Undergraduate men reported lower rates of prior engagement in accountability behaviors related to a friend/peer engaging in hazing (18%), when a friend/peer was violating a campus policy (18%), a friend breaking the law (24%), and a friend/peer's sexual relationships (25%). These findings align with those related to the comfort and confidence levels reported by undergraduate men, in which they feel most comfortable and

confident to engage in peer accountability related to academics, alcohol and substance use, and personal goals.

A greater portion of fraternity members indicate having engaged in peer accountability-related behaviors at some point while in college across all categories included in the study (Table 6).

Table 6
Previous Engagement in Accountability Behaviors, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=164)	Unaffiliated Men (n=257)
	%	%
A friend/peer was behaving in an unsafe manner.	45	35
A friend/peer was violating a campus policy.	26	13
A friend/peer was breaking a law.	30	20
A friend/peer was engaging in hazing behaviors.	28	11
A friend/peer was using or misusing alcohol or other substances.	38	28
Related to a friend/peer's health and safety.	43	34
Related to a friend/peer's use of alcohol or other substances.	40	28
Related to a friend/peer's professional goals.	40	29
Related to a friend/peer's academics.	56	37
Related to a friend/peer's dating or romantic relationships.	37	29
Related to a friend/peer's to sexual relationships.	29	22

Cross-tabulation analysis using chi-square tests garnered significant differences in the reported engagement in peer accountability behaviors between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men. A statistically significantly greater portion of fraternity members reported having engaged in peer accountability compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men in the following areas:
- A friend/peer was behaving in an unsafe manner, X^2 (2, N=422)=15.64, p<.001.
- A friend/peer was violating campus policy, X^2 (2, N=422)=26.27, p.001.
- A friend/peer was breaking the law, X^2 (2, N=422)=17.16, p<.001
- A friend/peer was engaging in hazing behaviors, X^2 (2, N=422)=26.69, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's health and safety, X^2 (2, N=422)=16.11, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's use of alcohol or other substances, X^2 (2, N=422)=19.35, p<.001.

- Related to a friend/peer's professional goals, X^2 (2, N=422)=14.62, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's academics, X^2 (2, N=422)=24.68, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's dating or romantic relationships, X^2 (2, N=422)=14.39, p<.001.
- Related to a friend/peer's sexual relationships, X^2 (2, N=422)=19.75, p<.001.

Accountability/Intervention Methods
Among those who reported prior experiences of engaging in peer accountability, there are some common methods that undergraduate men employ to engage in to do so. Having a one-on-one, in-person conversation is the top-rated method used by undergraduate men with 93% of those with prior experience in providing accountability having used this method. Next, undergraduate men gravitate towards sending an electronic message (i.e., text, social media, email, etc.) with 79% of respondents having used this method. The third most common method of providing accountability includes engaging the help of another friend/peer to have a conversation with the friend/peer in need of accountability. This method has been used by 63% of respondents who have provided accountability to a friend/peer.

In comparing the experiences of fraternity members and their unaffiliated peers, significant differences were not observed. This indicates that fraternity members and their peers go about practicing peer accountability by using similar methods or behaviors.

Accountability Training Experiences
Forty percent of respondents indicated prior participation in training or educational experiences related to providing accountability to friends or peers. When factoring in fraternity membership, there is a notable difference in the portion of students who have participated in prior training related accountability (Table 7).

Table 7
Past Training Experience Related to Peer Accountability or Intervention, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=162)	Unaffiliated Men (n=252)
	%	%
Engaged in prior training or education	57	29
Had not engaged in prior training or education	43	71

More than half of fraternity members (56%) indicate having participated in some form of training related to peer accountability or intervention compared to the fewer than one in three unaffiliated men (29%). Through cross-tabulation analysis, there is a significant difference in the portion of fraternity members and unaffiliated men who have participated in some form of training related to peer accountability or intervention (X^2 (1, N=415)=32.9, p<.001).

When examining the types of training and education experiences of respondents, those with past training experiences most reported predominantly receiving training through their college or university (77%), with no observable significant difference between fraternity members and

unaffiliated undergraduate men. However, slightly more fraternity members have participated in a training experience within their fraternity experience (78%) than those who have participated in a training program sponsored by their college or university (74%) (Table 8).

