Fraternities and Alcohol

Fraternity and Sorority Involvement
Arguably, the greek, or fraternity-sorority, system is the best environment on campus in which to examine the role of social influence processes on alcohol use and problems. Members of greek organizations consistently demonstrate higher levels of alcohol use and problems than nonmembers (Lo & Globetti, 1995; Sher, Bartholow, & Nanda, 2001). Specifically, fraternity and sorority members and leaders exhibit high levels of use and approval of use (Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998). In fact, particular houses often have reputations based on their members’ alcohol consumption (Larimer, Irvine, Kilmer, & Marlatt, 1997).

In a review of two decades of research on fraternity drinking, Borsari and Carey (1999) identified five factors contributing to the heavy drinking consistently observed in fraternities:

(a) a continuity of heavy alcohol use from high school to college;
(b) self-selection into heavy drinking environments;
(c) the central role that alcohol plays in fraternity socialization;
(d) misperceptions of drinking norms;
(e) the enabling environment of the fraternity house.

Thus, an individual’s decision to join the greek system and the subsequent socialization that may occur in this environment provide an ideal context in which to study the influences of selection, socialization, and active and passive social influences on college student drinking.

Recent longitudinal studies (e.g., Bartholow, Sher, & Krull, 2003) have provided support for socialization effects among those involved in the Greek community and have begun to explicate potentially important social influences that may mediate relations between greek involvement and collegiate alcohol use and problems.

Excerpted and adapted from “Fraternity and Sorority Involvement, Social Influences, and Alcohol Use Among College Students: A Prospective Examination.”