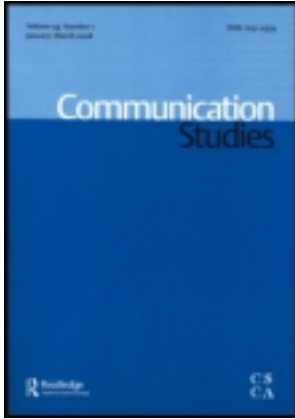


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Blowing the Whistle Against Greek Hazing: The Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Reporting Intentions

Brian K. Richardson, Zuoming Wang, & Camille A. Hall

This study tests the applicability of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) framework to whistle-blowing intentions within the context of Greek hazing. Participants (N = 259) responded to a survey with one of three scenarios, varying in level of severity (“not severe,” “moderately severe,” “most severe”), describing a hypothetical hazing situation occurring in their fraternity or sorority. Results show that TRA provides a sound framework for predicting whistle-blowing intentions. Level of severity served as a moderator for behavioral intentions. The TRA model was confirmed for both the “moderately severe” and the “most severe” scenarios. For the “not severe” scenario, the TRA model was supported except for the effect of the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations on attitude toward the behavior. The article concludes with a discussion of limitations and theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Greek Organizations; Hazing; Theory of Reasoned Action; Whistle-Blowing

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Hazing, defined as “any activity expected of someone that joins a group, which humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers its victims” (Edelman, 2005, p. 310), remains a serious, sometimes deadly problem, on college campuses (Allan & Madden, 2006). More than half of college students belonging to campus organizations and over two-thirds of members of Greek organizations admit they have been hazed (Lipka, 2008). Greek members have been killed in alleged hazing incidents at universities including California State University, Los Angeles, University of Colorado, Boulder, University of Miami, Chico State University, Auburn University, Plattsburgh State University, University of Maryland, University of Nevada, Reno, University of Texas at Austin, and Florida A&M University (Iverson & Allan, 2004; Lipkins, 2006; Morman, 2007). Indeed, the identities of many Greek organizations are intertwined with hazing traditions (Iverson & Allan, 2004). While Greek Life advisors and university administrators are responsible for preventing and discouraging hazing, they are limited in their abilities to infiltrate these tight-knit organizations that routinely meet off-campus and at late hours (Hollmann, 2002). It is for this reason that when hazing does occur there is the potential for members of Greek organizations to become whistle-blowers (Lipkins, 2006). Johnson, Sellnow, Seeger, Barrett, and Hasbargen (2004) suggest “whistle-blowing involves an individual with some level of unique or inside knowledge using public communication to bring attention to some perceived wrongdoing or problem” (p. 353). Whistle-blowers in a number of Greek organizations have reported hazing incidents in an attempt to end these behaviors (Chan, 2004; Iverson & Allan, 2004; Krieger, 2010).

Whistle-blowing in organizations characterized by strong codes of conformity, such as fraternities and sororities, may be particularly difficult as it violates group cohesion and opens the door for retaliation (Greenberger, Miceli, & Cohen, 1987; Horne, 2001). Organizational scholars argue potential whistle-blowers may seek the opinions of relevant others (Greenberger et al., 1987) and weigh the costs and benefits of taking action (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2008) as they consider whether to report wrongdoing. In light of this literature, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) provides a framework that may be particularly useful for explaining Greek members’ whistle-blowing intentions in hazing situations. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) developed TRA to explain an individual’s behavioral intentions as the outcome of his or her beliefs and attitudes. Specifically, TRA considers individuals’ attitudes about performing a particular behavior, as well as their perceptions of how relevant others might perceive the behavior, into their decision-making processes (Meyer, Roberto, Boster, & Roberto, 2004). Fraternity and sorority members typically identify strongly with their respective organizations (Giddan, 1988), leading them to carefully weigh the potential consequences of their blowing the whistle on hazing. Concern over these consequences might lead them to seek out opinions from university and Greek administrators, fellow Greeks, family members, and non-Greek friends. These factors suggest TRA dimensions might align closely with the decision-making process of Greek members who have witnessed hazing.

An additional factor influencing one’s decision to blow the whistle is the severity, or potential harmfulness, of the alleged wrongdoing (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran,

2005). A number of studies have cited severity of the wrongdoing as significantly related to decisions to report unethical behavior (King, 1997; Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997; Singer, Mitchell, & Turner, 1998). Thus, the present study sought to test TRA's capacity to predict the whistle-blowing intentions of Greek members faced with a scenario describing a hazing incident perpetuated by members of their fraternity or sorority. In addition, the study also examined whether the severity of the proposed hazing incident (not, moderate, most) affected the fit of the TRA model. The present study could make contributions in a number of areas. First, it examines the applicability of the TRA model to whistle-blowing scenarios. Next, it assesses whether the model changes as the severity of the proposed hazing incident changes. Finally, from a practical standpoint, this study informs hazing prevention programs and facilitates intervention efforts.

Literature Review

Theory of Reasoned Action

TRA proposes that behavioral intent is the most significant predictor of human behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). *Behavioral intent* is formulated in a rational manner (Airhihenbuwa & Obregon, 2000) as the function of two factors: (a) one's *personal attitude* toward the behavior and (b) *subjective norms* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). An individual's personal attitude toward a behavior includes whether he or she perceives a specific behavior as favorable or unfavorable (Hale, Householder, & Green, 2003). Moreover, one's attitude is influenced by *behavioral beliefs*, or the probability that a behavior leads to particular outcomes, and *evaluation of outcomes*, an assessment of whether engaging in the behavior will lead to positive or negative outcomes (Park & Levine, 1999). Subjective norms, meanwhile, explain how an individual believes relevant others will perceive the behavior if performed by the individual. These are comprised of *normative beliefs*, individuals' perceptions of what relevant others think about their performing the behavior, and *motivations to comply*, individuals' inclination to behave in a similar manner as their reference group (Park & Levine, 1999). TRA is recognized for its potential to identify particular targets of persuasion that can, in turn, influence a specific, willful behavior (Hale et al., 2003). The theory has been used to study behavioral intent in a wide variety of disciplines including psychology, marketing, consumer behavior, business ethics, advertising, and health (Hale et al., 2003; Reichert, Kim, & Fosu, 2007). Next, we describe why TRA is appropriate for examining the whistle-blowing decision-making process.

