2008

Women's perceptions of high risk drinking: Understanding binge drinking in a gender biased setting

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WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH RISK DRINKING:

UNDERSTANDING BINGE DRINKING

IN A GENDER BIASED SETTING

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Jill Lynne Russett

April 2008

COLLEGE WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH RISK DRINKING:

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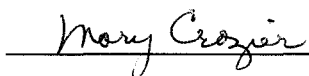
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, my partner, and my best friend, Jeff. From before the day I sent in my application to William and Mary until now as I finish this chapter, you have been my number one fan, providing me with endless support, encouragement, and motivation. Through the many late nights, the juggling of schedules, traveling, driving me to school, and endless hours of talking on the back porch, you have been with me every step of the way. I don't know how to thank you for giving me one of the greatest gifts in life; an opportunity to pursue my dreams. You are the only one who can truly understand the tremendous sacrifices we have made to follow this path as well as sharing in the tremendous feeling of pride and joy in such an accomplishment. You have always said I don't need to say "thank you" for loving me, so instead I will show you my gratitude as we embark upon the next road in our life. You have always been my number one and I love you with all my heart.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the other boys in my life, my three sons Alex, Nathan, and Jared. You were so little when I started this process that you haven't known Mommy as anything other than a student. Alex, you are so inquisitive and insightful. Your thirst for learning and drive for knowledge remind me of why I started this journey. I was so proud as you entered kindergarten and began your own education this year. Nathan, your lightheartedness, laughter, and insistence on my being present for you have always reminded me of what is most important in life. You have also grown so much and I can see your love of learning blossoming. You are like a sponge, absorbing everything around you. And Jared, you truly started this journey with me. Just a few weeks into the program you arrived in my life and completed our family.

Having a newborn to care for encouraged me to stay focused and gave me a light to reach for beyond this program. In some ways the time has gone by too fast and it's hard to believe you are now a little boy. Your warm and loving spirit, your energy, and mischievous ways have always brought a smile to my face. To my beautiful boys, my wonderful children, who for the past four years have endeared unknowingly, I love you with all of my heart.

My journey was not traveled alone. I could not have reached this juncture in my life without what each of you has given me to make me whole. I am filled with gratitude every day for my incredible family, your selfless sacrifice, the strength that you give me, and most of all for your love. For Alex, Nathan, and Jared, I hope that through this process I can instill a foundation for you to learn, challenge, and explore your dreams that have no known boundaries. I will support you in all of your endeavors. To Jeff, I give you my endless devotion, support, and love as we enter into the next phase of this journey. Your dreams have waited long enough.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." Lao-Tse

The path that life gives us cannot always be explained nor predicted. I don't believe it is by coincidence that upon moving to Williamsburg my first supervisor was Laurie Rokutani, a strong, intelligent woman who encouraged me to stand up for what I believe in and who allowed me to explore alternatives while gently guiding and supporting me along the way. It cannot be by chance that I would have the opportunity to be connected with the College of William and Mary and to have worked on so many collaborative projects with Dr. Rick Gressard and Dr. Mary Crozier who inspired my love of learning again and renewed my passion in the field of substance abuse. Just as probability alone does not explain how my conversations about evaluation strategies and research methodology with Dr. John McLaughlin and Dr. Andy Rowe would spark a new light inside of me and a desire to gain a greater understanding into these approaches. Maybe it was fate. Maybe it was luck. Some would say it is something greater than ourselves that led me into the doctoral program and on the path as a counselor educator. Whatever it may be, I feel privileged to have traveled this road.

"One can never pay in gratitude: One can only pay 'in kind' somewhere else in life."
Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The core of my success in this program has been in the relationships that have been fostered along the way. The acknowledgement to the educators, counselors, family, and friends only begins to scratch the surface of my heartfelt appreciation for your endless contributions.

To Dr. Rick Gressard; my advisor and chair of my committee. I am in awe of your skills as an educator and your devotion to the field of substance abuse and the counseling profession. You have a remarkable skill of connecting with students in a way that I can only one day hope to achieve. Your commitment to the field and professional organizations has set a standard for me that I will strive to reach and that has shown me the endless possibilities as an educator. Your warm spirit, intelligence, professionalism, and sense of humor are only some of the characteristics that make you an incredible role model. I am especially appreciative for the countless opportunities you have provided to me and for allowing and encouraging me to participate in projects beyond the ordinary. For the past four years you have been a constant in this process, providing me with endless support, motivation, and guidance. Whenever I had doubt in myself you always believed in me. Whenever I fell off course you gently led me back on the right path. Thank you hardly seems to be the right words. As I reflect on my experience at William and Mary I recognize that what I have achieved could not be possible without you. As I move forward with my career I will carry with me all that you have taught me and I can only hope to share with others a fraction of what I have gained from you.

To Dr. Kelly Whalon: Thank you for taking a chance on me! Your fresh perspective on my dissertation topic required me to explore areas in my field and of myself that could only be done through this process. Your skill as a qualitative researcher is remarkable. I greatly appreciate our countless meetings and discussions and always enjoyed hearing your constructions of my topic. Your openness, honesty, and willingness to share your opinion resulted in an end product that is fluid and complete. I hope to one day gain the insight and knowledge about qualitative research that you possess.

To Dr. Mary Crozier: I was so grateful that you agreed to serve on my committee and commute long distance. You always provided me with positive affirmations and made me feel like I could take on anything! I appreciate your questions and forcing me to think outside the box. Your knowledge of prevention and the college culture filled me with endless resources and ideas. Your vision and passion in the area of prevention is one I hope to emulate. I hope that our paths will continue to cross in the future.

To Dr. Foster: You have been a much greater influence on me than I imagine you know. As I look back, I believe you have taught me almost every core course. It was through this foundation that I began to develop my identity as an educator and stretch my belief in my abilities. You encouraged me as a mother, as a woman, and as a scholar. Thank you for reaching out.

To My William and Mary Family: I am fortunate to be caught in the best of both worlds. Dana, Chris, and Dave: you set the bar high and provided me the drive to achieve. I always felt accepted and that I belonged despite my frequent feelings of being lost. Greg and Yukio: I can't think of a better group to have for peer review! Your sense of humor and kindness always seemed to be there when I needed it most. To the others: Kristi, Sara, Emilie, Esther, and Adele; thank you for your friendship and adding to my experience.

To My Parents: Thank you Mom for always believing in me and supporting me in so many ways it's hard to put into words. I couldn't have done this without you. Dad, thank you for always asking me questions and trying to figure out exactly what it is I'm doing. I appreciate your caring and your interest. I love you both.

To Karen Chapski: I always looked forward to your emails so I could take a break from school work. Thank you for listening, supporting, encouraging me, and always being there for me to lean on. You are my best friend.

And finally, to the women of the study: It is because of your courage, honesty, openness, and authentic voices this is possible. Thank you for sharing your world with me, if only for a moment in time.

LIST OF FIGURES

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH RISK DRINKING: UNDERSTANDING BINGE DRINKING IN A GENDER BIASED SETTING

ABSTRACT

In recent years rates of binge drinking among college women have continually increased. Research in this area has been predominately quantitative and has been limited in ways it assesses the college drinking environment and issues related to women. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of high risk drinking among college women and to explore how the participants conceptualize this behavior.

In this qualitative study the researcher used a feminist lens to understand and analyze the findings. Focus groups and individual interviews were the primary source of data collection. In all, twenty-five women from a moderate sized southeast public university participated. Purposeful selection was used to identify women in the Greek social sororities and who were representative of a range of sophomores, juniors, and seniors on a predominately Caucasian campus. The women were asked to explore their perceptions of high risk drinking, including how they define this activity, how it is perceived on campus and their perspective of high risk drinking as it relates to gender.

Findings indicate a strong gender biased environment in which almost all drinking occurs in a male dominated setting, particularly through the fraternities. As a result, the drinking environment creates inherent differences for women who are faced with issues of power, gender, and control unique to the college setting. In addition, women's perception and understanding of binge drinking is inconsistent with the

literature in this area creating disconnect between research and reality. New findings

have significant implications in working with this population.

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WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH RISK DRINKING:

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

College Student Drinking

Over the years it has been well accepted that high levels of alcohol use by

college students are common practice. In fact, an overwhelming majority of students

(approximately 80-90% including those under the legal drinking age) engage in the use

of alcohol as part of their undergraduate experience and about two out of every five

students engage in binge drinking (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seiberg, Nelson &Lee, 2002).

Researchers have examined a number of facets related to this phenomenon and over the

years prevention efforts targeting this problem have become increasingly sophisticated.

Nevertheless college student drinking remains one of the leading public health issues

among U.S. colleges and universities (Presley, Meilman, & Leichliter, 2002).

Multiple strategies have been employed to collectively address problem drinking

among men and women through programming aimed at the individual, the environment,

and in community systems. Efforts to reduce college student drinking have been

numerous, focusing broadly on; education, enforcement, availability, and normative

behavior (Larimer & Cronce, 2002; Vicary & Karshin, 2002). Despite increased

attention to this phenomenon and more sophisticated prevention efforts, colleges have

had limited success in reducing high risk drinking as evidenced by the remarkably stable

rates of binge drinking over time (Wechsler, et al., 2002). In fact, college student

drinking patterns have not significantly changed since the first college drinking study by

Strauss and Bacon (1953). It is therefore imperative that research is not only continue in this area, but perhaps it is time to consider alternative methods of exploring this issue in order to generate new theories and approaches to this age old problem.

Statement of the Problem

Large scale national studies over the past ten years of college student drinking have provided important information on the prevalence and pattern of alcohol use among undergraduate students. The primary instruments used for estimating recent college alcohol use include the College Alcohol Study (CAS) developed by the Harvard School of Public Health, the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (Core) developed by the Core Institute at Southern Carbondale University, and the Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) developed by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan (Wechsler et al., 2002; Presley, Cheng, & Pimental, 2004; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2001). Results from these studies consistently find high levels of engagement in heavy episodic drinking or binge drinking among college students. The operational definition for binge drinking widely accepted in the research literature is defined as the consumption of five or more alcoholic beverages in one sitting by men and four or more in a sitting by women at least once in the past two weeks (Wechsler et al., 2002). Over the past ten years the aforementioned studies continue to find that approximately 44% of the college student population engages in binge drinking (Wechsler et al., 2002; Presley, et al., 2002).

The practice of binge drinking is widely concerning due to the range of consequences and significant number of problems encountered by students and the college community as a result of engaging in this type of drinking behavior. A review of

alcohol related problems among college students ages 18 to 24 found that annually more than 500,000 students were unintentionally injured, 600,000 were physically assaulted, and 70,000 cases of sexual assault were reported (Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). During the same time, incidents of driving under the influence rose from 2.3 million to 2.8 million cases. Even more concerning, is that approximately 1,700 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 died in 2001 (an increase of 6% from 1998) as a result of hazardous drinking (Hingson, et al., 2005). Due to these serious consequences, alcohol abuse on college campuses is considered by many as the most significant health risk behavior among this population (Wechsler et al., 2002; Presley, et al., 2002).

Drinking and College Women

Drinking large quantities of alcohol is a behavior that has largely been associated with men, both within the context of society such as portrayed in the media; and among research studies which has predominately assessed male drinking patterns (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2002). In past research women were frequently not considered at all, or grouped with men suggesting results were applicable to both genders (Mann, Ackermann, Croissant, Mundle, Nakovics, & Diehl, 2005). However what was once considered a predominately male behavior has permeated the lives of women; whereas not only are women drinking "ferociously" (as suggested by Patrick Kilcarr, the director of Georgetown's Center for Personal Development, 1999, in Morse, 2002) but women's level of drinking are increasingly reaching rates of those of men (Wechsler, et al., 2002). Recent trends in college women drinking show that as each new cohort of students enter higher education, gender

differences related to drinking among college students are found to be diminishing

(Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, D'Arcy, 2005; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003).

Of particular significance is the mounting evidence indicating women process

alcohol differently than men and as a result are more vulnerable to its effects. That is,

women have been found to experience more significant health related consequences

including the faster onset of liver disease, greater risk of heart problems, and increased

risk of reproductive disorders (Wechsler et al., 2002; Mann et al., 2005; NIAAA, 1999).

