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FAKE-ID USE AMONG FRATERNITY/SORORITY MEMBERS

William R. Molasso

The author explores differences among fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers in the use of and attitudes about fake IDs. Data from this study of 3,780 students from 12 institutions across the country indicate that fraternity/sorority affiliated students were almost three times as likely to have a fake ID and maintain less healthy attitudes about them when compared to non-affiliated students. The researcher identifies recommendations for professionals working with this community.

The continued evolution of risk management policies of inter/national organizations and local campus fraternity/sorority governing boards has had a significant impact on the social environment associated with alcohol in fraternity/sorority communities. However, professionals working with fraternity/sorority communities continue to struggle with the use and abuse of alcohol by members and guests. One area of concern for fraternity/sorority advisors, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders is access to alcoholic beverages by those students under the minimum legal drinking age. The information derived from this study can help constituents of the fraternal movement address underage drinking.

Since the passage of the 1984 Federal Minimum Purchase Age Act, states have established a minimum drinking age of 21. Despite this law, studies have shown that students under 21 have continued to gain access to alcoholic beverages, making underage drinking a major problem at American colleges and universities (Wechsler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002). Wechsler et al., found that a majority (50.9%) of underage students indicated it was very easy to obtain alcohol. To address this problem, Wechsler, Moeykens, and DeJong (1995) recommended that college administrators and security chiefs take three steps to enforce the minimum drinking age more effectively: taking legal action against those providing alcoholic beverages to minors; establishing a zero-tolerance policy for students using fake IDs; and implementing greater punishment for underage students involved in alcohol-related incidents. This study examined the second recommendation of Wechsler, Moeykens, and DeJong related to the use of fake or counterfeit IDs. For the purposes of this study, fake IDs refer to the use of an identification of someone else that indicates a minimum age necessary to purchase alcoholic beverages. This may include borrowing someone else's driver's license that looks like the person, but is older than the minimum drinking age. It may also include purchasing a counterfeit identification card that uses the person's picture, but changes the age of the individual to something over the minimum drinking age required. I selected the term fake ID for this study based on use of this terminology in the previous published articles on this issue.

After an extensive search, very little research on the prevalence of fake IDs was found in the literature. These few previous studies indicated that nearly half of all college students used fake IDs, and that White men under the age of 21 were most likely to have one. Durkin, Wolfe, and Phillips (1996) found that 46% of the respondents in their study of undergraduates in a sociology class reported using a fake ID to obtain alcohol. Lotterhos, Glover, Holbert, and Barnes (1988) studied the likelihood that students between the ages of 18 and 21 would get a fake ID after the state raised

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the minimum drinking age to 21. They discovered that White, male students with high grade-point averages were the most likely to say they planned to get a fake ID after the law changed. Goldsmith (1989) found that 13% of community college students had a fake ID, although the sample size of his study was limited. In a more recent analysis, Wechsler et al., (2002) found that 17.8% of students used fake IDs to obtain alcohol. These results indicate that the use of fake IDs may be a primary means for underage students to obtain alcohol.

The purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of fake IDs among fraternity/sorority members. This study assists fraternity/sorority advisors, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders in understanding better the magnitude of the problem in this community. This study sought to answer two questions:

1. Are there differences in fake ID use among fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers?
2. Are there differences in general attitudes about fake ID use among fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers?

Answering these questions provides fraternity/sorority advisors, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders with the information they need to improve their ability to address drinking among underage members.

Methods

This investigation used data from a multi-institutional study of off-campus parties that utilized the Off-Campus Party Study Survey Questionnaire in fall 2003. The research team constructed the survey because no literature was identified on parties that occur in the off-campus apartments and houses of students, and no other instrument was available to explore the phenomena.

An institutional panel of staff from student affairs and health education and scholars from the Colleges of Education and Communication served as the coordinating research team. To ensure that validity of the overall survey, several stages of testing and piloting were completed before finalizing the instrument. Initially, the team of faculty and staff collaborated during a series of meetings and conversations about the purpose of the study and the kinds of questions needed to achieve that purpose. After an initial instrument was created, a small number of students (less than 20) were asked to complete the survey in a preliminary screening. After they completed the instrument, students were asked to indicate any questions they found difficult to complete, did not understand, or found overly intrusive. After compiling this feedback, a final draft of the instrument was created and piloted in spring 2003.