Whistle-Blowing and TRA

Whistle-blowing is becoming a regular feature of organizational life (Gundlach, Martinko, & Douglas, 2008), and one that is increasingly studied by organization and communication scholars. Whistle-blowing is a decidedly communicative act (Johnson et al., 2004); indeed, without communication, this type of informing could

not occur. Scholarly models (Greenberger et al., 1987; Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2003; Miceli et al., 2008) tend to depict whistle-blowing as occurring through a number of stages. Henik (2007) provides a summary of these stages. The first stage is marked by a trigger event; for example, an organizational member learning of suspected wrongdoing. In Stage 2, the focal individual deems the event problematic and engages in a decision-making process about what action to take. This stage includes communication between the individual and coworkers, supervisors, and possibly the wrongdoer (Greenberger et al., 1987; Gundlach et al., 2003), and often a cost-benefit analysis (Miceli et al., 2008). The individual's action (blow the whistle or remain silent) occurs in Stage 3. In the fourth stage, the accused organization reacts to the report. Finally, in Stage 5, the whistle-blower assesses the organization's response and considers whether further action is warranted.

In light of whistle-blowing models, TRA seems an especially suitable fit for examining whistle-blowing intentions. Many of the scholarly whistle-blowing models directly or indirectly highlight interactions between the focal individual and relevant others, including coworkers, supervisors, and even the wrongdoer (Greenberger et al., 1987; Gundlach et al., 2003; Miceli et al., 2008). Such interactions parallel TRA's focus on individuals' considerations of significant others' opinions about performing a particular behavior. Individuals considering whether to blow the whistle do not make their decisions in a vacuum (Gundlach et al., 2003). They talk to others that help the focal individual make sense of the situation and weigh the impact of blowing the whistle (Johnson et al., 2004). Another factor that cuts across many whistle-blowing models is the cost-benefit analysis; a process by which potential whistle-blowers assess whether the expected advantages of whistle-blowing—for example, increased workplace safety, cessation of wrongdoing, receiving a reward for informing, etc.—outweigh the probable expenses—example, job loss, damage to company reputation, and possible retaliation (Miceli et al., 2008). As the costs of whistle-blowing increase relative to the benefits, the individual is increasingly expected to refrain from whistle-blowing (Gundlach et al., 2003). This cost-benefit analysis relates closely to TRA's notions of behavioral beliefs and evaluation of outcomes. In this process, the individual weighs the positive and negative outcomes of engaging in a particular behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Finally, TRA's general purpose is to explain an individual's conscious decisions, rather than those that are impulsive or spontaneous (Hale et al., 2003). Likewise, whistle-blowing is traditionally conceptualized as a process built upon deliberation, reflection, and careful consideration (Gundlach et al., 2003; Miceli et al., 2008). For these reasons, we expect TRA to provide a sound, theoretical model for predicting whistle-blowing behavior.

While whistle-blowing research has yet to empirically explore Greek organizations or hazing situations, it is likely the models discussed above would be relevant for these contexts. A Greek member who is bothered by a hazing incident would likely be influenced by interactions with relevant others and their own cost-benefit analysis of blowing the whistle. In fact, in her practical guide for preventing hazing, Lipkins (2006) recognizes that individuals who witness hazing may feel powerless, can benefit from talking to other concerned witnesses and may wonder about the consequences

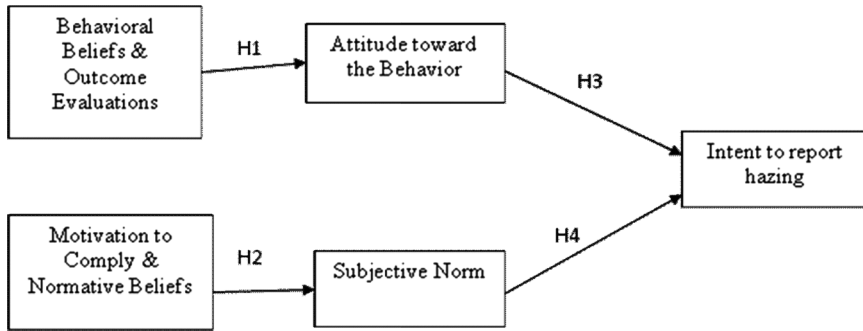


Figure 1 Hypothesized relationships amongst variables.

of reporting what they have seen, conditions that parallel the experiences of whistle-blowers in other contexts. In lieu of a wealth of research confirming the relationships between factors of the theory, we propose the links comprising the TRA model will form the hypotheses for the present study. These hypothesized relationships are presented in Figure 1. H1 proposes the summed product of behavioral beliefs and outcomes evaluations predicts attitude toward the behavior. H2 suggests the summed product of motivation to comply and normative beliefs is predictive of subjective norm. Finally, H3 and H4 propose that attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm, respectively, will predict behavioral intention (intent to report hazing).

Severity of the Wrongdoing

Miceli et al. (2008) report characteristics associated with wrongdoing, including its perceived seriousness, have had significant relationships with whistle-blowing behavior. McLain and Keenan (1999) suggest that the more serious wrongdoing is perceived to be, the more likely it is employees will be motivated to end it. A number of studies have found a positive relationship between perceived seriousness of the wrongdoing and whistle-blowing intentions (King, 1997; Miceli & Near, 1985; Singer et al., 1998). Seriousness has been operationalized as wrongdoing that could cause physical harm to someone (King, 1997; Singer et al., 1998) or is costly in nature (Miceli & Near, 1985). Campo and Poulos (2004) found that perceptions of harm to victims were the strongest predictor of initiates and group members' willingness to report hazing. While we suspected wrongdoing severity would influence whistle-blowing intentions, we were unsure what impact it would have upon links of the TRA model. For example, heightened severity might cause observers to more strongly consider how relevant others perceive the unethical act as suggested by the concept of principled organizational dissent (Graham, 1986). Conversely, when wrongdoing is considered severe, observers might feel justified in acting independently with less consideration of relevant others' opinions, as suggested by independent-mindedness theory (Infante & Gorden, 1987). Without conclusive theory-guiding predictions

about the influence of differing levels of severity on the TRA model, we posed the following research question:

RQ1: Does the perceived severity of a hazing incident, as a moderator, strengthen or weaken the relationships comprising the TRA model?