These health concerns, coupled with the fact that women who drink heavily may

experience more serious consequences including blackouts, violence, unintended and

unprotected sexual activity, date rape, and sexual assault (Wechsler, et al., 1995;

NIAAA, 1999) indicate this is a problem that cannot be ignored. Despite these concerns,

there have been limited research studies specifically addressing high risk drinking

among women.

Without question college student drinking is a complex issue. However given

this topic has been minimally researched among women, the complexity in

understanding the manifestation and consequences of binge drinking are amplified.

Koren Zailckas (2005) illustrates the complexity of drinking among college aged women

and the unique experiences women face in her autobiography "Smashed: Story of a

Drunken Girlhood." In her personal account of alcohol abuse as a young woman in

college, she states that drinking was an expectation of her environment. She confesses to

spending more time in the bars around campus than at the gym, library, or dining hall.

Zailckas states alcohol became the preferred conduit of bonding with women, a means to

numb her emotional pain, and provided a sense of false courage. She writes her story as

a warning to other girls who could potentially follow in her footsteps. This important documentary is presented as an example that Zailckas' story may be similar to that of thousands of other college women.

Trends in College Women's Drinking Patterns

Data from the College Alcohol Study (CAS) spanning from 1993 to 2001 indicates there has been a significant increase in college women's drinking, particularly within extreme patterns of drinking, such as women who never or rarely drank alcohol and for those drinking significantly heavy amounts of alcohol (Wechsler et al., 2002). For example the number of women who engaged in frequent binge drinking (defined as binge drinking three or more times in the past two weeks) increased from 17.1% in 1993 to 20.9% in 2001. Similarly there was also an increase in the numbers of women who drank on ten or more occasions over the past 30-day period (12.3% to 16.8%) and in the percentage of women who drank with the intention of getting drunk (35.6% to 42.4%). At the same time fewer women on all women's campuses refrained from alcohol use as seen at all women's colleges where abstinence decreased from 26% to 21%. While the rates of drinking at both ends of the spectrum (abstinence and frequent binge drinking) changed, the rates of binge drinking for women remained consistent at about 44% during the period of the CAS study.

Important questions remain unanswered regarding why women's consumption of alcohol has increased. Although research has identified a number of different reasons students have reported for engaging in drinking, it has provided little insight specific to women. In their review of the literature, Young and colleagues (2005) noted that research in the 1980's revealed women to engage in heavy drinking as a means to

change their emotional state (such as feeling lonely, angry, depressed, and restless), whereas men were more likely to report drinking to get drunk. However, as pointed out in the same study, in the 1990's a notable shift was seen in the research indicating more similar reasons for men and women to engage in drinking (Young et al., 2005). For example, both genders were found in recent studies to be just as likely to report drinking to get drunk and drinking to reduce negative affect (McCabe, 2002). Other research indicates a discrepancy in the reasons for drinking by men and women and has found women who drink experience greater symptoms of depression and anxiety and drink as a means of dealing with negative affect to a greater extent than men (Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams, & Young, 2001;Young et. al., 2005). In 2002, Vicary and Karshin summarized the past findings regarding why students drink and suggest that men and women engage in alcohol use for different reasons. Clearly these studies show there is much to be learned about the potentially unique aspects of alcohol use between men and women.

As evidence increases indicating men and women drink for different reasons, these findings must be interpreted with caution. As indicated earlier, the majority of studies have used women as a comparison group rather than exploring the unique issues related to women. Also, studies tend to focus on the "problem" of drinking and frequently ignore the context in which it occurs. In addition the underlying understanding of differences in perceptions, meaning, and emotional constructs experienced related to drinking have been given limited attention and have not been fully articulated (Ricciardelli, et. al., 2001; Young et. al., 2005; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003).

A Snapshot of Perceptions Related to Alcohol use by Women

Many possibilities have been offered to explain the changes in drinking patterns among women. One suggestion is that the impact of our evolving social system has made drinking more acceptable and even expected among women. Some, like Babcock (1996) contend that relaxing sex roles in our society has allowed women to be more open about their alcohol use, and as a result ask for help more freely when needed. Others such as Ehrenreich (2002) further this notion in her belief that gender roles are changing and that today's college women are seeking equality to that of men, including the opportunity to engage in the use of alcohol as a "rite of passage." This view may bear weight given that in the past it was discouraged for women to drink socially in public. No longer a social taboo, drinking behaviors among women have become more lenient and socially acceptable than in decades past. This poses for consideration whether women are actually drinking more or if women are more willing and able to talk about their use (Babcock, 1996). While Babcock (1996) asserts that gender is a significant variable in considering drinking patterns, further research is needed to more fully understand the similarities and differences of alcohol use by women and men.

Nevertheless, evidence shows drinking patterns among women have changed, and that this transformation has been met with negative perceptions attributed to this behavior. For instance, heavy consumption of alcohol by women continues to carry with it a negative stigma of being sexually promiscuous and has been tied to perceptions of less traditional feminine roles of caretaking and nurturing (Wilke, Siebert, Delva, Smith, & Howell, 2005; Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Young, et al., 2001). As suggested by Ricciardelli and colleagues (2001), a paradox has developed within our society in which

more liberal gender roles have increased the expectations for women to engage in drinking; however views about women drinking remain very negative.

Other perceptions of alcohol use provide insight into understanding patterns and reasons for use. For example, the perceptions of quantity and frequency of drinking by peers among college students is often inaccurate. Students perceive their peers as drinking at much higher rates than their actual reported use (Presley, et al., 2002). These perceptions may lead students to drink more than they would have intended as a means of fitting in with their peers. Women's misperceptions of their own drinking were supported in other studies. An exploratory study by Young et al. (2005) entitled "Drinking Like a Guy" reported that women who engage in frequent binge drinking are copying the drinking patterns of their male peers. Results indicate women believed they obtained an elevated social status among their male peer group but did not achieve an equality or similar power to that of men. Despite increased research and media attention to alcohol abuse in college and the consequences of drinking by women, the role alcohol plays in the perceptions of college-aged women has received relatively little attention and much remains virtually unknown (Gleason, 1994; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1997; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2006).

Prevention and Women's Drinking

Current studies indicate that prevention initiatives should consider gender differences in designing prevention programs (NIAAA, 1999; Ricciardelli, et al., 2001; Quintero, Young, Mier, & Jenks, 2005). As the literature suggests, men and women have unique needs related to alcohol use and therefore prevention efforts aimed at either

men or women independently may have a greater impact (Ametrano, 1992; Vickers,

Patten, Bronars, Lane, Stevens, Croghan, et. al., 2004; The National Center on Addiction

and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2006). Ametrano (p. 513, 1992) says

"programs are missing the boat when they treat men and women the same regarding

their reasons for using." Similarly, other researchers suggest that in light of the complex

nature of female high-risk drinking, prevention efforts need to be developed for women

and need to be more intensive than those for men (Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Young et al.,

2001). However this has not been the case as current prevention programs are

implemented universally without consideration to gender (The National Center on

Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

While quantitative studies have identified many of the major social and cultural

influences on college drinking patterns relatively few qualitative studies have been

conducted in this area. Quintero and colleagues recommend the use of qualitative

research as a means to "add depth to existing quantitative studies concerning students'

perceptions of drinking and the implications these perceptions have on alcohol abuse

and prevention programs" (Quintero, et al., p.293, 2005). Thus, the purpose of this study

is to explore college women's perception of high risk drinking and to investigate the

way they construct meaning of this experience through a qualitative research design.

Nature of the Study

This study is based in a phenomenological approach or understanding of the

lived experiences of a small number of college women. This was done through an

interpretivist paradigm that aims at not only describing the experiences of the women but interpreting them within their social and cultural context (Jansen & Davis, 1998). Furthermore, this study employed the use of a feminist perspective with consideration to issues of power, privilege, culture, and social structure (Lather, 1992; Riger, 1992). The resulting design of the study placed this researcher in a cooperative relationship with the participants within their natural setting. As such, I was able to gain a more subjective understanding of the participants' experiences with high risk drinking in a college setting. Findings were interpreted by this researcher and described using the women's authentic voices and supporting quotations. Subsequent results interpreted from the data collected provide insight and possible explanations of high risk drinking among this population, ultimately lending a voice and visibility to issues faced by college women.

Research Questions

Broad research questions provided an overarching guide to frame the study while more specific interview questions afford a structure for acquiring information from the participants (Cantrell, 1993). Overarching questions posed addressed experiences, perceptions, and behaviors related to high risk drinking. In an effort to describe the experiences and perceptions of college women who are engaged in high risk drinking, subsequent interview questions were designed with a feminist lens in mind.

Procedures

Data was collected over the course of one semester and consisted of three focus group interviews, six individual interviews, ongoing observations, and review of artifact data. In all, 25 women, inclusive of sophomore, junior and senior sorority

members, participated in the study. The overall design allowed events to unfold

naturally through the participants lived experiences.

Data were analyzed using inductive analysis in which no predetermined theory

was proposed at the onset, but instead allows this process to be a continual evolution as

data unfolds. The process of understanding the data consisted of immersion in the data,

organization of the data, and generating meaning from the data. This information was

then understood through chunking and sorting data into categories, refining these

categories, and ultimately discovering themes that emerged. The findings were reported

using a descriptive narrative that included the authentic voices of the women. Finally,

the themes were presented using a feminist lens to interpret the women's words, both

explicit and those revealed below the surface. This final narrative linked findings to the

literature and provided new insight to the experiences faced by college women.

Significance of the Study

According to the U.S. Surgeon General and the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (USDHHS), a fifty percent reduction in binge drinking (to twenty

percent) among the college populations has been identified as part of the "Goals for the

Nation" by the year 2010 (USDHHS, 2000). College health educators and prevention

specialist tasked with addressing high risk drinking can benefit from research that

specifically addresses the issues of college women. This research will challenge

traditional assumptions about drinking behaviors of college women and will bring to the

forefront a population where drinking patterns are often minimized. Additionally

gaining a greater understanding in women's perception of binge drinking and reasons for

engagement in this behavior could provide valuable information to support gender

specific prevention programming and ultimately in designing programs specific to women.

Organizational Design of the Study

Chapter I provides an overview of the proposed study, including an outline of the problem, its background, limitations, assumptions, and purpose of the study. In addition, an overview of the research questions and methodology are presented. Chapter II provides a review of the research literature related to the rates of drinking, patterns and trends of binge drinking, specific concerns for women, and prevention efforts. A feminist lens is used to guide the study and a review of the literature from this perspective is discussed in this section. Chapter III identifies specifically the methodology, research design, and steps taken in the interpretation and analysis of the data. Chapter IV includes a descriptive summary of the findings including the use of the authentic voices of the women who participated in the study. Lastly, Chapter V provides further interpretations of the study from the researcher's perspective, a discussion of the results, and presents implications for future interventions as well as potential subsequent areas of research.

CHAPTER TWO

A Selected Review of the literature

Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a framework for understanding the phenomenon of high risk drinking specific to college women. A comprehensive examination of the literature related to binge drinking assists in providing knowledge of the factors contributing to and addressing this widespread problem. A few studies that have specifically addressed college women's substance use reveal the unique challenges and experiences faced by this population (Young, et al., 2005 and Williams, 1998). This literature review assesses the following areas of college student drinking: (a) An understanding of high risk drinking, its prevalence and epidemiology, (b) The pervasiveness of high risk drinking among college women, (c) Consequences and the unique experiences faced by college women, and (d) A review of the efforts used to address this problem.

Understanding High Risk Drinking Among College Students

College drinking has long been identified as a serious health risk on college campuses. While drinking in college is frequently considered a "rite of passage" for many students, college presidents have described it as the single greatest threat to the quality of campus life (Presley, et al., p. 82, 2002). Specifically, binge drinking and frequent binge drinking are of particular concern due to the extreme behaviors and harmful effects associated with this issue (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler, et al., 2002).