The pilot study of 186 students was administered in several courses of the faculty members familiar with the study on the campus of the research team. The purpose of the pilot study was to provide an initial collection of data to determine if the format and questions asked would achieve adequately the purposes of the study. After compiling the data of the pilot study, the researchers modified the format and language of several questions to reflect better the necessary outcomes. The instrument was then forwarded to several scholars and practitioners with expertise in student issues of this nature to ensure the accuracy of the instrument. The researchers then finalized the questionnaire, which included a range of questions examining the phenomenon of off-campus parties. A subset of those questions asked students about their use of fake IDs, which formed the basis for this study.

On the survey, students were asked to indicate yes or no to the question: "Do you have a fake ID?" Those who indicated they did were asked to select from three reasons for using the fake ID: to purchase beer or wine, to buy liquor, or to get into a bar or club. Students were asked to indicate their belief with a 4-point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree) on the following questions: "Most of my friends have fake IDs;" "There is nothing wrong with using a fake ID;" "You really need a fake ID to have an active social life;" and "My friends discourage my use of a fake ID." The study also included questions about student demographics and alcohol use. They included the variables of gender, race/ethnicity, age, residence, membership in a student organization, fraternity/sorority affiliation, and frequency of alcohol consumption in the past 30 days.

While the instrument was under testing, research team members began to contact staff at other higher education institutions who could be interested in participating in the multi-institutional study. From this recruitment effort, 12 institutions of higher education from across the country voluntarily participated in the fall 2003 study. These institutions represented a range of institutional locations (urban, suburban, rural), type (public, private), and geographic region of the country.

Each institution developed its own data collection procedures based on institutional norms and obtained institutional review board approval for the study. All 12 institutions used random sampling methods, surveying between 1,100 and 1,500 students each. Nine institutions used a direct mail approach to their randomly selected sample, with at least one follow-up. Three institutions used online data collection methods. Over 3,700 students completed and returned the survey. Of those students who responded, 59% indicated they were under the age of 21, 42% were men, 19% were students of color, and 9% indicated they were a member of a fraternity/sorority. Chi square analysis indicated that the demographic characteristics of age, race, and gender did not vary statistically significantly from the demographics of population frame.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, I used descriptive statistics, chi-square procedures, and *t* tests to compare data from students who indicated they were members of a fraternity/sorority with nonmembers. Descriptive statistics on each of the independent and dependent variables were computed. Then I analyzed fraternity/sorority affiliation with the categorical dependent variable of having a fake ID using cross-tabular chi-square analysis. Finally, I explored differences of opinions on fake ID with fraternity/sorority affiliation using *t* tests.

Using chi-square analysis, the proportion of fraternity/sorority members who had a fake ID was compared to nonmembers. This study indicated the proportion of fraternity/sorority members that had fake IDs (14%) was almost three times that of nonaffiliated students (5%). This difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 46.72, p < .001$) (Table 1). The strength of this relationships was statistically not strong ($\phi = -.17$). However, the actual difference in proportions between the two groups was relatively large for a sample of this size, and showed an importance that the statistical strength did not demonstrate. Chi-square analysis indicated no statistical difference between men and women having a fake ID, regardless of fraternity/sorority membership.

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Table 1
Comparison of Proportions of Fraternity/Sorority Members and Nonmembers on Prevalence and Use of Fake IDs

Item	Members		Nonmembers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Have a Fake ID†	47	14%	160	5%
Used To				
Purchase Beer/Wine*	34	74%	107	67%
Purchase Liquor*	27	60%	89	56%
Get Into a Bar/Club*	43	92%	136	85%

* Of those who have fake ID.