Specifically, we wondered whether the model fits well for behavioral intention of reporting hazing and whether the strength of the model's relationships vary depending on level of severity of a hazing incident.

Prior TRA literature suggest there are some distal factors such as the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations and the product term of motivation to comply and normative beliefs that predict behavioral intentional (Park & Levine, 1999). Specifically, they exert an impact on behavioral intention indirectly through their impact on behavioral attitude and subjective norm. Therefore, there is a possibility that perceived severity of a hazing incident could serve as a distal factor rather than a moderator as specified in RQ1. Based on that consideration, RQ2 was raised:

RQ2: Is the effect of perceived severity of a hazing incident on the intent to report that incident mediated through the behavioral attitude and subjective norm?

Method

The purposes of this study were to determine whether the hypothesized relationships of the TRA model persist in predicting whistle-blowing intentions and to discover if these relationships changed based upon the severity of the wrongdoing incident. To test the hypotheses and to answer the research questions, we utilized a survey. Surveys included a vignette that described one of three hazing situations varying in its level of severity, as well as a number of scales for measuring factors associated with TRA. Structural equation modeling was used to assess the relationship between TRA variables and whistle-blowing intentions across the three vignettes.

Participants

Two hundred fifty-nine members ($N = 259$) of social Greek organizations participated in the study. All participants were enrolled in a large Southwestern university. The sample included 129 women (49.8%) and 130 men (50.2%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 ($M = 19.9$, $SD = 1.37$); 71.8% of participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian, 12.7% as Hispanic, 3.1% as African American, 1.9% as Asian American, and 7.3% as Other. To recruit participants, we emailed fraternity and sorority presidents and requested the participation of their respective organizations. They were also informed that all participating fraternities and sororities would be entered into a drawing for \$250. Five sororities, out of a possible 17, and four fraternities, out of a possible 24, agreed to participate in the study. Overall, 21% of the Greek organizations on campus agreed to participate in the study. One of the

researchers attended their monthly formal meetings, explained the study, read the consent form and distributed and collected surveys.

Instrumentation

Survey development

As we projected that the level of seriousness of the hazing scenarios can affect whistle-blowing intentions, we first developed three different scenarios reflecting “not severe,” “moderately severe,” and “most severe” levels of the hazing incidents. We utilized members of our research population to develop those scenarios. Specifically, we distributed an open-ended survey to seven Greek members at a large Southwestern university. The purpose of the survey was to determine typical hazing incidents, salient outcomes expected from whistle-blowing, and a list of relevant others. Participants were asked about types of hazing they had seen or heard about and to rate the hazing acts as “not severe,” “moderately severe,” or “most severe.” They were then asked to list any individuals with whom they might consult if they considered blowing the whistle on hazing and what outcomes they might expect from reporting hazing.

Using the data collected from the open-ended survey, the researchers selected three hazing scenarios, one each from the “not severe,” “moderately severe,” and “most severe” categories. For a manipulation check, these scenarios were distributed to two experts, the Greek advisor at a large Southwestern university and an advisor for a sorority chapter. They were asked to rank the scenarios from least to most severe. Both sources agreed with our preliminary rankings. Thus, we proceeded with the three scenarios (see Appendix). During distribution, surveys were randomly sorted based upon the different scenarios. Eighty-seven participants completed Survey 1 (most severe), 89 participants completed Survey 2 (moderately severe), and 83 participants completed Survey 3 (not severe).

Manipulation Check

After reading the hazing scenario, participants were asked to respond to the statement, “The act described above could have been harmful to the pledges” on a 5-point Likert-type scale, anchored by *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*. This item served as a manipulation check for the scenarios. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed the mean score differences of perceived harmfulness of the hazing incident between these three groups was highly significant, $F(2, 206) = 22.45, p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test indicated that the mean score for the “most severe” condition ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.31$) was significantly different than the “not severe” condition ($M = 2.62, SD = 1.31$) with an effect size Cohen’s d of 1.11. Moreover, the “moderately severe” condition ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.21$) also significantly differed from the “most severe” (Cohen’s $d = 0.53$) and “not severe” conditions (Cohen’s $d = 0.62$). Taken together, these results suggest that participants did perceive different levels of severity in the presented scenario as intended by the study design.

Measures

The survey measured, in order, the following factors: behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, attitude toward the behavior, normative beliefs, motivation to comply, and subjective norms using multiple-item scales, as well as demographic information (ethnicity, age, and school classification). We ran reliability assessments on each scale. Scales that were deemed reliable remained intact. Factor analysis was run on scales with low reliability in order to identify which items to retain.

Antecedent Endogenous Variables

Behavioral beliefs

Behavioral beliefs ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.51$) were assessed using a three-item, 7-point Likert-type scale adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), depicting items that described concern over costs associated with whistle-blowing. Such items were “My reporting the hazing incident will cause my fraternity/sorority to alienate me,” “My reporting the hazing incident will cause people to be angry with me,” and “My reporting the hazing incident will cause my fraternity brothers/sorority sisters to retaliate against me.” Respondents were asked to indicate their assessment of each item on a scale anchored by “unlikely” (score of 1) to “likely” (7). This scale achieved satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .81$).¹

Outcome evaluations

Outcome evaluations ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.12$) were assessed with a three-item, 7-point Likert-type scale adapted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), which added a valence measure to the behavioral beliefs described above. Items from the outcome evaluations scale were “Being alienated by my fraternity/sorority due to my reporting hazing is,” “People being angry with me for reporting hazing is,” and “My fraternity brothers/sorority sisters retaliating against me is.” Respondents were asked to indicate their perception of each item on the scale anchored by “bad” (score of 1) to “good” (7). This scale was reliable ($\alpha = .73$) and focused on the outcome evaluations related to concern over negative treatment, corresponding to its behavioral beliefs counterpart aforementioned.