14

Definitions

Over the years the understanding of what entails a drink and how drinking is measured has become more consistent in the literature though some discrepancies remain. While the specific volume varies slightly, a standard drink is generally defined as one can or bottle of beer (12oz), a glass of wine (5oz), or one serving of liquor (1.5oz) either as a shot or in a mixed drink (NIAAA, 2002). Binge drinking has consistently been defined as consuming five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women in about a two hour time frame. This pattern of drinking typically results in a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent or above, the legal level of intoxication in most states. In 2004, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) adopted the aforementioned definition for binge drinking and is commonly accepted as the standard in the research on this topic. The distinction in quantity identified for men versus women has been established due to differences in body chemistry and the metabolism in processing ethanol (Wechsler, Dowdall, & Rimm, 1995 ;Wechsler et al., 2002; Mann et al., 2005; NIAAA, 1999). In addition to binge drinking, the College Alcohol Survey uses the term "frequent binge drinking" to describe the act of binge drinking on three or more occasions in the last two weeks (Wechsler, et al., 2002).

These definitions have not been without controversy. Researchers at the Rutgers Communication and Health Issues Partnership for Education and Research (CHI) looked at the concept of binge drinking among college students and found the standard definition of binge drinking did not resonate with this population (Lederman, Stewart, Laitman, Goodhart, & Powell, 2000). The study at Rutgers found that 92% of students

did not think of themselves as binge drinkers despite the fact that 35% of these students drank at levels consistent with the definition of binge drinking. Instead, students believe the issue of time and consequences are of greater concern than quantity, yet the definition of binge drinking does not take these factors into account. As a result, Lederman and colleagues (2000) present an argument to change the terminology of binge drinking. These concerns raised by the researchers at Rutgers warrants further consideration when taking into account terms such as binge drinking. However, for the purpose of this literature review the above defined terms of binge drinking (five drinks for men/ four drinks for women) and frequent binge drinking (three or more times in the past two weeks) will be used to describe patterns of high risk drinking.

Measuring National College Drinking Rates

The phenomenon of high risk drinking has been well researched using multiple national longitudinal studies. Some of the most well known instruments used for assessing rates of alcohol use among the college population are the College Alcohol Study (CAS), the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (Core Survey), and the Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) (Wechsler et al., 2002; Presley, et al., 2004; Johnston, et al., 2001). While each study varies to a degree in the manner in which data are collected, its sample, and other methodology, outcomes related to binge drinking from each of these sources have been remarkably similar.

The Harvard School of Public Health, College Alcohol Study (CAS), is one of the most well known national and longitudinal studies related to college drinking. Over the past fifteen years, the CAS has been administered four times; once in 1993, 1997, 1999, and most recently in 2001. The questionnaire asks about alcohol use and

associated problems, tobacco and other drug use, and related lifestyle issues. The 2001 College Alcohol Study involves the collection of surveys of over 10,000 full-time students drawn from the same 119 institutions as previous years (Wechsler et al., 2002).

The CORE Institute's Alcohol and Other Drug Survey (CORE Survey) is a national survey that has been administered annually since 1989. The CORE survey assesses the nature, scope, and consequences of alcohol and other drug use on college campuses. It was later expanded to include student's perceptions and beliefs about drug and alcohol use, sexual behavior, and violence related to alcohol and drug use. The most recent CORE survey was conducted in 2005 and consisted of 33,379 undergraduate students from 53 colleges. Results for this review were drawn from the most recent CORE report to College Presidents. This report specifically assessed substance use between 1998 and 2000 (Presley, et al., 2004).

The Monitoring the Future (MTF) Survey began initially with high school seniors in 1975, extending to eighth and tenth graders in 1991, and now includes follow up study surveys of these graduating classes beginning in 1980 and continuing through 2000. For this literature review, focus will draw from the MTF, National Survey Results on Drug Use 1975-2000; Volume II, College Students and Adults. Reports of this study include follow up studies of students one-to-four years post high school who are enrolled full time in a two or four year college. In addition to assessing the rate of alcohol and drug use, Monitoring the Future looks at levels and trends in behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs related to alcohol and drug use at different points throughout the lifetime (Johnston, et al., 2002).

Using these well researched longitudinal studies as a framework provides an understanding of trends related to high risk drinking among college students. Drinking patterns associated with binge drinking, frequent binge drinking, and abstinence are presented. Students typically engaged in high risk drinking are identified and described with specific emphasis on risk factors associated with women. In addition, student's perceptions of high risk drinking behavior are reported.

National College Drinking Patterns

The three surveys described share similar findings related to rates of college binge drinking. Over the past decade, Wechsler et al. (2002) found relatively stable levels of binge drinking to exist with approximately 44% of college students classified as binge drinkers (five or more drinks in one sitting for men and four or more for women over a two hour period). The CORE survey reported similar findings of 46.3% of students classified as binge drinkers, while the MTF reported slightly lower rates of 41.5% (Johnston, et al., 2002). These percentages correspond to approximately two in every five students engaging in binge drinking. According to the CORE survey, of those who engaged in binge drinking, 55.5% were male and 40.1% were female (Presley et al, 2004). Again, the MTF survey found these rates to be slightly lower, with 48% of males and 34% of females' binge drinking (Johnston, et al., 2002).

Remarkably, over the year's very little change in binge drinking has occurred. On the other hand, data supports greater differences in the polarization of drinking in both levels of abstinence and frequent binge drinking. The CAS found students who abstained from alcohol over the past year increased in 1993 to 2001 from 16% to 19% respectively (Wechsler et al, 2002). The CORE reported 15.3% of both male and female

students did not drink in the last twelve months (Presley et al, 2004). A notable exception to this occurred in all women's colleges where rates of abstention decreased during this same time frame from 26% to 21% .This is particularly alarming given that attendance at all women's school has historically been thought of as a protective factor. (Wechsler et al, 2002).

During the same time, the CAS reported students who engaged in frequent binge drinking, sometimes called heavy episodic drinking, increased from 20% (in 1993) to 23% (in 2001) (Wechsler et al, 2002). The 2000 CORE survey noted individuals classified as frequent binge drinkers as 30% male and 20% female (Presley et al, 2004). Again, at all women's colleges the increase in frequent binge drinking was particularly noteworthy, climbing from 5% (in 1993) to 12% (in 2001) (Wechsler et al., 2002). Additionally more students were drinking to excess as noted on measures of frequency of drinking, frequency of drunkenness, and drinking to get drunk (Wechsler et al, 2002).

To summarize, the review of the aforementioned longitudinal studies provide a useful framework for examining trends related to high risk drinking by college women and substantial reason for concern among this population. It is important to emphasize that while some drinking patterns have remained constant, women's overall drinking over the years has slowly climbed and women are increasingly exhibiting patterns of unhealthy drinking habits (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002; Young, et al, 2005). Although historically undergraduate men have engaged in drinking at higher rates than undergraduate women, studies confirm the trend that women are drinking in larger amounts, with greater frequency than ever before, and with greater consequences (Ricciardelli, et al., 2001; Wechsler, et al., 2002). In fact, mounting evidence suggests

drinking patterns by women are converging and that the gender gap for increased drinking between men and women is closing (Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; and Young, et al., 2005). The closing in this gap is particularly evident in the area of binge drinking among undergraduate women (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002; Young, et al, 2005).

College Student Groups at Risk

While increased drinking among college women has just begun to emerge, other sub-segments of the student population have already been identified. Nearly half the college population reports binge drinking annually, though certain subgroups of students are at increased risk of engaging in high risk drinking and experiencing subsequent related consequences. The research has consistently found incoming freshman, college athletes, and Greek-letter social organizations are at greatest risk for heavy episodic drinking (Turrisi, Mallett, Mastroleo, & Larimer, 2006). For the purpose of this literature review and subsequent study a closer look at the Greek social system is needed, specifically that of sororities.

Greek student organizations

Men and women involved in Greek student social organizations show some of the heaviest and most frequent drinking patterns among college students and are more likely to experience alcohol related problems (Wechsler et al, 2002; Presley, et al., 2004; Johnston, et al., 2002; Turrisi et al., 2006). One study reported significantly higher use related to quantity in which the average number of drinks consumed by fraternity members was twelve drinks per week compared to that of non-Greek men who reported six drinks; and sorority women who reported six drinks compared to non-Greek women

who reported two drinks (Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998). Another study conducted in 2005, seven years later, speaks to the increased frequency of use by Greek social organizations, finding 70% of men and 50% of women who are members of fraternities and sororities engaged in binge drinking compared to 42% of men and 29% of the women non-members (McCabe, Schulenberg, Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Kloska, 2005). Most recently, in 2006 Turrisi and colleagues (2006) reported sorority members as being twice as likely to engage in binge drinking (62%) compared to non-sorority members (35%).

In addition to membership in fraternities and sororities, men and women living in Greek student housing were at additional risk for drinking greater quantities and with increased frequency than Greek members who lived in alternative housing. Of the women living in sorority housing, 80% indicate they engage in binge drinking, with similar rates (86%) found among men living in fraternity housing (Turrisi, et al., 2006).

Greek letter social organizations possess a strong relationship to the use of alcohol and many of their social functions are tied to drinking. One only has to look to the media portrayal of such images as "Animal House" to recognize the long standing history of alcohol use among fraternities and sororities. Yet there is still a great deal to learn about the campus culture, and specifically that of Greek organizations. With regard to women, despite the high rates of alcohol use among sorority members, very little is known about the attitudes and behaviors related to women in the Greek student system (Presley, et al., 2002; Alva, 1998, Caldwell, 2005). Further studies are needed with this population to understand the higher rates of alcohol use and to develop appropriate interventions for this subgroup.

College Drinking Prevention Efforts and Theory

Research, development, and implementation of college drinking prevention

programs have become increasingly more intentional in recent years. This in part is due

to efforts of the NIAAA who in 1998 established a Task Force on College Drinking to

include assessing the needs of college administrators and providing funding to support

the development, implementation, and evaluation of prevention interventions (Turrisi, et

al., 2006). As a result the majority of four-year colleges provide some form of alcohol

prevention programming to their students, though the principles, methods, and programs

vary widely (Wechsler, Weitzman, San Giovanni, & Seibring, 2000; Turrisi, et. al.,

2006). A brief overview of alcohol prevention programs is provided as a means of

understanding of current practices, their efficacy, and program limitations.

Prevention theory and programming aimed at college student drinking addresses

separate domains that target the individual, the group, and the environment. In the field

of substance abuse prevention these three overlapping components are aimed at specific

populations known as *universal, selected,* and *indicated* (Hogan, Gabrielson, Luna, &

Grothaus, 2003). *Universal* strategies address the population as a whole with the goal of

preventing or delaying the onset of use. Programs targeting the entire college campus are

examples of universal strategies. *Selected* strategies target subsets of the population

considered at risk by virtue of their membership or involvement in particular groups

regardless of their individual risk factors. Identified populations for selected strategies

include fraternities and sororities members or incoming freshman in which specific

programming is targeted toward these groups. *Indicated* strategies focus on individuals

who are exhibiting early signs or consequences of alcohol including individuals who

identify as binge drinkers or who have received alcohol related infractions (Larimer & Cronce, 2002; DeJong & Langford, 2002).

Prevention programming occurs within the three levels of prevention just described (universal, selected, and indicated) and consists of two types: *primary* and *secondary* (Hogan, et al., 2003). *Primary* prevention is aimed at increasing awareness to high risk drinking and developing alternatives to drinking through the use of education programs, environmental strategies, and policy change. *Secondary* prevention programs focus on students who are already engaged in high risk drinking through brief interventions or highly structured programming (Larimer & Cronce, 2002). Most promising prevention efforts addressing excessive drinking on college campuses strongly support the use of a comprehensive approach that incorporate the three target domains (individual, group, and environment) and that are designed for specific populations (universal, selected, and indicated) in mind. An example of a comprehensive approach would be to target multiple groups (individuals, the college student body, administrators, and surrounding community) using both general education and specific targeted programs (Quintero, et al., 2005; Larimer & Cronce, 2002; Vicary & Karshin, 2002).

College prevention programming incorporates multiple theoretical perspectives and is grounded in well established research on risk and protective factors associated with college student drinking (Hogan et al., 2003). Larimer and Cronce (2002) conducted an extensive review of the literature on individual prevention programs for college student drinking. Their meta-analysis consisted of reviewing studies from a 15-year period from 1984-1999; review of the Promising Practices: Campus Alcohol

Strategies sourcebook; and contacting authors identified in the search. Results from this analysis found prevention efforts have been largely developed in the following theory based approaches: (a) Education, which include theories of norms and value clarification, (b) Cognitive Behavioral theory, and (C) Motivational Enhancement theory.