†($\chi^2(1) = 46.72, p < .001, \phi < .001$)

Next, I explored differences in how fraternity/sorority members used their fake IDs compared to nonmembers. Affiliated members were slightly more likely to use their fake ID to purchase beer/wine (74%) and liquor (60%) than nonmembers were to purchase beer/wine (67%) and liquor (56%). Additionally, a greater percentage of affiliated members who had fake IDs used them to get into a bar/club (92%) when compared to nonmembers (85%).

Four questions related to attitudes about Fake IDs were asked of the participants. Students responded to each question on a four-point scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree. Differences between the means of fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers were analyzed using *t* test procedures (Table 2).

On the scale provided, fraternity/sorority affiliated students were much more likely to believe most of the friends have fake IDs ($m = 2.10, sd = 0.89$) than nonmembers ($m = 1.65, sd = 0.76$). This difference was statistically significant ($t(3,610) = -10.14, p < .01$). A statically significant difference ($t(3,590) = -4.91, p < .01$) was also discovered among fraternity/sorority members ($m = 2.24, sd = 0.80$) in believing nothing is wrong with using a fake ID when compared to nonmembers ($m = 2.00, sd = 0.85$), as well as a statistically significant difference in friends discouraging the participant's use of a fake ID. Fraternity/sorority members ($m = 2.01, sd = 0.97$) were less likely discouraged by friends to use one than nonmembers ($m = 2.21, sd = 1.03$). Fraternity/sorority members ($m = 1.74, sd = 0.77$) were more likely to believe you needed a fake ID to have an active social life, when compared to nonmembers ($m = 1.50, sd = 0.68$). Although *t* tests indicated this difference was statistically significant ($t(3,601) = -6.18, p < .01$), the raw means for both groups was relatively low.

Table 2
Comparison of Four Fake ID Attitudes of Fraternity/Sorority Members and Nonmembers

Attitudes Statement	Members			Nonmembers			<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	*
	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>			
Most of my friends have fake IDs. †	339	2.10	0.89	3,273	1.65	0.76	3,610	-10.14	*
There is nothing wrong with using a fake ID. †	337	2.24	0.80	3,255	2.00	0.85	3,590	-4.91	*
You really need a fake ID to have an active social life. †	337	1.74	0.77	3,266	1.50	0.68	3,601	-6.18	*
My friends discourage my use of a fake ID. †	292	2.01	0.97	2,838	2.21	1.03	3,128	3.10	*

† Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree.

* Significant difference at the $p < .01$ level.

Discussion

This study found that the overall use of fake IDs by college students was very low when compared to the findings of the few previous studies on this issue. However, it is notable that fraternity/sorority members were almost three times as likely to have a fake ID when compared to nonmembers, with no significant differences among fraternity men and sorority women. While generally most students did not have a fake ID, fraternity/sorority members were much more likely to have one than nonaffiliated students. This may indicate that characteristics of the fraternity/sorority community may encourage the possession of a fake ID. While it would be easy to simply look at the low raw percentage of fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers and conclude that fake IDs are not a significant issue, that fraternity/sorority members were so much more likely to have a fake ID than nonmembers is very concerning.

As fraternity/sorority members were more likely to have a fake ID, they were also more likely actually to use that ID. Data from this study indicated that fraternity/sorority members were more likely than nonmembers to use a fake ID to purchase beer, wine, or liquor. Fraternity/sorority members were also more likely to use a fake ID to get into a bar or club compared to nonmembers. Almost all fraternity/sorority members who have a fake ID used it to get into a bar or club.

In the general attitudes about fake ID use, fraternity/sorority affiliated students consistently held less favorable or unhealthy attitudes about this illegal behavior. Fraternity/sorority members are more likely to believe their friends have a fake ID, less likely to be discouraged by their friends in using one, and more likely to see nothing wrong with this behavior. Additionally, fraternity/sorority members were significantly more likely to believe you needed a fake ID to have an active social life, when compared to nonmembers.