Attitude toward the behavior

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recommend assessing attitude with a semantic differential scale anchored by items that represent general “positive” outcomes of the behavior and negative outcomes of the behavior. We measured attitude toward the behavior (whistle-blowing) ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.02$) with a five-item, 7-point, semantic differential scale. Respondents were instructed to indicate their attitude about reporting the hazing incident in terms of the descriptors weighting each side of the scale. The descriptors included “wise/foolish” (R = reverse coded), “harmful/beneficial,”

“rewarding/punishing” (R), “good/bad” (R), and “unpleasant/pleasant.” This scale was reliable ($\alpha = .83$).

Normative beliefs

Normative beliefs ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 1.05$) were measured with an 11-item, 7-point Likert-type scale that was anchored by “should not” (score of 1) and “should” (score of 7). Each item included the front end of a statement, the scale, and the last part of the statement, which was “report the hazing incident” for each item. For example, one item read “My sorority’s advisors think I should/should not . . .” Other referents included friends, the campus newspaper, the university, and so forth. It was followed by the Likert-type scale, which preceded the closing statement “report the hazing incident.” The scale reached reliability ($\alpha = .84$).

Motivation to comply

Motivation to comply ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.64$) was assessed with an 11-item, 7-point Likert-type scale that was anchored by “not at all” (score of 1) to “very much” (7). Items in this scale mirrored items in the normative beliefs scale. For example, one item read “Generally speaking, how much do you want to do what your sorority wants you to do?” The scale yielded satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .82$).

Subjective norms

The subjective norm ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.76$) measure is considered a respondent’s general assessment of whether relevant others believe they should report hazing. A one-item measure was used as outlined in Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The item read, “Most people who are important to me think I should report the hazing incident.” It was assessed with a 7-point, Likert-type scale, anchored by “likely” (score of 1) to “unlikely” (7).

Consequence endogenous variable

The consequence endogenous variable was the behavioral intention to report hazing. This variable ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 2.06$) was assessed with a single-item measure, as is typical with TRA research (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Rise, 1992; Ross, Kohler, Grimley, & Anderson-Lewis, 2007). It read, “I intend to report the hazing incident to someone who could affect action.” Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale, anchored by *extremely unlikely* (score of 1) and *extremely likely* (7).

Generating the Model

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggest that there are two interactive effects on behavioral intention, deriving from the two product terms. One is the product term between behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluation; the other one is the product term between

motivation to comply and normative beliefs. Following this approach, these two product terms were created as independent variables in the model. In order to establish the interconnections among all the variables, we tested a theoretical model of structural relationships among these variables against our data using Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) (Jöreskog, 1993). LISREL allows for the simultaneous estimation of all parameters in a model. This model accounted not only for all the links from antecedent endogenous variables to the consequence endogenous variable but also for the relationships among all antecedent endogenous variables. Any given coefficient therefore represents the relationship between two variables, controlling for all other relationships and variables in the model. By treating antecedent endogenous variables as both independent and dependent variables, structural equation modeling allows for the estimation of direct and indirect effects. In this study, we followed the “model generating” approach (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). According to this approach, we developed an initial theoretical model and tested it with empirical data, then adjusted the model by freeing or fixing some of the paths based on the Lagrangian Multiplier (LM) test (Bollen, 1987) to optimize the model fit.

Results

Impact of Manipulated Severity on TRA Variables

Our study investigated how various beliefs and norms affect the behavioral intention, which served as the key dependent variable. One-way ANOVA was conducted to directly test the impact of severity variable against one another on the behavioral intention. Results (see Table 1) showed the behavioral intention mean score differences between these three severity-level conditions was highly significant, $F(2, 256) = 13.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the most severe condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 2.05$) was significantly different than the “not severe” condition ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.84$). Moreover, the “moderately severe” condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 3.01$) also significantly differed from the “most severe” and “not severe” conditions. Taken together, these results suggest

Table 1 Table of Mean and Standard Deviation of All Variables across Conditions

	Behavioral beliefs	Outcome evaluations	Motivation to comply	Normative beliefs*	Behavioral attitude	Subjective norm*	Behavioral intention*
Not severe	3.23 ^a (1.59) ^b	5.67 (1.13)	4.66 (1.07)	5.10 (1.26)	3.34 (0.59)	4.57 (1.89)	2.62 (1.84)
Moderately severe	3.33 (1.49)	5.71 (1.20)	4.76 (1.04)	5.54 (1.09)	3.49 (0.63)	5.20 (1.67)	3.72 (3.01)
Most severe	3.35 (1.46)	5.79 (1.02)	4.68 (0.98)	5.66 (0.93)	3.52 (0.68)	5.46 (1.63)	4.12 (2.05)

^aMean score.

^bStandard deviation.

*ANOVA results showed that the mean differences among the three conditions were statistically significant.

that perceived severity of hazing really does have an effect on participant's behavioral intention to report hazing. Even moderate level of hazing severity appears to significantly increase the behavioral intention to report. Moreover, additional ANOVA tests showed that there was a significant difference for variables "normative beliefs," $F(2, 256) = 6.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$, and "subjective norms," $F(2, 256) = 5.98, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$, across the three conditions.

Noticeably, for the "not severe" scenario, behavioral intention was low ($M = 2.62, SD = 1.84$) on the 1–7 scale where larger scores indicated greater intention to report the hazing incident. That is, most participants were less likely to report the hazing in this condition, which led to variability in behavioral intentions. Similarly, the perceived most severity scenario also encountered this low variability problem ($M = 4.12, SD = 2.05$). Although the mean score of behavioral intention increased significantly compared to the "not severe" condition, indicating participants said that they would be more likely to report the hazing, the whistle-blowing intention was still only moderate (slightly above the midpoint of the 1–7 scale. Although there was no ceiling effect for the high severity condition, participants' behavioral intention score did cluster close to the mean ($SD = 2.05$). For the perceived moderate severity scenario, the dependent variable behavioral intention had more variability ($M = 3.72, SD = 3.01$); that is, participants were not as uniform about whether they would report hazing as in the other two conditions. Instead, they displayed more heterogeneous responses on reporting hazing.