Education Approaches

Education programs often focus on the negative aspects of drinking, aim to increase awareness of associated problems with drinking, and assist in skill development to moderate this behavior (Quintero, et al., 2005). Typically this has been accomplished through freshman orientation, residence hall programming, curriculum infusion, specific dedicated substance abuse classes, and campus-wide awareness programs (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). While these approaches have been found to increase knowledge among participants, in their review, Larimer and Cronce (2002) found these approaches to show little support for their efficacy.

Values Clarification

Another type of prevention effort are value clarification programs. These programs are designed to help students evaluate their goals and incorporate responsible decision making about their alcohol use into their goals or values. Two promising programs using this approach are; "On Campus Talking About Alcohol" and "Delts Talking about Alcohol." While they report reductions in rates of drinking from the baseline to the follow up, results are limited by the sample size, procedures, and use of comparison groups (Larimer & Cronce, 2002).

Social Norms

Social norms marketing is a theoretical approach to behavior change that uses information about the socially normative levels of drinking as a means of changing problematic drinking behavior by changing students' perceived drinking norms (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). Researchers have established that individual drinking practices are strongly related to their perceptions of their peers' attitude and drinking behavior and that social motives are a common reason why students drink (Perkins & Wechsler, 1996). In utilizing the norms or values clarification approach, students' perceptions about the acceptability of high risk drinking behavior are examined. Data are then used to correct misperceptions about the number of students engaged in drinking and the quantities they consume (NIAAA, 2002). This is most commonly done through social norms marketing strategies such as mass media messages through poster campaigns, newspapers, t-shirts, etc. Mixed results exist in regard to the efficacy of this approach, although some studies have shown college campuses that use this approach have had a reduction in rates of binge drinking (Vicary & Karshin, 2002; Larimer & Cronce, 2002).

Although social norms marketing efforts are intended to target high risk drinking, they are having minimal impact with Greek student organizations. One likely reason for this is that while most college students overestimate how much their peers are actually drinking, this has not been the case among Greek fraternity and sorority members. In fact, members of these groups have accurately estimated the normative drinking patterns among their peers (Larimer et al., 2004 in Turrisi, 2006). Therefore social norms marketing may not be the most suitable approach with students who engage in high risk drinking. Additionally, social norms strategies are most often targeted to the college populations as a whole without consideration of potential gender

differences within its messages. As noted by Korcuska & Thombs (2003), gender-based parameters for "normative" drinking likely exist however previous prevention efforts has not sufficiently accounted for differences in gender in the measurement of perceived norms.

Researchers agree the use of education efforts alone have had limited success (Amertrano, 1992). While such approaches may increase knowledge about negative consequences, they do little to change actual behavior. The 2001 CAS survey confirms this notion in its measurement of different educational approaches students were exposed to on campus including: lectures, workshops, handouts, posters, and articles. Results indicate such approaches were not associated with a decrease in high risk drinking (Weschler, et. al., 2002). Despite these findings and acknowledgement by prevention specialists that information and education alone cannot change behavior, the majority of substance abuse prevention programming continues to be educationally based (Vicary & Karshin, 2002).

Cognitive Behavioral Theory

Many prevention programs are based in cognitive behavioral interventions that attempt to change distorted thinking about substance abuse while enhancing adaptive coping skills (Ametrano, 1992). Often the cognitive behavioral approaches incorporate information, values clarification, and/or normative reeducation as discussed previously. Incorporating the education based content is often done in the context of teaching skills to modify beliefs or behaviors associated with high risk drinking (Larimer & Cronce 2002).

A wide range of cognitive behavioral programs exist with most emphasizing skills training. Examples of cognitive behavioral programs include teaching individuals how to alter their expectancies about alcohol's effects, documenting daily alcohol consumption, monitoring their blood alcohol levels, increasing refusal skills, and stress management. The programs are designed to help individual's manage their alcohol consumption and challenge personal beliefs about alcohol use (NIAAA, 2002).

Several cognitive behavioral programs have demonstrated behavioral changes in drinking. The extent of this change varies widely depending on the intervention and specifics of the study. While these studies showed greater promise than educational approaches, results are limited by sample size and evaluation efforts (Larimer & Cronce, 2002).

Motivational Enhancement Theory

A more recent approach utilizes Motivational Enhancement Theory or Motivational Interviewing (MI), which is based on the concept of increasing students' intrinsic desire or motivation to change their behavior. This approach supports the premise that individuals alone are responsible for their drinking behavior (NIAAA, 2002). Given that students are often ambivalent about alcohol use, this approach is well suited for this population (Quintero, et al., 2005).

Efforts using this approach incorporate brief sessions (one or two), alcohol information, skills training, and personalized feedback. This approach has been facilitated with college aged students in emergency room settings, through computerized alcohol assessments, and during one time motivational feedback sessions. Feedback includes information on personal drinking behavior, negative consequences, and

personal risk factors. Studies have found promising support for the efficacy of brief personalized motivational enhancement techniques, delivered both individually and within group settings. Long term follow up studies of these interventions are needed (Larimer & Cronce, 2002).

Efficacy of Programming

While prevention programming has had substantial advances in its approach to college age drinking, it continues to demonstrate little impact on the problem. A greater understanding of the attitudes and behaviors of binge drinking through the eyes of college students may contribute to messages and programs that more effectively meet the needs of this population (Lederman, et al., 2000). Specifically, as research suggests that women are drinking differently in recent years, new approaches to prevention programming with this group may be warranted. However gender specific interventions are virtually non-existent.

Alcohol and Women

Despite the years of research on college student drinking, relatively little attention has been given specifically to the role alcohol plays with women. This may be in part because consequences faced by women are less overt than their male counterpart, or because differences in women's issues have only recently begun to emerge. Consequently, it is necessary to review issues specific to women's drinking and emphasize the pertinent research conducted with this population.

Consequences of Binge Drinking Related to Women

One of the greatest concerns related to drinking among college women are the consequences they experience while engaging in this high risk behavior. While similar

consequences associated with binge drinking exist for both men and women, they tend to be of greater significance and with more extreme implications for women. Both genders experience equally the unpleasant effects related to excessive drinking such as having a "hangover" or feeling "nauseated and/or vomiting" as well as the more severe effects of blackouts or personal injury (Wechsler, Nelson, & Weitzman, 2000). Additionally, binge drinking is closely associated with low academic performance for both men and women (Wechsler et al., 2002). However, there has been a primary focus on high risk drinking among men, suggesting this behavior is more harmful because men drink in greater frequency and with more overt consequences. Consequently, women's use of alcohol has historically been downplayed or ignored.

Although women do not drink as much or as often as men, the consequences they experience as a result of high risk drinking are significantly more serious. As was previously mentioned in the definition of binge drinking, it is well known that women are affected by alcohol at lower dosage levels than men (Wechsler et al., 2002; Mann et al., 2005; NIAAA, 1999). Additionally there is new evidence indicating there is also a faster progression for women in developing alcohol dependence and an earlier onset of adverse consequences related to alcohol use (Wechsler et al., 1995). For example, women develop complications of the liver related to alcohol use in a shorter period of time and through the use of smaller quantities of alcohol compared to men. Women are also at higher risk for other medical conditions including brain damage and heart damage, despite drinking at similar rates to that of men (NIAAA, 1999). Such evidence points to higher health risks than men.

In addition to the biological differences, women are at greater risk of unintended and unprotected sexual activity and physical and sexual aggression as a result of alcohol use (Mohler-Kuo, 2003, Abbey, 1991). Women who drink at high rates report engaging in greater levels of unplanned sexual activity and are more often victims of acquaintance rape and sexual assault (Wechsler et al., 2002, Abbey, 1991). In a separate study, Wechsler et al. (2000), found one out of ten women who engage in frequent binge drinking reported engaging in non-consensual sex while under the influence of alcohol. At least 50% of sexual assaults on female college students are associated with alcohol use (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Testa, Parks, & Norris et al., 2002) and it is estimated that a women has a one in four chance of being raped during her college years (Benson, Gohm, & Gross, 2007). A study conducted by Mohler-Kuo and colleagues (2003), utilized a random sample of respondents from the College Alcohol Study conducted in 1997, 1999, and 2001 and compared the data of heavy episodic drinking to prevalence of rape. Results of this study found women who engaged in higher levels of episodic drinking and who belong to a sorority were at greater risk for being raped.

Contributing Factors to High Risk Drinking in College Women

Researchers are not fully able to explain the gradual increase in women's drinking over the years. A review of the literature does provide us with some insight into the changing drinking patterns among women. Consistent with a multitude of studies in college drinking, Wilke, et al. (2005) found the greatest predictors of women engaging in high risk drinking are being white, being a member of a sorority, having experienced forced sexual contact, and having a greater number of sexual partners. In addition, as discussed under the prevention efforts, evidence exists that students frequently possess

distorted perceptions about the rates of alcohol use among college students including both quantity and frequency of use. For example, college student's perceptions of alcohol use by their peers were as much as nine times higher than their actual reported use. The CORE survey found students perceived alcohol use to be a central part of the social life on campus, finding 86% of students perceived alcohol use to be an important part of the social life for men and 73% perceived it to be a part of the social life for women (Presley et al, 2004). However, as reported earlier, high risk groups such as Greek social organizations were able to accurately assess the level of their peer drinking (Larimer et al., 2004 in Turrisi, 2006). Such perceptions are critical in understanding the phenomenon of high risk drinking. However the notion that women do not drink as much as men persists and therefore issues related to women may be ignored or minimized (Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005).

Alcohol and Gender

The cultural norms on college campuses associated with drinking patterns among women have transformed considerably over time. Once considered a social taboo, over the years drinking among women has become more permissive and socially acceptable behavior than in decades past. Recent bestselling authors, Robbins (2004) "Pledged: The Secret Life of Sororities" and Zailckas (2005) "Smashed" describde the freedom women have today to engage in a variety of drinking behaviors on college campuses. Today women are just as likely to engage in drinking as a rite of passage, to drink at a bar, attend a fraternity event or other social function, or to use fake identification to gain access to alcohol. College women are also increasingly engaging in drinking games, an

activity intended to promote the large consumption of alcohol in a relatively short period of time, resulting in high levels of intoxication.

While drinking games are not new, the research on this phenomenon is, and preliminary results may indicate this behavior as a contributing factor to increased rates of binge drinking by women. Engagement in drinking games (more typically associated with male drinking) has shown women becoming increasingly involved at rates similar to those of men and experience greater consequences. Pederson and LaBrie (2006) examined a sample of 105 undergraduate men and women's drinking patterns through a one-on-one interview and completion of two structured questionnaires. Participants were administered the 23-item Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI) which assesses problems during the past month related to drinking and the 8-item revised College Alcohol Problem Scale (CAPS-r) that addresses personal and social problems experienced in the last month related to drinking. In addition participants completed a 3-month Timeline Followback for alcohol use (TLFB) led by a trained researcher. The TLFB uses a calendar to assist participants in recalling retrospective drinking behavior, including days of drinking, frequency of drinking, and quantities consumed. Included in the TLFB were questions related to participation in drinking games. While results indicate both men and women engaged in drinking games at similar rates, involvement in drinking games were particularly concerning for women as their participation was clearly associated with negative consequences for alcohol use, whereas this was not the case for men. Such consequences included missing class, increased tolerance, driving under the influence, and engaging in unprotected sex. The study found an increased involvement in the participation of drinking games by women compared to past research

and that women drank significantly more while engaged in this behavior. One of the limitations of this study is its small sample size. Additionally, the TLFB uses self-report data from past experiences in which the participant may not accurately remember. Nonetheless the study is significant as being one of the first known studies to address women's engagement in drinking games.

Although drinking has become more acceptable for college women, perhaps even encouraged or expected, when it comes to binge drinking a double standard continues to exist. Multiple studies support the notion that differences in gender roles contribute to differences in the way men and women drink. Common gender stereotypes suggest that drinking for men is perceived as a "symbol of manliness" (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989, p.213) or is associated with physical stamina (Ricciardelli, et al., 2001). Getting drunk continues to be socially acceptable for men, while on the contrary, heavy intoxication by women continues to be perceived negatively (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989). Perceptions of women who drink heavily suggest they lack the traditional feminine traits of caretaking and nurturance and instead demonstrate an increase in the loss of sexual inhibitions and promiscuity (Wilke et al., 2005; Bailly and Lo in Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Young, et al., 2001). On the other hand, individuals with a high affiliation to feminine traits report less quantity and frequency of alcohol use (Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1997).