Table 8
Types of Past Training Experiences, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=92)	Unaffiliated Men (n=74)
	%	%
Program sponsored by college or university	74	74
Program sponsored by fraternity chapter or national organization	78	-
Program sponsored by campus club or organization	17	22
Program as a part of an academic course	18	23
Program sponsored by a community organization	12	19

Drivers and Barriers to Practicing Peer Accountability

Both fraternity members and unaffiliated students identified many similar barriers or challenges related to providing accountability to peers. For both groups, fear of the friendship ending was the greatest barrier or challenge cited with one in three undergraduate men indicating this would be a barrier to hold them back from engaging in peer accountability.

Where differences lie is in the prioritization of the organization among fraternity members and the fear of interpersonal fall out among unaffiliated undergraduate men. Table 9 outlines the portion of respondents who identified barriers as either a moderate or extreme barrier or challenge to practicing peer accountability.

Table 9

Identified Barriers or Challenges in Practicing Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=153)	Non-Members (n=242)
	%	%
Fear of retaliation by my friend(s)/peer(s)	17	28
Fear of rejection by my friend(s)/peer(s)	24	31
Fear of the friendship ending	26	36
Fear of being kicked out of a club/organization	13	17
Fear of a club/organization being closed or banned on campus	24	11
Fear of involvement of campus administration	25	19
Fear of bullying or being made fun of	13	17
Not knowing how to properly hold someone accountable	18	26
Fear of getting in trouble with my college/university	23	23
Fear of getting in trouble with law enforcement	24	26

A statistically significant difference was observed among fraternity members who cited a fear of their club or organization being shut down or banned compared to their unaffiliated peers (X^2 (3, N=396)=16.8, p<.001). And, a significant difference was observed in which more unaffiliated undergraduate men cited a fear of bullying or being made fun of as a barrier or challenge to providing accountability to their peers (X^2 (1, N=415)=9.77, p=.021). These differences illuminate a deeper difference that emerges between fraternity members and unaffiliated undergraduate men. Fraternity members prioritize maintaining their organization as it serves as a means and structure that promotes social connection. Through these organizations, fraternity members engage in relationships and practice interpersonal skills to grow confidence to engage in peer accountability. From this lens, fraternal organizations serve as a guardrail for young men in college to develop the skills they need to practice peer accountability without fear of a relationship ending. Whereas unaffiliated undergraduate men, who may not have similarly structured social interactions through organizations, are concerned about the interpersonal fallout that could occur through engaging in accountability-oriented behaviors with their friends or peers.

Motivations for Practicing Peer Accountability
For both fraternity members and unaffiliated men, acting in alignment with values, keeping friends safe and healthy, and encouraging personal growth of friends/peers serve as the top sources of motivation to engage in peer accountability. Table 10 outlines the percentage of respondents who

indicated various types of motivation would greatly motivate them to engage in accountability or intervention behaviors with their friends/peers.

Table 10
Identified as Greatly Motivating for Engaging in Peer Accountability, by Affiliation

	Fraternity Members (n=156)	Non-Members (n=242)
	%	%
Keeping my friend(s)/peer(s) healthy and safe	79	76
Encouraging the personal growth of my friend(s)/peer(s)	75	65
Encouraging the professional growth of my friend(s)/peer(s)	67	61
Encouraging the academic success of my friend(s)/peer(s)	72	62
Following campus policies	32	33
Obeying the law	51	47
Someone may repay the favor for me in the future	33	32
Following the policies/rules of a club/organization I am a part of*	49	34
Protecting a club/organization I am a part of*	65	37
Being accepted by my friend(s)/peer(s)	38	42
Acting in alignment with my values	80	72

When factoring in affiliation, variations emerge between the motivations of members of fraternities and unaffiliated men. First, there is a significant difference in the motivations between fraternity members and unaffiliated men related to involvement with a club or organization. Fraternity members are more motivated by following the policies and rules for a club or organization than their unaffiliated peers (X^2 (2, N=400)=16.8, p<.001). Additionally, fraternity members are more likely to be motivated to engage in peer accountability to protect a club or organization of which they are a member (X^2 (2, N=415)=36.9, p<.001). In connection to the previously cited barriers by fraternity members, their motivation to engage in peer accountability is also derived from the structure that exists and is provided by their organizational involvement.