Test of Proposed Theoretical Model

The data were further divided into three parts based on the severity level of the scenarios. In order to establish the interconnections between behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, normative beliefs, motivation to comply, attitude toward performing behavior, subjective norms, and behavioral intention, we tested a theoretically driven model of structural relationships among these variables against the data. We first tested the hypothesized model as presented in Figure 1, then we made adjustments to the models such as deleting nonsignificant paths and adding paths suggested by LISREL output to improve the model fit. As a result, three models were generated.

For the "not severe" hazing scenario, the original hypothesized model as presented in Figure 1 did not fit well, χ^2 of 13.88 ($df = 5, p = .01, n = 83$). Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .14, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .84, and Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and the Adjusted-Goodness-of-Fit (AGFI)—controlling for multivariate non-normality—were .94, and .83, respectively. Following the LISREL modification indices, paths with a critical ratio greater than 1.96, a conventional cutoff point for .05 level significance, were free, and paths with a critical ratio less than 1.96 were considered insignificant and deleted. The final model fit very well with a χ^2 of 7.08 ($df = 5, p = .21, n = 83$); RMSEA = .06, CFI = .98, and GFI and the AGFI were both close to perfect with values of .97 and .91, respectively (see Figure 2). The model explains 12% of the variance of attitude toward performing the behavior,

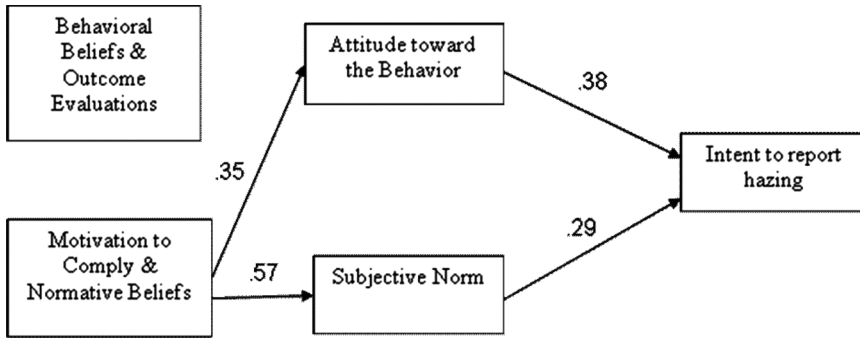


Figure 2 Results of structural equation modeling in the “not severe” condition showing significant paths ($p < .05$).

33% of the variance of subjective norms, and 27% of the variance of behavioral intention.

As is apparent from Figure 2, most of the predicted paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. The only exceptions are the expected link between the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations on attitude toward the behavior (H1). However, a direct, positive relationship between the product term of motivation to comply and normative beliefs on attitude toward the behavior was detected ($\beta = 0.35$). This particular product term also significantly predicted subjective norm ($\beta = 0.57$, H2). Both attitude toward behavior and the subjective norm had a direct effect on intention to report hazing ($\beta = 0.38$, H3) and ($\beta = 0.29$, H4), respectively.

For the “moderately severe” hazing scenario, the original hypothesized model did not fit well with a χ^2 of 22.23 ($df = 5$, $p < .01$, $n = 89$); RMSEA = .19, CFI = .88, and GFI and AGFI were .92 and .75, respectively. After adjusting the model based on the LISREL modification indices, the final model yielded an excellent fit with a χ^2 of 1.94 ($df = 2$, $p = .38$, $n = 89$); RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00, and GFI and AGFI were both close to perfect with values of .99 and .94, respectively (see Figure 3). The model explains 27% of the variance of attitude toward performing behavior, 39% of the variance of subjective norms, and 34% of the variance of behavioral intention.

As is apparent from Figure 3, all the hypotheses proposed in the TRA literature were supported. The product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations not only significantly predicted the attitude toward performing the behavior ($\beta = 0.18$, H1) but also directly predicted the behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.13$). Meanwhile, the product term of motivation to comply and normative beliefs directly predicted subjective norm ($\beta = 0.62$, H2). Moreover, subjective norm was positively related to attitude toward performing the behavior ($\beta = 0.14$). Both attitude toward performing the behavior ($\beta = 0.24$, H3) and the subjective norm ($\beta = 0.39$, H4) had a positive direct effect on the behavioral intention.

For the “most severe” hazing scenario, the original hypothesized model did not fit well with a χ^2 of 17.73 ($df = 5$, $p < .01$, $n = 87$); RMSEA = .16, CFI = .88, and GFI and

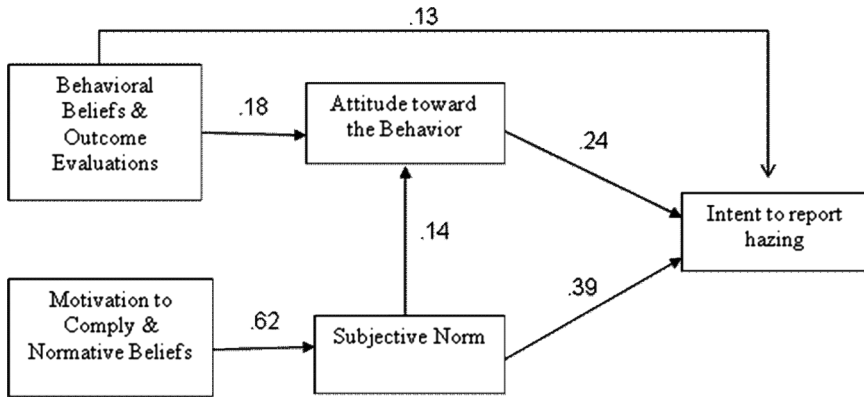


Figure 3 Results of structural equation modeling in the “moderately severe” condition showing significant paths ($p < .05$).