In 2000, Ricciardelli and colleagues set out to examine whether gender stereotypes, restrained drinking (ability to control drinking by setting limits) and self-efficacy for alcohol refusal (individual confidence in the ability to refuse alcohol) could differentiate between moderate and high risk drinking among undergraduate men and

women. The sample included 301 women and 118 men drawn from two Australian universities. The location of the study may have unique cultural differences, although this was not specified. Participants completed four surveys: the Drinking Refusal Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (DRSEQ) that measures the ability to resist drinking, the Temptation Restraint Inventory (TRI) that measures attempts to control, cut back, and concern about drinking, the Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS) that measures problems with alcohol and dependence, and the Australian Sex-Role Scale that assesses positive and negative gender stereotypes. Additionally, participants reported on the quantity and frequency of their drinking.

Findings from this study (Ricciardelli et al., 2000) indicate a greater complexity in the social and cognitive factors of female drinkers than of male. High risk drinking women scored significantly lower on all three self efficacy scales and higher on four of the five drinking restraint sub scales than did men. Women demonstrated lower capacity to refuse drinks in social situations, when they were experiencing negative emotional states, and when faced with other temptations, despite the fact they were concerned about their drinking. Evidence supported similar studies that found women experience more symptoms of depression and anxiety and were more likely than men to use alcohol as a means of dealing with negative affect. Women also scored lower on positive femininity scales which have been associated with heavy drinking and intoxication. On the other hand, for men, fewer of the cognitions described above and none of the gender stereotypes discriminated between moderate and high drinkers. Ricciardelli et al. (2000) suggest that due to the increased complexity found among the women that prevention efforts may have the greatest impact if they are gender specific and that programs need

to be more intensive for women. In addition, they recommend further research with women and studies that consider female drinking independently rather than as an adjunct of male drinking. Young and colleagues (2005) did just this in a recent qualitative study, one which bears further consideration.

In 2005 Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, and D'Arcy conducted an exploratory study of the increase in undergraduate women's frequent binge drinking. Specifically, they examined the relationship of being able to "drink like a guy" (defined as frequently consuming four or more drinks in one sitting) with gender equality. The sample consisted of 42 female undergraduate women separated into four groups: a Stable High Group (frequent binge drinkers), a Stable Low Group (non-binge drinkers),a Decreasers Group (change in binge drinking to non-binge drinking from 2001 to 2003) and an Increasers Group (change in non-binge drinking to binge drinking from 2001 to 2003). A series of focus groups were facilitated with these women where they were asked to respond to popular media articles that related the increase in college women's drinking to a change in gender roles and the relevance of "drinking like a guy." Examples of women's response to this topic are illustrated through the following quotes:

> "one of my best friends, she can drink any guy under the table, very, very proud of it and she will tell anybody" (p. 255)

and

> "It's like the girl that's walking around with the orange juice and vodka, the girl that's drinking the beast out of the cup just like every other guy, a lot guys will …[say]; Oh that's awesome" (p.254)

Findings from this study "drinking like a guy" seemed to be particularly relevant to current undergraduate women and may contribute to the understanding of why there has been a dramatic increase in the rate of frequent binge drinking. In particular, results of this study suggest men's opinions play an important role in the decision for college women to drink excessively. Specifically, women's *perceptions* about men's opinions of their drinking behavior are more important than men's *actual* opinions. As the study was based in qualitative data, generalizations and interpretations must be made with caution. However it does provide rich information regarding this population and is significant because it sheds light on the unique aspects about why women engage in high risk drinking.

Evidence from a number of studies suggests that women engage in high risk drinking for different reasons than men. The two studies just described demonstrate how new research is emerging that is beginning to explore the role of stereotypes, women's perceptions, and underlying social and cognitive constructs have on women's decision to engage in high risk drinking. Yet the research specific to women is significantly limited and has not provided a complete picture of women's perceptions and understanding of high risk drinking (Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; Ricciardelli, et al., 2001). Additional qualitative research can further the exploration and information gained from women about their reasons for high risk drinking and their perceptions about engaging in this behavior. In particular, continued research in this area may benefit from attention to feminist literature.

Feminist Theory Applied to College Women Drinking

Feminist theory is a diverse field emerging from different historical, political, and individual perspectives and sees gender as a basic organizing principle (Lather, 1992). The assumptions behind the feminist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed, subjective, and embedded within the context of gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation. Feminist theory postulates women have been and continue to be subordinated, or are prohibited from fully developing their potential. As such, feminism seeks equality for men and women in all spheres of life; politically, economically, and socially. In addition, feminist theory attempts to explain how and why women have occupied positions of lesser power and investigates how women's situation might be improved. No single definition of feminism exists, however the following central tenets are found in much of the feminist literature (Hoff, 1995; Bepko, 1991):

(a) The belief that women and men are treated differently by society, both today and in the past, and that women frequently are unable to fully participate in all social arenas and institutions as their counterpart

(b) A desire to change the situation

(c) The elimination of old assumptions by providing a new frame of reference and looking at issues through a new lens in which women are not inferior and men are not the norm (Hoff, 1995; Bepko, 1991)

The central understanding of feminist theory doesn't assume differences or similarities between men and women but aims for equality. In general, feminists believe a few inherent (biological) differences exist and that are unchangeable. On the other hand feminist focus on a number of individual differences and variation that can be transformed (Gilligan, 1982; Hoff, 1995). In relation to binge drinking, this would

suggest that the biological differences that exist in metabolizing alcohol are inherent and cannot be modified. Instead, feminist theory would address gender inequality within the context of power relations, social patterns, and politics. In the area of binge drinking, such issues as gender stereotypes, relationships, and sexuality would be addressed.

Drinking, especially to excess, is viewed as more socially acceptable for men than women and is more consistent with male gender roles (Farmer H., & Cooper, 1992). While women may not view getting drunk as a feminist statement, engaging in drinking has been described as a means of getting along in a "guys world" (Ehrenreich, 2002). Although women can be seen as reaching equality of men in binge drinking (such as in the convergence of drinking patterns), Ehrenreich (2002) offers that gender equality does not mean the opportunity to engage in self destructive, high risk behaviors at the same rate as men. Rather, using a feminist perspective provides a guide in which to understand such experiences. Through feminist epistemology researchers are able to make visible what is so embedded in our culture.

The vast majority of research on women's issues related to high risk drinking has occurred through experimental groups, focuses on men, and lacks attention to social context. In doing so, important social, cultural, and historical factors are ignored, making it implicit that differences are biological (Riger, 1992). Lott argues that "gender differences exist for certain behaviors at certain ages and in some situations, but that behaviors are better understood in context, not by gender alone" (Lott,1988, p.56, in Williams 1998). This understanding should be taken one step farther in that not only is it important to consider women's use of alcohol and the environment, but it is equally important to analyze this phenomenon from the perspective of women living in it.

Feminist research is distinctive in that it generates its suppositions from the perspective of women's experience. Fundamental to feminist theory is to understand the actual lives and injustices faced by women who need to be afforded the opportunity to express their view of how they understand the phenomenon of high risk drinking and how it relates to their decision making process (Ehrenreich, 2002).

A Need for Change

The growing problem of college women's increased engagement in binge drinking and resulting consequences is evident. At the same time, there has also been increased attention in recent years to the development, implementation and evaluation of prevention efforts targeted at college student drinking. Despite these efforts, rates of binge drinking have remained virtually unchanged for the past fifteen years. Perhaps more alarming is the recent increase in the change in drinking patterns among women. Several possibilities exist to explain the limitations of current research.

First, although prevention efforts have improved, many of the fundamental strategies employed today are the same approaches recommended over 30 years ago. In 1976 the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) recommended both personal development and environmental change were needed. Some specific recommendations included alcohol awareness campaigns, workshops on drinking attitudes, freshman orientation programming, education of fraternities and sororities, and campus drinking policies and regulations (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). These recommended strategies are not necessarily ineffective approaches, but does imply a link is missing to make them more successful. For example, research overwhelmingly supports utilizing a combination of prevention strategies to effectively address high risk

drinking. However in practice, approaches to programming are often implemented in isolation, rather than in combination (Quintero et al., 2005). Additionally, the use of the term "binge drinking" may be missing the mark. Lederman and colleagues (2000) found this term did not resonate with the majority of college students, despite the fact almost one third of students drank at levels consistent with the literature definition of binge drinking. They suggest student's thinking about this subject needs to be taken into account and suggest inadequate attention is being paid to the words used to conceptualize drinking behavior. In addition, while prevention efforts emphasize the need to consider the environment, little research of women's alcohol use has occurred within the context of women's interactions in their surroundings.

Second, the vast majority of substance abuse studies historically have focused on male participants as the primary research subjects (Nolen-Hoeksema & Hilt, 2006; Ackermann, Croissant, Mundle, Nakovics, & Diehl, 2005). Research on the use of alcohol had predominantly referred to men. Often women were not considered in published studies or no gender-specific evaluations were conducted (Ackermann et al., 2005). As a result it is possible a distorted picture of college women's drinking patterns has emerged. In past studies, women were assumed to misuse the same substances, for the same reasons, and with the same impact as their male counterparts. Social research has gradually been changing to be more inclusive of women, a necessary shift as men and women are believed to live in two separate drinking cultures (Caldwell, 2005). Even so, it has only been within the past ten to twenty years that any separate research has been conducted on the causes and consequences of alcohol and drug problems among women.

This leads to a third consideration that the development of prevention programs have neglected to consider gender differences. Particular research based and effective prevention efforts aimed specifically at women have been nearly non-existent. The majority of programs have approached college student drinking prevention in a unisex manner, without regard for the potentially unique needs associated with gender (The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2006). Interestingly, there is current knowledge about gender differences that could be incorporated into substance abuse programming. For example, it is known that women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol than men, yet this information is not consistently conveyed to women. In addition, current findings indicate prevention initiatives may have the most impact if they are directed separately to males or females, and if they challenge traditional assumptions about behavior and needs, however prevention efforts aimed specifically at women are limited (Ricciardelli, et al., 2001; Ametrano, 1992; Wilke et al, 2005).

Lastly, research in high risk drinking among college women has been overwhelmingly quantitative. While such studies provide a wealth of information regarding prevalence and trends, and a number of variables associated with male and female high risk drinking, they only provide part of the picture and much still needs to be learned (Ametrano, 1992). Limited qualitative studies exist related to college women drinking. Using a qualitative approach allows rich information pertaining to perceptions of high risk drinking of women to be heard through their own voice.

While it seems apparent a fresh perspective is needed and may provide insight to an age old problem, the solution is not so clear. Holmila & Raitasalo (2005) suggest that

"gender differences in alcohol consumption are found everywhere to such an extent that they can be considered one of the few universal gender differences in human social behavior" (p. 1763). However, many questions about gender and alcohol need further clarification. Neither the universality nor the variability of gender differences in alcohol use has been explained adequately (Holmila & Raitasalo, pg. 1764, 2005). In particular, women's perceptions of high risk drinking may lead to new insight regarding this phenomenon.

Current approaches to research on women's drinking patterns are primarily drawn from quantitative paradigms and fail to consider the subjective experiences of women as active and experiencing participants in their social world. Additionally, substance abuse prevention efforts lack consideration of women's unique needs. Therefore further qualitative research is needed that draws from a feminist perspective to explore the potentially unique way that female college students construct the experience of high risk drinking. Qualitative methods allow women's words about high risk drinking to be explored in ways quantitative paradigms would not. Using the work of feminine theorists as a guide, women's voices about how they experience high risk drinking and how they construct meaning about alcohol use in their environment can be heard through a qualitative study. It is important to note such a study is both culturally and historically bound and that women's understanding of reality will be different for women in different cultures and periods of history. The results of this research have significant implications to inform future prevention programming and related policies associated with college student drinking, particularly for women.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

For several decades researchers and educators have sought to understand the phenomenon of high risk drinking among college students. Until recently, quantitative methodology has been the primary investigative tool, resulting in the identification of a number of patterns of high risk drinking related to the quantity, frequency, and behaviors associated with use. However measurement studies have only provided part of the picture, neglecting the subjective experiences of participants and their understanding of high risk drinking and meaning behind this behavior. Utilization of qualitative analysis can potentially extend the already identified universal patterns of college drinking, thus providing greater insight into the understanding and meaning attributed to high risk drinking behaviors. While a few qualitative studies on this topic have begun to emerge they are far and few between. Such studies have just barely scratched the surface and present only a glimpse into the contributing factors of the existence of high risk drinking. A relatively unknown area related to high risk drinking and of particular need is a greater understanding of why students engage in this behavior and the meaning students attribute to alcohol and drinking. Gaining a new perspective on patterns of high risk drinking, specifically through the experiences and perceptions of college aged women will contribute greatly to the known body of research in this area.