Other studies have drawn inferences from the literature related the alcohol-centric nature of fraternities and sororities as the reason for increased fake ID use (see Durkin, Wolfe & Phillips, 1996; Engs & Hanson, 1985). Although this is one logical conclusion to draw from the studies, the prevalence of fake IDs among fraternity and sorority members may also be explained by a recent shift in the risk management policies of the organizations. In the past five years, an increasing number of inter/national organizations and campus governing councils have instituted policies prohibiting social events involving alcohol at fraternity chapter houses. As a result, these parties have been transferred to licensed third-party vendors such as bars and clubs. Because many bars and clubs that provide alcoholic beverages often limit entrance to those over the age of 21, this creates a new problem for underage members of fraternities and sororities who want to attend these events. If the chapters host social functions in third-party venues without making special accommodations for those who are underage, the younger members may need to use fake IDs to attend these events. This study, thus, has important implications for leaders of the fraternity and sorority movement.

Implications

This study found that fraternity/sorority members were much more likely to have a fake ID and have more unhealthy attitudes about their use. These outcomes have a number of implications for fraternity/sorority advisors, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders as they continue to address problems associated with alcohol abuse among fraternity/sorority communities.

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Campus-based professionals, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders should target education programs related to this specific issue more effectively. The use of fake IDs are illegal and provide the means for underage students to violate further alcohol consumption laws and ordinances. Clear and consistent messages about fake IDs should be included in educational programs and policies on all levels of the fraternity movement. This may include a new or expanded section in risk management educational manuals and workshops or a specific policy statement about the use of fake IDs by members and guests. Although this problem may have only been superficially addressed in the past, this study indicates that the issue of fake IDs should be prioritized in the future.

Leaders of the fraternity and sorority movement should also examine fraternity parties held in age-restricted establishments. Fraternity/sorority advisors and volunteer leaders working with local establishments to develop a system that would allow underage students into their bar or club to attend the party, but not to provide alcohol to minors, is critical to the long-term success of recent efforts to move social functions out of chapter houses. These efforts may be limited because of state laws and local ordinances or the relatively small size of many establishments surrounding college campuses. However, where possible, efforts of this type could have a significant impact in the rate of fake ID use among fraternity/sorority members. Campus officials should research all of the options for having undergraduate student leaders host functions in establishments that are not age-restricted. In assessing efforts to ensure access to events by students under the age of 21, campus based professionals should consider the following questions:

- Can your underage members easily get into establishments for chapter social events (but not get served)?
- Have all available venue-options been aggressively explored and information provided widely to chapters?
- Do local establishments need outreach educational efforts on why and how underage members can attend social events in their area without risk of serving alcohol to minors?
- Campus based professionals, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders working with the fraternity/sorority movement on a local and national level should be concerned about the issue of fake IDs among the membership. Educational and policy efforts on this issue are important to consider and expand in the future. Additionally, ensuring that underage students have access to social events, but not be served alcoholic beverages, is critical to the overall success of recent policy changes that shift social events out of chapter houses.

Limitations

The design of this study had notable limitations. Although all of the institutions used a random-sample design for the collection of data, each established unique collection methodologies specific to their campus situations. Future multi-institutional studies with identical sampling and implementation procedures would strengthen the accuracy of the results.

Language is increasingly important in the design of research. This study used similar language to the few studies that had been completed and published in the literature. However, future studies of this issue should consider extending the category for those who use fake IDs or counterfeit IDs to include those who use or “borrow IDs from someone over the age of 21.” Additionally, the nuance of “having” and “using” a fake ID should be examined.

Summary

Wechsler et al., (1995) gave college administrators and security chiefs three recommendations for addressing underage drinking. Those recommendations included focusing efforts on those who provide alcohol to minors, addressing the use of fake IDs, and taking stronger action against underage students involved in alcohol-related incidents. This study examined their second recommendation by assessing the differences in fake ID use and attitudes among fraternity/sorority members and nonmembers. Findings clearly indicated fraternity/sorority members are at greater risk of violating fake ID laws and policies than nonmembers. As fraternity/sorority advisors, inter/national staff, and volunteer leaders continue to deal with the problems associated with alcohol abuse by members of the community, efforts addressing illegal use of fake IDs should be expanded and prioritized.

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