AGFI were .93 and .79, respectively. After adjusting the model based on the LISREL modification indices, that is, freeing the path from the product term between motivation to comply and normative beliefs to the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations, the final χ^2 of 2.75 ($df = 4, p = .60, n = 87$); RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00, GFI and AGFI Index were .99 and .95, respectively (see Figure 4). The model explains 12% of the variance of attitude toward performing the behavior, 13% of the variance of subjective norms, and 20% of the variance of behavioral intention.

As is apparent from Figure 4, most of the predicted paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. All the hypotheses were supported. The product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations directly predicted attitude toward the behavior ($\beta = 0.16$, H1). The product term of motivation to comply and normative beliefs had a direct positive effect on subjective norm ($\beta = 0.36$, H2). Moreover, the product term of motivation to comply and normative beliefs significantly predicted the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations

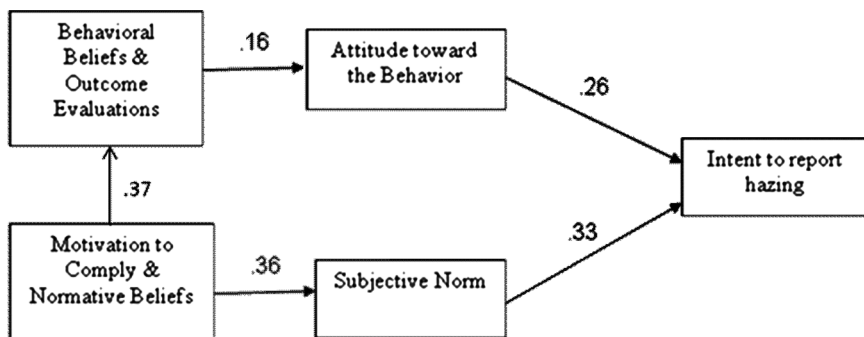


Figure 4 Results of structural equation modeling in the “most severe” condition showing significant paths ($p < .05$).

($\beta = 0.37$). Both attitude toward performing the behavior ($\beta = 0.26$, H3) and the subjective norm ($\beta = 0.33$, H4) have a positive direct effect on the behavioral intention. To summarize, H1 was not supported in the “not severe” condition; meanwhile, H2, H3, and H4 were supported in all three conditions.

Test of Mediators on the Impact of Perceived Severity on Behavioral Intention (BI)

RQ2 projected a possibility that perceived severity of a hazing incident can serve as a distal factor, exerting an indirect effect on behavioral intention through normative beliefs and subjective norm. The SOBEL test (Baron & Kenny, 1986) was run to test this mediation effect with the perceived severity; the single-item manipulation check question “The act described above could have been harmful to the pledges” was the independent variable, and behavioral intention was the dependent variable. Possible mediators’ subjective norm and normative beliefs were tested using SOBEL separately. Results showed that the indirect effect of perceived severity on the behavioral intention through subjective norm was significantly different from zero, SOBEL test statistic = 2.03, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .04$. Meanwhile, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression tests showed that the direct effect of perceived severity on behavioral intention was still significant after controlling for subjective norm ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$). Together these results indicate the impact of perceived severity on behavioral intention was significantly smaller after controlling for subjective norm (β changed from 0.77 to 0.58), indicating a partial (not total) mediation of subjective norm; that is, part of the impact of perceived severity on behavioral intention is explained by its impact on subjective norm but not all of it. The same procedure was repeated for possible mediator normative beliefs. Results showed that the indirect effect of perceived severity on the behavioral intention through normative beliefs was significantly different from zero, SOBEL test statistic = 1.94, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .05$. Meanwhile, the OLS regression test showed that the direct effect of perceived severity on behavioral intention was still significant after controlling for normative beliefs ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < .001$). Together these results suggest the impact of perceived severity on behavioral intention was significantly smaller after controlling for subjective norm (β changed from 0.77 to 0.66), indicating a partial (not total) mediation of normative beliefs. These results answered RQ2.

Discussion

Hazing remains a serious problem on college campuses and research indicates Greek organizations are the primary purveyors of hazing activity (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). Unethical behavior in many organizations, including fraternities and sororities, is frequently exposed through the efforts of whistle-blowers (Miceli et al., 2008). The purpose of this study was to test the applicability of the TRA framework to whistle-blowing intentions within the context of Greek-organization hazing. Participants responded to one of three scenarios, varying in level of severity, describing a hazing situation occurring in their fraternity or sorority. TRA factors predicting

reporting intentions included attitude measures (behavioral beliefs, outcome evaluations, and attitude toward the behavior) and normative measures (motivation to comply, normative beliefs, and subjective norms). While TRA has demonstrated strong predictive value in a variety of contexts (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988), it is seldom used for ethical decision-making contexts (Gibson & Frakes, 1997). Still, results indicated the model provided a generally good fit for explaining intention to report hazing across the scenarios. Moreover, perceived severity of the hazing situation altered the model's fit, particularly as it applied to behavioral attitudes, for example, costs associated with whistle-blowing. In the "not severe" scenario, attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm both had strong direct effects on reporting intentions, while the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations possessed no significant relationships to other factors. In the "moderately severe" scenario, the structural equation model completely confirms the TRA model in the literature (with two additional unanticipated links). Likewise, in the "most severe" scenario, all predicted relationships were significant. Theoretical and practical implications of the study's findings will be discussed next.

Theoretical Implications

TRA proved to be a good framework for predicting whistle-blowing intentions. Whistle-blowing models (Greenberger et al., 1987; Gundlach et al., 2003; Miceli et al., 2008) propose influence from relevant others, including coworkers and supervisors, and cost-benefit analysis are predictive of whistle-blowing intentions. The present study seems to support these models as it measures perceptions of relevant others' attitudes about blowing the whistle and concerns over costs of this particular behavior. Structural equation models produced effect sizes ranging from .24 to .39 between either behavioral attitudes or subjective norms and reporting intentions in the three severity scenarios. Such findings are consistent with similar studies; for example, in their study of a number of personal and situational factors predicting whistle-blowing against sexual harassment, Lee, Heilmann, and Near's (2004) strongest effect size was .13 for the factor "propensity and length of sexual harassment." Thus, the TRA model appears to provide a robust fit for whistle-blowing contexts. Future research should continue examining the applicability of the TRA model to various whistle-blowing situations.