Qualitative approaches utilize an inductive strategy in which the researcher does not start with a theory to test or impose preexisting expectations on the process, but

rather begins with a conceptual framework which is changed, modified, and refined in the process of making sense of the data as the study progresses (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). No prior assumptions are made. Instead a conceptual understanding of the data emerges as it is collected and by the researcher's own growing recognition of the information acquired throughout the research (Patton, 1980). Qualitative research is grounded in the belief that social objects and events are constructed within human minds resulting in multiple realities and can therefore only be understood by studying them within their context (Cantrell, 1993). The overall design is naturalistic allowing events and data to unfold in a naturally occurring setting through participants lived experiences.

A number of qualitative methodologies and strategies exist that differ in their design and approach to the understanding of the multiple realities of the participants being studied. This study utilizes an interpretivist approach in seeking to understand the phenomenon of high risk drinking among college women and to realize the meaning of these experiences within the context of their natural setting. Additionally, a feminist perspective was identified as a means of interpreting the data and to shed light on the multiple contexts of political, social, historical, economic and cultural influences associated with a college campus environment. An interpretive paradigm interwoven with a feminist perspective provides a meaningful framework to begin to explore this phenomenon at a deeper, interpersonal level. The purpose of this study was to lend a voice to women's perceptions of high risk drinking, to gain an understanding of this phenomenon as it relates to a feminist lens, and to raise awareness of the potentially unique needs of college aged women. The study was guided by the following broad research questions:

1. What are the participant's experiences with high risk drinking?

2. How do these experiences shape their perceptions of drinking?

3. How do these experiences affect their drinking?

Qualitative Research Design

Adopting a qualitative framework for the proposed research design provides a guide to all facets of the study including (a) the philosophical ideas behind the inquiry; (b) structure for data collection and; (c) support for analysis procedures (Creswell, 2003). The following description makes transparent the assumption made within the framework, describes the strategies of inquiry, and outlines the methodological steps taken for data collection and analysis.

Qualitative Framework

Qualitative research differs in several key ways from the traditional positivist nature of conventional research, most notably in terms of *ontology*, or what is knowledge; *epistemology*, how we know what knowledge is; and *axiology*, the values associated with the approach (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative research, knowledge is understood without manipulation of the research setting and utilizes naturalistic inquiry with the researcher as the primary instrument in obtaining information.

From this perspective several assumptions must be made explicit. First, meaning is individually constructed and varied through multiple realities that exist, and no two realities are shared in totality (Schwant, 1994). Therefore gaining multiple participant viewpoints through their own words is essential. Second, it is imperative to understand these views are shaped within a historical and social context in a holistic manner.

Consequently, engaging in, and understanding the setting is critical. Third, the nature of reality is constructed through human interaction. The meanings of experiences are influenced through the interaction with one another and are mutually and simultaneously shaped (Patton, 2002). As such, it is impossible to separate the values of the researcher and participants from the information generated.

Suitability of qualitative approach to proposed study

As expressed earlier, significant knowledge exists regarding patterns of college age drinking from a quantitative perspective, yet little is known about how this phenomenon is perceived by the individuals who engage in this behavior, leaving practitioners mystified as to how to impact these patterns. Standardized scales depict many facets of what men and women have in common related to drinking but reveal little in the way of how women define these experiences from men or how women may or may not differ from one another (Riger, 1992). Studying women in their natural setting at college and listening to their unique voices can shed light into the meaning of the experiences of high risk drinking. The use of personal and interactive communication and prolonged engagement with the women diminishes the power relationship typically present in conventional research allowing women a unique opportunity to express themselves and validate their worldview (Jansen & Davis, 1998).

Paradigm: Interpretivism

To frame the study an interpretivist paradigm was selected which aims to not only describe but to interpret the lived experiences of everyday life (Jansen & Davis, 1998). In using this approach, researchers attempt to understand a phenomenon and to interpret its meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting. The

goal of interpretive research is to increase understanding of an area of inquiry by generating information that is helpful in making decisions about similar populations thus allowing what is learned in one study to be useful in other settings (Patton, 1980). It does not however, lead to empirical generalizations as is found in quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Interpretivism is characterized by an emergent design and the flexibility of the researcher. Rather than describing every aspect of the design at the onset the interpretivist approach allows researchers to sort through questions, theories, and events as they become known and to later describe these details in the final report. In fact, Lincoln and Guba contend that the design cannot be known in advance, but must emerge, develop, and unfold (1985, p. 225). The subjective perceptions of individuals are sought through close interaction with participants and within a social context. The relationship between the researcher and participants is critical and with it rests the understanding that personal values, experiences, and realities cannot be separated.

The use of the interpretivist paradigm will serve to focus on the understanding and interpretation of high risk drinking. The intent of interpretivist research extends beyond solely reporting data in the manner it is collected but instead looks for meaning in an effort to elevate the perspectives of the participants (Jansen & Davis, 1998). Through this research approach, individual occurrences of drinking within the social structure and the meaning attributed to these events will be interpreted by the researcher, ultimately enhancing the voice and visibility of college women. As will be discussed later, it should be noted that the interpretations made by the researcher are filtered through personal experiences that are influenced by the researcher's individual social,

political, historical, and ethical underpinnings as well as through the use of a feminist lens (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Suitability of paradigm to proposed study

Employing an interpretivist paradigm allows not only the women's voices to be heard, but provides a conceptual framework for understanding these narratives within the context of the political, economic, and cultural power inherent on a college campus. The framework provides flexibility in adapting questions and in gathering data as information is uncovered. It also allows for engagement with the participants and provides a means to validate the worldviews of the participants in their own words (Jansen & Davis, 1998).

Perspective: The Lens of Feminist Theory

Feminist theory provided the theoretical framework and perspective used to guide the development and implementation of the study. While the interpretivist paradigm provides the structure to articulate the inherent power differentials among women and the college community, a feminist lens provides the perspective for understanding and articulating these differences. In other words, interpretivism provides the framework to express power differentials while the feminist perspective makes explicit what these differences are.

Feminist theory recognizes the central role of gender as well as other forms of social stratification including those based on race, class, and sexual orientation and its influence on the research process (Lather, 1992). Specific to this study is the central role of gender in the shaping of women's consciousness, interactions, and environment, as well as in the distribution of power and privilege. Feminist epistemologies suggest

traditional methods of research only consider the dominant view of society, one that is primarily shaped by men in power. Several examples in the research literature exist to illustrate the dominant male view in our society and how women's issues have historically been addressed. First, male subjects have traditionally been the primary focus of research, neglecting women altogether. Studies that have included women typically focus on between-gender differences rather than within-gender differences, making the assumption that all women are the same. As women's issues became of increasing interest, research topics were constricted to those that were either considered as specific to women (such as housework or abortion) and were often seen as either too trivial or too taboo a subject to study. In addition, relatively few women have held significant roles in research and faculty positions, a figure that still holds true today, further influencing the role of women in research (Riger, 1992). Facilitating research from a feminist lens brings focus to women issues and makes clear the approach to epistemology.

Another source of bias found in research is the lack of attention to social context. In doing so, any differences found in men and women are inherently attributed to biological differences or are suggested to be made by free will or self-determination (Riger, 1992). Feminism argues we must not only articulate the social and historical contexts of the matter being studied, but must also consider the established power dynamics within these contexts. Often issues of gender differences, contextual issues, and power dynamics are so entrenched in our society and taken for granted that individuals are not even aware they exist (Creswell, 2003). Feminist research design

lends itself to cooperation of the researcher and participants and places emphasis on the natural context.

A central tenet of feminism is to give voice to women's experiences and to view societal issues from a women's perspective. Maracek, (1989), summarizes this by stating "what we know and how we know depend on who we are, that is, on the knower's historical locus and his or her position in the social hierarchy (p.372)." It is not the intent of feminist perspectives to separate out women from men but rather more accurately understand the contextual world in which both live together (Riger, 1992). It is through the use of a feminist perspective, I seek to understand the central role of high risk drinking as it relates to the function of power, culture, and social structure within the college environment.

Suitability of perspective to the Study

While quantitative research broadly views the process in a linear fashion, qualitative design allows the researcher to emphasize and address the complexities of the participants. This is one of the reasons feminist researchers support the preference of naturalistic research over traditional survey based research methods. Likewise, a shift in power occurs as participants are seen as the experts in the research study rather than the researcher and evens out the power dynamics. This is emphasized through the use of one-to-one interviews and focus groups in which participants voices are heard in their own words, limiting the potential for the researcher to dominate the process (Riger, 1992). Women who engage in high risk drinking may be sensitive to the negative stereotypes attached to this behavior. Additionally, many of the women are likely to be under the legal drinking age of twenty-one. Given the potential stigma associated with

this topic the feminist perspective provides a foundation of empowerment and strength by assuming respondents are the experts and respecting, not judging, their worldview (Jansen & Davis, 1998).

Research Strategy: Phenomenology

The use of a feminist perspective is helpful in beginning to question the inherent social structure of college student drinking through issues such as gender and power but in and of itself is not enough. Adding a layer to the research design is the use of phenomenology. This strategy was employed to gain a better understanding of the behavior of women within the college environment from the participant's own frame of reference. Phenomenological research is characterized by exploring the meaning of individual lived experiences, often of a small number of individuals. It is concerned with how the individual experiences the world and recognizes that the researcher as an active, involved participant in understanding the individual's lived experiences. This is typically accomplished through extensive engagement with individuals through in-depth and iterative interviews over a series of time. It is assumed that through this highly engaged relationship and use of dialogue and reflection, the meaning of an experience will be revealed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Relationship of Phenomenology to Study

In seeking to understand college women's perspective of high risk drinking the phenomenological approach fits well with the interpretivist paradigm and feminist perspective already described. It is not practical, nor is it necessary, to meet with all college women about their understanding of high risk drinking. Phenomenological research provides a guideline to meet the intended goal of allowing women to describe

their personal meaning of high risk drinking through the voices of a few select women. The use of time through continued engagement over the course of a semester allowed women to reflect on their initial constructions of high risk drinking and change or adapt them, while simultaneously allowing myself as the researcher an opportunity to explore the meaning of these occurrences.

Research Methods

The methods employed with this research are consistent with the study's interpretivist paradigm, feminist perspective, and phenomenological strategy. The following is an overview of the setting and participants, the role of the researcher and personal influences, and a description of data collection. The steps used in data analysis are outline and ethical considerations are presented. Lastly, issues of trustworthiness and authenticity as well as limitations and assumptions of the study are presented.

Setting

The study took place in a moderate sized southeast public university with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 5,500 students. The university boasts strong academic achievement with 80% of the student body having been in the top tenth of their graduating high school class. Women account for approximately 54% of the students enrolled. The university lacks significant cultural diversity with approximately 66.7% of the population being Caucasian, 6.9% African American, 6.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.3% Hispanic, and 11.7% unknown. An active social Greek life exists on campus consisting of twenty-eight chapters, including sixteen fraternities and twelve sororities of which 27% of women participate.

Participants

In order to attain information-rich samples, participants were identified and selected using purposeful sampling. Denzin & Linclon (2000) describe purposeful sampling as intentionally seeking out individuals who need to be heard from regarding the purpose of the study. For this study the sample consisted of college aged women (age eighteen to twenty-two) who were (a) full time undergraduate students, (b) representative of upper and under classman (sophomores, juniors, and seniors) ,and (c) members of Greek social sororities.