Perspectives on Belonging and Community
Undergraduate men collectively report agreement in feeling a sense of belonging on their campus. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of undergraduate men agreed they feel as though they belong on campus. Additionally, sixty-one percent of undergraduate men feel a sense of responsibility for

the health and safety of their friends and peers. However, just over half of undergraduate men feel responsible to support the professional development of their friends and peers (53%) and as though they are a valued member of their campus community (54%).

While aggregate results indicate that many undergraduate men feel a sense of belonging and commitment to others, there are observed differences in reported mean levels of agreement between fraternity member and unaffiliated undergraduate men in the following areas (Table 11).

Table 11
T-test Analysis for Perspectives on Belonging and Campus Community, by Affiliation

	Members (n=158)		Non-Members (n=241)				
	M	SD	M	SD	*p*	df	t
I feel as though I belong on my campus*	5.90	1.35	5.18	1.62	0.0001	396	4.7561
I feel as though I am a valued member of my campus community*	5.66	1.53	4.86	1.72	0.0001	394	4.7271
I feel responsible to support the health and safety of my friends/peers	5.67	1.43	5.42	1.45	0.112	357	1.5906
I feel responsible to support the personal development of my friends/peers*	5.72	1.35	5.34	1.44	0.01	382	2.5882
I feel responsible to support the personal development of my friends/peers*	5.61	1.34	5.13	1.58	0.001	395	3.1388

Indicates statistically significant difference observed in means.

T-test analyses indicate statistically significant differences exist between these two groups in the following areas:

- Fraternity members feel a greater sense of belonging on campus.
- Fraternity members feel a greater sense of being a valued member of the campus community.
- Fraternity members report a greater sense of responsibility to support personal development.
- Fraternity members feel more responsible to support the professional development of their friends/peers.

Discussion

Understanding accountability and intervention is a key step in being able to effectively engage in behaviors that promote accountability. The results of this study garner insights that provide greater awareness of how undergraduate men understand and practice peer accountability. First, this study establishes supporting evidence that fraternity members report higher levels of understanding of how to practice accountability and the role intervention plays in practicing accountability. Fraternity members also report being more comfortable and confident in practicing peer accountability related to various topics. Given the information shared about their living situation and other involvement experiences, one explanation for these differences could be the heightened social experiences that fraternity members have through increased peer interactions within their fraternity, with whom they live, and their other avenues of extracurricular involvement. The gaps that exist between fraternity members and unaffiliated peers points to an opportunity to develop greater understanding and competency to practice peer accountability among undergraduate men regardless of affiliation.

This study also identifies the ways in which undergraduate men engage in behaviors associated with peer accountability. A greater portion of fraternity members have prior experiences of engaging in peer accountability behaviors compared to unaffiliated undergraduate men, especially regarding academics, hazing, alcohol or substance misuse, campus policy violation, professional goals, and when friends are engaging in an unsafe manner. Elevated levels of past experiences among fraternity members can again likely be attributed to the increased peer interactions through their fraternity, living situation, and other involvement opportunities.

An additional aim of this study was to develop insight into how undergraduate men develop competence and motivation to engage in behaviors related to peer accountability. With just under half of students indicating any formal prior training related to accountability or intervention, this presents a great opportunity for further development that can be provided by institutions of higher education. Those with prior accountability training predominantly cite experiences sponsored or organized by a college or university or fraternity program among affiliated members. The predominance of formal training programs sponsored by an institution or organization showcases a practice that can be further implemented by practitioners who aim to increase the knowledge and competence of students to practice peer accountability.

Understanding motivation to engage in peer accountability is imperative to encouraging behavior in these areas. This study illuminates the differences in motivation that exist among undergraduate men based on their affiliation with a fraternity. In addition to acting by their values and supporting their peers, fraternity members are uniquely motivated by following the rules or policies of an organization and the preservation of an organization of which they are a member. The motivation of fraternity members should be noted, as it showcases a distinct role that organizational membership plays as motivation to use peer accountability behaviors. While not every undergraduate man will seek membership in a fraternity, providing involvement opportunities that inspire organizational commitment can promote motivation towards practicing peer accountability, regardless of affiliation.