The TRA model provided an especially close fit for the "moderately severe" scenario. It explained more variance and yielded larger effect sizes. All predicted relationships were significant, and both behavioral attitude and subjective norms were strong predictors of whistle-blowing intentions. Moreover, the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations had both a direct effect and an indirect effect (through attitude toward the behavior) on the behavioral intentions. The "moderately severe" scenario may produce the most ambiguity for an observer of hazing. While the other scenarios seem to indicate either potential harm or no harm, the "moderately severe" scenario is likely to raise questions about whether the victim could be injured by this type of hazing. We propose that this severity "middle ground" leads to the most uncertainty for observers. Thus, they are more likely to

rely on both factors of the TRA model, attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms, which are weighted similarly in this particular scenario. These findings suggest when hazing is relatively harmful, observers are likely to rely on their perceptions of the attitudes of relevant others, *and* their analysis of the costs of reporting in deciding whether to blow the whistle. In other words, they are more considerate of multiple channels of information as they weigh their decision. Interestingly, the model was changed in the “not severe” scenario. Specifically, behavioral beliefs/outcome evaluations associated with whistle-blowing become nonfactors influencing whistle-blowing intentions.

In the “not severe” scenario, the observer is most influenced by attitudes about the behavior, with subjective norm remaining a significant predictor. In this scenario, the hazing incident is less likely to cause physical or psychological harm to the victims. Research suggests college students are reluctant to label as hazing those behaviors that do not involve physical force, or those that do not go against the will of the victim (Allan & Madden, 2006). Based upon these criteria, the “not severe” scenario is the least likely to be viewed as hazing by Greek members. This scenario presents no obvious physical threat and is unlikely to invoke resistance from victims. For these reasons, the observer is likely certain that whistle-blowing is not the correct course of action. An observer considering reporting this type of hazing is likely aware they would face retaliation for casting the organization in a negative light for an activity deemed innocuous by most members. While subjective norm is important, there is less need to rely upon the perceived opinions of others in order to make sense of the situation (Weick, 1979). Another interesting link within the “not severe” model is motivation to comply serving as a predictor of behavioral attitude. TRA positions behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations as predictors of behavioral attitude; motivation to comply is predictive of subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In the present study, considering how important it is to comply with the expectations of relevant others shaped participants’ attitudes about blowing the whistle. This finding suggests the importance of relevant others in forming participants’ attitudes about whistle-blowing in less severe situations.

Interestingly, the TRA model’s anticipated link between the product term of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations on attitude toward the behavior was not supported in the “not severe” condition. There were two potential reasons for this finding. First, it appears concerns over costs associated with whistle-blowing were ameliorated in these conditions. For the “not severe” condition, the individual would likely not blow the whistle so costs would not be a factor. Next, this finding could be a product of the measure; our scale for behavioral beliefs/outcome evaluations dropped a number of items due to reliability concern and focused solely on costs associated with whistle-blowing. If the original scale had remained intact, it could have changed the outcome of the model.

In the “most severe” scenario, all links of the model were supported; like with the “moderately severe” scenario, the strongest links occur between the social norms factors and behavioral intentions. While negative outcomes, or costs, are typically considered very important in whistle-blowing decisions (Miceli et al., 2008), it

appears the severity of the situation can reduce these concerns. Instead, observer perceptions of how relevant others feel about whistle-blowing against hazing activities seem to take precedence. These relevant others include personal friends, the campus's Greek Life advisor, the university, and the campus newspaper. This finding may be also linked to uncertainty. MacNab et al. (2007) found cultures such as the United States marked by high uncertainty avoidance are more likely to produce whistle-blowers when violations of policy are obvious. In the "most severe" scenario, there is little uncertainty that a transgression is occurring. Thus, observers are guided by their beliefs about what relevant others would have them do about the situation. Concerns over costs associated with whistle-blowing become less important in the decision-making process as the observer is more certain someone could be injured by hazing. This is interesting because research indicates retaliation is more likely for individuals who blow the whistle on serious transgressions, including wrongdoing that could cause physical or financial harm to key stakeholders (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). It appears the seriousness of the transgression reduces concerns over costs associated with whistle-blowing and pushes observers to consider what relevant others would have them do.

The present study also found whistle-blowing is positively associated with the perceived severity of the wrongdoing (Miceli et al., 2008; Singer et al., 1998). However, prior literature reveals little else about how this relationship operates. The present study contributes to whistle-blowing scholarship by demonstrating that potential whistle-blowers might be influenced by different sources depending upon the severity of the situation. In "not severe" situations, observers are more likely to consider the costs and favorability associated with whistle-blowing in conjunction with how they believe relevant others feel about whistle-blowing. As the severity of the incident becomes more salient, costs and favorability ratings associated with whistle-blowing become less consequential; instead, the observer relies more heavily on their perceptions of what they believe relevant others would want them to do. An alternative explanation is that costs associated with *not* blowing the whistle become more consequential, in the form of legal liability for failure to report or potential harm caused to victims. This study also contributes to research utilizing TRA. Our findings suggest the predicted relationships between factors in TRA are only slightly altered based upon changes to the context of a situation. Still, some changes were found suggesting TRA scholars should consider the saliency of the situation research subjects are responding to and its possible influence on behavioral intentions.