The use of sororities was selected for several reasons. First, while it is recognized that not all sorority women engage in high risk drinking, statistically a significant majority will. In fact sorority members are twice as likely to engage in binge drinking as their non- Greek affiliated peers and more than three times as likely to engage in binge drinking if they reside within a sorority house (Wechsler et al., 2002). Secondly, Sororities provided in tact groups of women who have a level of familiarity with one another, have social functions established around the use of alcohol, and who could be readily accessed for focus group discussions. In total, twelve sororities, all predominately Caucasian, are present at the location of the study.

Overall, 25 women participated in the study including six sophomores, ten juniors, and nine seniors. Freshman students were excluded from the study due to the time of year the study was conducted and accessibility to this group. At the time of the study freshman women were in the process of pledging their sorority and were not yet initiated as sisters. Some were leaders in their sorority or on campus; many others were involved in extracurricular activities and campus supported groups. All but two

participants were Caucasian. The women who participated represented three separate sororities.

Site Access

Various methods were employed to access participants, including personal invitations, email correspondence and professional campus connections with student administrators. Initial contact for the study began with the associate director of student activities for Greek life who provided a contact list of current sorority presidents, including their name, email address, and phone number. Using this list I sent an initial email to all sorority presidents requesting participants for a focus group. In addition I requested, and was approved to attend an inter-sorority council meeting early in the fall semester. The inter-sorority council is made up of two women representatives from each sorority chapter and who typically are in leadership positions. At this meeting I presented information about my study, distributed a flyer, and circulated a contact list for interest and follow up. All of the 22 women present at the meeting agreed to be contacted for future participation in the study. I followed up with the first three sororities who initially responded via email to my request for participants and these women ultimately comprised my focus group members.

As an additional means of accessing participants, I was able to offer incentives including small monetary compensation and the invitation to provide pizza and soft drinks should the focus group occur during a typical meal time. As a means of encouraging student participation and subsequent follow up each participant received their choice of a twenty dollar gift card to either "WaWa," a local convenience store, or "Target" at the completion of each interview.

Researchers Role

Central to qualitative research is the role of the researcher. It is acknowledged that what is learned through data collection, interpreted through data analysis, and represented in writing is first filtered through the researcher and must also take into account the current sociopolitical and historical context (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As the researcher, I am the primary instrument in data collection that occurs within multiple contexts over time and which requires a level of responsiveness, flexibility, and openness to the holistic process (Cantrell, 1993). Traditionally in research, the emic perspective or the insider's perspective (participants) is contrasted with that of the etic perspective or the outsider's perspective (researcher), suggesting the voices of college aged women can be uniquely separated from that of the researcher (Patton, 2002). However, this explanation is not as simple as inside/outside or us/they. One of the most difficult challenges as a researcher is to disengage myself from commonly shared beliefs so that these beliefs do not predetermine research findings (Riger, 1992). For example, the cultural background, values, and experiences I bring to the table as a researcher are impossible to detach from the group of women connected with this research.

Having recognized the potential limitations as a researcher, it was imperative that as I engaged in this study I made my feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and values that could potentially influence this study as transparent as possible. As such, the practice of self reflection was necessary, requiring careful consideration of my beliefs and values as a woman and a researcher, the motives driving my research, and how my past history may influence the interpretation of the women's voices and stories heard through data collection.

Researcher as Instrument Statement

The process of transparency began with my own initial "researcher as instrument" statement written prior to engaging in the study. In this statement, I thoughtfully engaged in self reflection regarding my personal thoughts, ideas and preconceived notions related to the subject of high risk drinking among college women. My perspective as a women, a former member of a Greek social sorority, and personal undergraduate college experiences related to high risk drinking all are considered in a self reflective statement. Understanding my personal values and biases has been an ongoing process beginning with framing the research questions and continuing throughout the collection of data. I made my understanding of the impact of my personal autobiography as transparent as possible through discussions with other researchers, engaging in peer debriefing and through a written narrative in a researcher as instrument statement found in Appendix G.

Reflexive Journal

Transparency continued throughout the study with the use of a personal field journal that accounts for my personal impressions, reactions, and comments. My journal described the setting, people, activities, and personal emotions associated with data collection are useful in interpreting and analyzing data to be included with the report (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The journal was maintained for the duration of the study and contributes to the credibility of the study. See Appendix H for excerpts from the reflexive journal.

Data Collection

Data are described by Rossman and Rallis (2003) as the basic building blocks of information which through the process of analysis becomes knowledge. In qualitative studies, discovering knowledge is a process that emerges through experience. Inherent in this experience is ambiguity, sensitivity, and self awareness (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The application of phenomenological research advocates the use of words in the form of in depth interviews and face-to-face interaction to bring forward the voice of participants. The use of observations, material culture, and other documentation provides insight not otherwise experienced as an additional way of understanding the meaning of the experience as lived by the participants (Cantrell, 1993). The data generated by this researcher's time spent in the natural setting is consistent with qualitative methodology.

Interviews

Focus Groups

A primary source of data collection was the use of interviews throughout a series of focus groups. Morgan states "opinions about a variety of issues are generally determined not by individual information gathering and deliberation but through communication with others (1993, p 54). The use of focus groups is believed to reduce the influence of the researcher, tipping the balance of power toward the group (Madriz, 2000). Focus groups were initiated first, followed by individual interviews with selected participants. The use of focus groups at the onset of the study provided an opportunity for group interaction and allowed individuals to interrelate with one another to generate an open discussion and understanding of the topic. Given that college student drinking generally occurs in the context of a social setting, focus groups provided a useful venue

for gathering data. Likewise, the sorority women who participated were familiar with similar venues where drinking occurs on campus and therefore had shared insight to experiences and behaviors that regularly occur.

Three focus groups were held with three separate sororities consisting of mixed class levels of juniors, sophomores, and seniors. Morgan (1993) suggests the desired number of participants in a focus group is between six and ten members. The focus groups met this standard as two groups consisted of nine members and one group was held with seven women. A goal in facilitating focus groups is to reach data saturation or a level in which the researcher is able to anticipate what will be said next with no new themes emerging. Asbury (1995) suggests this typically occurs upon completion of three to four groups while Morgan (1993) indicates saturation occurs between three to five groups. At the conclusion of the third focus group I was confident that a sufficient level of data saturation had been met as repetitive words were heard and no new data emerged. Additionally the follow up individual interviews helped to add detail to the information obtained in the focus group and confirm data saturation.

Conducting focus groups within the natural setting of the students is most desirable and helps to increase an understanding of the student's worldview while also allowing for observation of participants in their natural surrounding (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Ideally this would consist of such locations as a residential setting, student housing, sorority housing, or elsewhere on campus. Each of the three focus groups was facilitated in a different location of the women's choosing. One was held in a university center common building, another at the university library, and the final focus group was facilitated at the women's sorority house.

Individual Interviews

A second principal method of data generation was the use of in depth face-to-face individual interviews. Meeting individually with selected women provided a means for them to share in greater detail their personal observations, behavior and experiences related to high risk drinking in college. It also provided an opportunity for their voice to be heard in describing and explaining their thoughts, perceptions, and constructions of how they make sense of this experience. Additionally, meeting with the women helped me to gain further insight and clarification into information shared in the focus group, to follow up with observations, and allowed an opportunity for the women to express their perceptions beyond the initial conversation.

Individual interviews occurred with six women (two sophomores, two juniors, and two seniors) approximately two weeks after the initial focus group. The time between the focus group discussion and personal interview provided an opportunity for the women to self reflect on their construction and knowledge of the topic and to gain insight into behavior patterns shared with the larger group of women. This process also allowed further engagement by the researcher and additional opportunities to observe the women in their natural setting. Of the six interviews, three took place in the campus library, a venue selected by the participants, and the remaining three occurred in two separate sorority houses.

Participants were selected based on criterion sampling, meeting the following: (a) women who had verbalized engaging in binge drinking behaviors during the focus group, (b) women who live or had lived in the sorority house, and (c) a range of class

levels from sophomore, junior, and seniors. Women who met these criteria for the focus group were contacted via email and the first six women who responded were selected.

Interview guide development

A semi-structured interview format was selected as being the most suitable to the research at hand and used as a tool to facilitate discussions. This approach supports the intent of naturalistic inquiry while providing comparable data across subjects through the use of standardized questions (Cantrell, 1993). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. An initial interview guide consisting of pre-determined open-ended questions was developed using the grand tour questions outlined earlier. Questions were also structured within a feminist framework and were open to follow up questions used to probe deeper. Though the design was emergent and the interview process was open to some flexibility, the researcher found the initial questions to work well resulting in minimal changes to the structured questions as the study unfolded. Questions asked during the individual interviews were similar to those asked in the focus groups, allowing for member checking, data saturation, and contributing to thick rick descriptions. The interview guide covered questions around the following areas: (a) the drinking culture on campus, (b) motivation for drinking, (c) interpretation of high risk drinking/binge drinking, (d) perceptions of high risk drinking, and (e) gender differences related to drinking (See Appendix E for interview questions).

Observations

Additional methods of data generation consisted of direct observation, a fundamental basis of all qualitative inquiry. The purpose of observation is to provide the researcher with direct, first- hand experience in which the researcher functions as both

the participant and observer, depending on the situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Observation proves to have both benefits and limitations for the study. On one hand, observation provides direct knowledge, information about the context of the participants, and serves as a system for checks and balance. On the other hand, the presence of the researcher may alter the nature of the setting, information obtained is subjective, and it may become very time consuming resulting in large quantities of data (Patton, 1980).

The identified participants (college sorority women), the environment (both the college campus and locations specific to the women), and the interaction of both were the focus of observation. Specific areas of observation included the inter-sorority council meetings, interaction between members at the focus groups, individual interview meetings, location and settings of the interviews, and informal observation of college women wearing their sorority letters on campus. Detailed notes including the time, date, events, individual's present and content observed were maintained by the researcher, as were my personal reactions to these events.

Field Notes

A written record, or field notes, were maintained of all my impressions, insights, and emerging hypothesis as I engaged in the study. Notes began with rough ideas and impressions and were later extended and fleshed out to include greater detail and depth. Field notes include both description and reflection of correspondence, events, meetings, and observation. Descriptive notes include specific details of the participants, setting, event, and observations. The reflective aspect of the record includes personal reactions, feelings, and biases at the time of the event as well as greater analysis, interpretation, and insight from the perspective as a researcher (Cantrell, 1993). This process began at

the onset of the study and continued throughout my engagement with participants. Field

notes were transformed into written narratives and contributed to the writing of thick,

rich descriptions. The use of thick descriptions allows an event or process to be

understood and later interpreted (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Material Culture

The use of material culture is important in supplementing data collected through

observations and interviews and can capture information that can confirm or contradict

what has been heard or seen (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The material artifacts I

anticipated using for this study included, but were not limited to: posters and flyers on

campus with alcohol related messages and events; photographs or objects observed at

sorority houses or Greek events; campus newspaper advertisements and articles; and on-

line material such as chapter sponsored websites. What was discovered was that material

culture related to drinking on campus by women was difficult to come by. No flyers

were observed as anticipated on campus advertising parties or drink specials at the bars.

The campus newspaper did not promote drinking events. On line sources such as

"Facebook" or "MySpace" were difficult for outside observers to access. One area that

did show promise in the way of material culture was artifacts in the two sorority houses

that were accessed. At the same time, the very idea that material culture was difficult to

access and was not predominately displayed is an artifact in and of itself.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an evolving and complex process starting with (a)

becoming fully cognizant of all aspects of the data collected (immersion) followed by

(b) sifting through and organizing all of the collected data in a purposeful and

meaningful way (organization) and finally by (c) bringing meaning to the information using an identified framework (interpretation) (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It is difficult, if not impossible, to say that data analysis is independent of methods of data generation. Rather, data analysis is considered a fluid process that occurs throughout the study as it unfolds (Cantrell, 1993). However once all of the data has been collected, a synthesized examination of all the material occurs. The following is a description of the steps taken during data analysis to undergo immersion, organization, and interpretation of the findings.

Immersion

The process of analysis begins with the researcher becoming fully immersed and intimately knowing the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As the researcher, I performed all aspects of this study, including all communication and correspondence with participants, observations and interviews, and a synthesis of the data. In doing so I became aware of nuances of the participants such as how quickly they responded to electronic communication, at what time they responded, those that did or did not follow through, and so forth. Further, I personally transcribed all of the digital recordings of the individual and focus groups interviews verbatim. This process helped me to initially become familiar with the data. Immersion was further accomplished by repeatedly listening to the recordings and by reading and re-reading the transcripts.