Finally, this study sought to draw comparisons of the peer accountability experiences and perspectives on campus belonging between undergraduate fraternity members with their

unaffiliated peers. This comparison found fraternity members have greater sense of belonging, feeling valued on campus, and greater sense of responsibility to support the personal and professional growth of friends and peers. These increased levels of agreement with commitment to others and belonging on campus among fraternity members is likely once again supported by the heightened peer interactions fraternity members have through their involvement and living situations.

Implications

The findings of this study present key implications to inform and guide campus involvement experiences. First, those with higher levels of involvement on campus (i.e., fraternity members) reported greater confidence, competence, and experience in engaging in accountability related behaviors. Those who advise and support campus organizations have opportunity to position involvement, with fraternities as well as other organizations, as spaces for undergraduate men to learn interpersonal skills related to peer accountability.

However, these findings also point out the gap that exists for training experiences to help students understand and practice accountability behaviors, which can serve to increase their confidence to engage in these behaviors in real-life situations. Those supporting campus involvement can grow this competency area among students by providing robust learning experiences that promote student safety and frame accountability as a practice of care for others. This training would not only benefit those who are involved in campus organizations but can include the student population more broadly to inspire positive behaviors across the campus community.

Finally, this study points out the increased levels of knowledge, confidence, ability, and past experiences of fraternity members and link to the increased levels of involvement of these members, even beyond their chapter. Fraternity members have more frequent opportunities to witness and engage in accountability behaviors. And, these situations may not be related to high-risk situations like substance misuse, sexual misconduct, or hazing. Historically, accountability within fraternities is framed in punitive or consequence-oriented measures under the notion that these organizations inspire and reproduce negative or risky behaviors that require accountability. Accountability has also taken the form of campus-wide moratoriums or ceasing operations of entire fraternity/sorority life communities in response to an incident. Consistent with literature related to campus-wide moratoriums (Fleischer et al, 2021) and studies related to system-wide shutdowns (Dickson, 2007), this study affirms that collective punishment may be counter-productive and not lend itself toward the desired behavior of encouraging students to practice peer intervention. If protecting an organization and supporting peers serve as key sources of motivation to engage in peer accountability, collective punishment may erode the motivation to engage in peer accountability and diminish the very environments that encourage ethical and moral skill development. Professionals who support student involvement can evolve this narrative by recognizing the multi-faceted nature of fraternity members and accountability. This includes integrating advising practices that acknowledge how fraternity members engage in accountability behaviors with their peers beyond high-risk settings and encouraging continued practice of accountability interactions related to academic goals, personal goals, professional pursuits, and other interpersonal relationships. A balanced approach to advising student organizations, including fraternities, should involve support for situations that require punitive processes while also

celebrating and promoting when students appropriately and proactively engage in peer accountability to self-regulate situations within their campus community.

Limitations

This study presents important findings to the higher education field related to student engagement and the practice of peer accountability. However, this study is not without its limitations.

First, many concepts studied are reliant on self-reported knowledge or understanding by undergraduate students. This methodology provides convenience while recognizing the potential for some level of response bias or over-inflation of reported behaviors. To mitigate this, the study was positioned as anonymous and confidential in which participants' responses would not be used for investigative or punitive purposes. It is not anticipated that response bias would render the results of this study invalid or non-generalizable, but it is important to note the nature of how data were collected, and insights were generated.

While the multi-institutional approach garnered a diverse sample of student participants, geographical locations of those institutions is limited. The participating institutions were situated predominantly in the Southeast or Southwest regions of the United States. Greater geographic diversity among the participating institutions would further extend the generalizability of these findings to the larger student population.

Finally, this study solely focused on students at four-year institutions, at which fraternal organizations predominantly operate. This does not invalidate the findings but limits the application of the comparative findings between fraternity men and unaffiliated men to those who are enrolled at four-year institutions at the undergraduate level. This reduces the generalizability of the findings to undergraduate men enrolled at two-year institutions or at the graduate level.

Conclusion

While numerous student involvement opportunities exist at institutions of higher education, this study finds that fraternity involvement is a positively impactful opportunity for undergraduate men to interact with their peers and develop and practice interpersonal skills related to accountability. The significant findings of this study point to the ways fraternity membership can provide undergraduate men with an elevated campus experience that allows them to develop interpersonal skills that are critical to applying accountability and intervention behaviors. Fraternity members indicate greater understanding of peer accountability concepts, greater confidence and comfort in practicing peer accountability, and a greater sense of belonging and sense of responsibility for the development of their peers.

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