Practical Implications

Hazing intervention efforts can be enhanced in three ways with knowledge accrued from this study. First, hazing education should not be limited to members of Greek and other university organizations. It is imperative that all members of the university community be educated about what constitutes hazing and its dangerous outcomes especially when considering the wide variety of relevant others who may influence observers of hazing and their decisions to report (Allan & Madden, 2006). The

present study revealed the importance of these relevant others in reporting intentions. An especially important group to reach is “friends” of the observer (Campo et al., 2005), which could include fellow Greeks or non-Greek students. The present study showed that the mean score on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates not at all and 7 indicates very much, for motivation to comply with friends was high across the three severity conditions ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.43$ for the “not severe” condition, $M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.35$ for the “moderately severe” condition, and $M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.28$ for the “most severe” condition). Hazing education aimed at all students would capture such friends, who are frequently relied upon by observers who consider reporting hazing. Second, education efforts must include negative physical and psychological outcomes associated with hazing. This study and other research indicated whistle-blowing increases along with perceived severity of transgressions. Even seemingly harmless hazing events can negatively impact the mental state of victims (Lipka, 2008); as Greek members are educated about all negative outcomes, whistle-blowing intentions may increase. Finally, university administrators must work to reduce the perceived negative costs associated with reporting hazing. These costs can weigh heavily upon the minds of hazing observers. University policies that forbid retaliation against whistle-blowers and that reward Greek organizations that report hazing might increase reporting.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Results of this study are considered in light of several limitations. First, study participants were not randomly selected. Instead, sororities and fraternities voluntarily agreed to participate. It is possible these organizations possessed different values about hazing than those that did not participate. Second, the use of one scenario per condition limits conclusions that can be drawn about severity. For example, the moderate severity scenario includes mention of water balloons, which might have gendered connotations for females. Other “moderately severe” scenarios may be gender-neutral and thus lead to different responses for participants. Moreover, like other whistle-blowing research, the dependent variable in the present study was behavioral intentions, rather than actual behaviors. We cannot say with certainty that those who indicate they would report hazing would actually do so. Finally, due to the low variability of the dependent variable behavioral intention in both extreme conditions (not and most severe), the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) models were not able to explain much variance in these two conditions. This suggested that, when the scenarios were on two extremes, participants’ decisions with regard to blowing the whistle were more homogenous and covaried less with the TRA traditional predictor variables. Future research should be aware of this issue and focus on soliciting more heterogeneous responses across different conditions.

Though investigating attitudes and intentions about whistle-blowing is informative in its own right (Richardson, Wheelless, & Cunningham, 2008; Trevino & Victor, 1992), future research should also examine which factors influence actual behaviors in response to hazing to see if these mirror what was learned in this study. Next, future

studies should also test the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), an extension of the TRA, to whistle-blowing intentions. The TPB adds perceived behavioral control to the TRA model; perceived behavioral control is described as individuals' perceptions about the presence of factors that may aid or hinder their execution of a behavior and the degree of control they perceive they have over these factors (Kwan, Bray, & Martin Ginis, 2009). Since those who witness hazing may feel powerless to stop it (Lipkins, 2006), a measure of perceived behavioral control may capture the weight of this factor in whistle-blowing decisions. Finally, future research might investigate which factors influence other communicative behaviors related to the whistle-blowing stages, including the behavioral intent to talk with others, for example, a faculty advisor, about an incident of concern and whether it should be reported.

Conclusion

The Theory of Reasoned Action is recognized for "its success in predicting and explaining volitional behaviors" (Ross et al., 2007, p. 124) in a wide variety of contexts; still, communication researchers have not used it to predict whistle-blowing intentions. The present study suggests the TRA is a useful framework for understanding factors contributing to Greek members' decisions to blow the whistle against hazing. More particularly, whistle-blowing intentions were a function of attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived severity of the hazing. This research is important for several reasons. First, hazing appears to be persistent within collegiate groups and organizations (Allan & Madden, 2006) so we should continue to explore mechanisms that can disrupt it. It is especially crucial to enhance our understanding of factors, for example, the perceived expectations of relevant others, which are influential to college students in speaking up against activities that cause harm. Finally, we need to continually increase our knowledge of whistle-blowing as it is often the only line of defense against unethical, illegitimate, or illegal organizational activities. We hope this study will initiate an ongoing body of research into hazing and whistle-blowing issues.

Appendix

Description of Hazing Scenarios

Scenario 1 (not severe)

A group from your sorority/fraternity goes out to eat one night. One of the actives discovers that the waitress neglected to bring her/his table napkins. You witness the active say to one of the pledges, "Hey pledge, go get some napkins for my table." Later, when one of the actives runs out of water, you hear an active tell him, "Just send a pledge to get you some."

Scenario 2 (moderately severe)

Your sorority/fraternity has an event that requires all members to dress formally. After instructing a group of pledges to get dressed for this event, you witness a group of actives throwing water balloons at the pledges.

Scenario 3 (most severe)

During a rush event, you witness a group of actives insisting that a group of pledges continue to drink heavily. It is evident that the pledges are already intoxicated. After the pledges have consumed the alcohol as requested by the actives, the actives ask the pledges to participate in a series of physical activities such as jogging in place, doing lunges across the floor, push-ups, and jumping-jacks. During this, many of the pledges become ill.

Note

- [1] Originally, 11 items were used to measure behavioral beliefs. The initial reliability assessment of this scale was low ($\alpha = .58$), suggesting possible dimensions of behavioral beliefs. Factor analysis revealed two factors: Concern over negative consequence of whistle-blowing and positive outcomes associated with whistle-blowing account for 48% of the total variance together. The first factor itself explained 28% of the variance and was more reliable ($\alpha = .81$) than the second factor ($\alpha = .74$). Whistle-blowing literature suggests the emphasis on negative consequences, or costs, is not surprising considering the omnipresent possibility of retaliation against whistle-blowers (Miceli et al., 2008). Allan and Madden (2006) found college students were concerned about reporting hazing because they did not want to get their group in trouble because of fear of negative consequences toward themselves, being labeled an “outsider,” and physical retaliation. This finding suggests possible negative outcomes associated with reporting hazing are most salient in the minds of prospective whistle-blowers belonging to tight-knit groups, while the positive outcomes of whistle-blowing is less prominent under these circumstances. Therefore, items in the second factor—positive outcomes associated with blowing the whistle (e.g., my reporting the hazing incident will help eliminate hazing from campus, my reporting the hazing incident will help alleviate negative stereotypes concerning Greek organizations and hazing, my reporting the hazing incident will help fraternities/sororities begin attracting better quality pledges, my reporting the hazing incident will bring awareness to the problem)—were dropped from the *behavioral beliefs* measure. The three remaining items of the first factor all concerning potential negative consequences for whistle-blowing were used to create a composite index score for *behavioral beliefs* measure.

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