Organization and Analysis Process

Due to the voluminous nature of information generated it is necessary to organize the data in a meaningful manner. A number of different qualitative methods exist to describe the analysis process, or the steps set forth that are used to identify and

code segments of data, organize similar and different ideas into categories, and to uncover themes and patterns that emerge. The systematic procedures used in this study are based on categorical and holistic analysis. Although occurring simultaneously, for the purpose of understanding the steps used in the organization and analysis of this data, interpretation of findings will be discussed separately.

The first step in analyzing the data began with categorical analysis of the focus group and individual interview transcripts. Categorical strategies are used to identify similarities and differences in data through the process of coding, or formal representations of analytic thinking. This process provides a means of linking data to conceptual issues (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Drawing on the early work of Glaser and Strauss in 1969 (as discussed in Priest, Roberts, & Woods, 2002), the constant comparative method provided a framework for coding and developing categories. This method entails four stages that were integrated into this study: (1) coding and comparing incidents to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting or reduction of data into themes, and (4) written discussion of themes (Priest, et al., 2002).

1. The initial step in coding allows for broad interpretation and the development of as many categories as necessary. Codes were assigned to the data using the unit of analysis of a complete "discrete thought" which represented a particular defining idea expressed by the participant. While coding an incident, each new meaning or discrete thought was selected for analysis. It is compared with all other units of meaning and was found to either identify or be grouped with similar units of meaning to create a category, or if it did not

fit a new category was generated. This process was done manually on a computer word processing program in which codes were identified by color, font, etc. This was an ongoing and recursive process as new categories were developed and as each new transcript was analyzed. An example used to describe this step, is having an apple and an orange both identified, but not recognized as fitting together.

2. The integration of categories occurred much the same way as in the previous step and is a continuous process of refining and revising. The constant comparative process described above changes from the comparison of an idea to an idea and shifts to comparing ideas within a category or among other categories. This is a process of grouping related concepts in which initial categories are continually reviewed, merged, refined, or omitted. For example, instead of seeing apples and oranges as separate entities, they are now seen as fitting into one category identified as fruit.

3. Data reduction occurs in the third step as fewer and fewer modifications occur within categories. At this point, themes began to emerge resulting in the parsimony of ideas and clarity in which to describe findings. Also data saturation occurs in which no new ideas emerge during this step. At this stage, the metaphor suggests that several categories of fruits and vegetables can now be grouped together under the concept of "healthy foods."

4. At the end of this process the final themes emerge and are presented using thick rich descriptions in a narrative form allowing the voices of participants to be heard both collectively and individually.

A second form of data analysis, holistic coding, was also used to understand other data including field notes, personal reflections, and observation. Holistic analysis focuses on the narrative description of events and is especially useful for understanding data collected in the natural setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Such descriptive data are useful in making connections among the content of different data types and sources of data. Combining holistic data with categorical data helped to enrich the interpretation of the study.

Interpretation

Similar to the progression of coding, the process of interpretation began early in the data analysis. Although impressions begin to form early on, a written narrative using an interpretivist framework could only be fully developed once complete themes emerged. "Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meaning, and otherwise imposing order (Patton, 2002, p. 480).

Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, analysis is aimed at searching for meaning in participant's lives. As identified at the onset of this study, interpretations about meaning and constructions of reality were made through a feminist lens. The analysis of this feminist phenomenological study looks specifically at the deeper meaning of women's experiences including issues such as a deeper understanding of women's experiences of patriarchy, oppression, power, and discrimination based on gender (Lather, 1992).

Initially, I had considered interpreting and reporting the findings in terms of the three individual sororities that participated in the focus groups. However as the

interpretation emerged, the women's experiences were so similar that presenting them as individual cases did not seem logical. Similarly, I had also contemplated the idea of reporting cases with regard to class designation; sophomore, junior, or seniors. Although the individuals had some differences with regard to their age and class, ultimately these distinctions did not warrant presenting individual cases. These nuances between under classman and upperclassman were however reported within the findings. Ultimately, I chose to report the findings with regard to the interpretation of experiences found across all the women.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Creswell (2003) describes eight strategies used to validate the study and determine the accuracy of findings. These strategies contribute to the "trustworthiness," "authenticity," and "credibility" of the study. Trustworthiness speaks to the degree to which the study has been conducted competently and within ethical considerations. Authenticity speaks to the relationship of the researcher to its participants. Together, trustworthiness and authenticity demonstrate the quality of the research results as determined by its methodology (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

Strategies used to strengthen the trustworthiness and authenticity includes:

(a) Triangulation consists of using multiple and diverse sources of data. Through the use of interviews, observation, and other sources of data, information can be compared and contrasted and provide insight into similarities and discrepancies.

(b) Member checking involves having participants review transcripts, summaries, and other narratives written by the researcher for validity and

accuracy. This first occurred during the interview itself in which I checked my understanding and meaning of the words spoken by the participants through the use of reflection and by asking questions. Next electronic copies summarizing interviews were sent to participants to check for accuracy and thoroughness.

(c) Rich- thick descriptions were generated through categorical and holistic analysis of field notes, transcriptions, and observations and were then transformed into descriptive narratives reported in the findings section. Such detailed descriptions provide a foundation for further analysis and interpretation of findings. Additionally, readers can use these descriptions to make inferences about their own setting through their understanding of the thick descriptions of the site, participants, and methodology employed.

(d) Clarifying researcher bias occurred through the use of the "researcher as instrument" statement; making values, opinions, and biases transparent within the written narrative; and through peer review.

(e) Peer debriefing entails the reflection of experiences in the field with other researchers as a means of exploring alternative understandings of similar experiences. As two other students were simultaneously conducting qualitative research, a unique opportunity to perform peer review was available. This group of researchers discussed findings, methods, and ethical issues on a weekly basis.

Ethical Issues and Considerations

Typically one considers the initial approval from the college's Human Subjects Committee as the foundation to encompassing all ethical standards. While this is a valid starting point, and one that was completed for this study prior to data collection, qualitative research encounters additional ethical consideration that transcends the entirety of the study. Although there is no one clear definition of ethical standards, they all stem from the basic premise of "acting as we would want others to act in any given situation" (Rossman & Rallis, p.72, 2003). Ethical issues typically encountered in qualitative research include issues of personal privacy, the confidentiality of data, the potential use of deception, and understanding the limitations of consent.

Several steps were taken to ensure the protection of individual participants and to adhere to ethical standards. Prior to data collection an informed consent was signed by participants in the focus group and by individuals who engaged in personal interviews. The informed consent outlined steps toward protecting the individual and provided information about the study at hand. It included details about the purpose of the study, how data would be collected, stored, and used, and measures to ensure anonymity. In addition, the informed consent acknowledged that all material generated from the study would be destroyed upon completion of the research project.

Perhaps one of the greatest issues is that of confidentiality, anonymity, and personal privacy. As mentioned earlier, data collected from focus groups as well as individual interviews was digitally recorded and transcribed personally. Participants were assigned numbers during the focus group and individuals were referred to by a number and class; sophomore, junior, or senior. An original copy of all recordings was maintained for the duration of the study to ensure accuracy and contributes to the

trustworthiness of the study. All recordings and related data will be destroyed upon completion of the final review.

This study required personal encounters with women who entrusted the researcher with private information. Care was taken in writing up the findings in order to maintain the women's voices without jeopardizing their anonymity. Although it is necessary that the findings are spoken in the words of the women and is imperative to keep the narrative consistent with the participant's worldview, it is equally important that these words cannot be linked back to any single individual. One way of protecting the participant's anonymity was through the application of pseudonyms for both the sororities as well as the individuals in the written narrative. Another means of ensuring the accuracy of interpretation prior to reporting the findings was through the use of member checks and feedback from participants. The researcher's role is critical in co-constructing the participant's reality, developing a trusting relationship with the women, and approaching the data collection in a non-judgmental, authentic manner.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions of the Study

Participants in the study were self selected and volunteered to participate. Given their willingness to take part in the study, an assumption was made that the participants would be open, honest, and willing to engage in thoughtful discussions about their personal perceptions and experiences of high risk drinking. As members of the same peer group and affiliation with a Greek social sorority it was also assumed participants would know one another, share similar experiences, and would respond in a manner

consistent with their membership. Lastly, it was assumed the students would be familiar with the concept of high risk drinking.

Limitations of the Study

Consistent with qualitative studies and the intent of this research, results will lead to logically generalizable rather than statistically generalizable findings. The most important limitation of qualitative research is that findings cannot be directly generalized to the larger population but instead are limited to the sample of participants rather than the student population as a whole (Creswell, 2003). While it is true that transferability, or the extent to which findings can be applied to other settings, must be approached with a degree of caution (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), the well planned design and detailed description of the methodology and findings help to alleviate this concern. Findings are reported through the use of thick descriptions of the university, selection of participants, focus groups and its members, observations, and other material deemed appropriate to the study. Thick descriptions provide readers with adequate information to be able to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be a possibility to their setting and to what extent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The reader is cautioned to interpret results based on their understanding of the thick descriptions and writing of the results.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the significant findings and themes found through the

analysis of the extensive data collected during this study. Both focus group and

individual interviews were analyzed together and reported collectively. The raw data

found in the transcripts revealed significantly explicit language used by the participants

in describing specific events and individuals. The resulting narrative that follows is

expressed through a careful selection of direct quotes from the participants that helps to

illustrate specific themes that emerged. The final themes that emerged are presented in

this chapter and are elaborated further through the researcher's own interpretation.

Understanding high risk drinking is a complex matter and findings from this

study of college women perceptions on alcohol use present no exception. In all, 25

women (sophomores, juniors, and seniors) participated in this study. All participants

reported they had personally engaged in binge drinking at one point or another during

their time at college. The women were forthcoming in their description and perceptions

of binge drinking, whether it was from their own personal experiences or as a result of

others around them who engaged in this type of drinking behavior. Through the analysis

of women's inside view of high risk drinking and a thorough examination of the data, a

deeper understanding of this process was revealed resulting in four predominant themes:

Theme One: Campus Drinking Culture. An overall description of what drinking

is like on campus became a prominent theme. The women described their own patterns

of alcohol use, drinking patterns among their peers, and the overall campus culture related to drinking. This theme is significant in relation to the known body of research on college campus drinking and is particularly consistent with past findings.

Theme Two: Binge Drinking. Findings in the second theme describe how participants construct and make meaning of the concept of binge drinking. The participant's constructions and understanding of this phenomenon differ significantly with the research. In this theme, participants describe their definition of binge drinking and their perceptions of individuals who engage in this behavior.

Theme Three: Drinking in a Male Dominated Environment. The third theme that emerged provides insight and an understanding about the gender differences inherent in the college drinking environment. Virtually every aspect of drinking was indicative of a male dominated environment resulting in the marginalization of women in a number of different ways. The gender bias is so engrained in the system that it is rarely questioned, yet these differences have significant implications for women as was seen in theme four.

Theme Four: Fitting Into a Man's World. Perhaps of greatest significance was the final theme that emerged in which women made significant modifications to their thoughts and behaviors as a result of the gendered biased environment described in the previous theme. Most of these changes contributed to the disenfranchisement of women, leaving them with few alternatives and limited power. However, one potential protective factor emerged that may contribute to the empowerment of women.

The remainder of this chapter will describe the four themes that emerged in greater detail. However prior to doing so a synthesis of typical college drinking is

presented, including a description of the focus groups facilitated and the campus environment. Whenever possible, the authentic words of the women in the study are used to provide the reader with some insight about the dynamics of the setting and an understanding of the unique attributes possessed by the participants. By initially providing this framework an understanding of significant contextual issues and patterns related to women's high risk drinking is made known and contributes to an integral understanding of the present themes.

Description of the Environment and Participants

Framework of Alcohol Use on Campus

The college alcohol policy provides guidelines concerning the general provisions of alcohol use by students. Briefly, it indicates no person under the age of 21 years of age may purchase, possess, or consume alcoholic beverages; that events where alcohol is being served must be registered with the college; and that amnesty is provided to those students seeking medical attention for over intoxication. In the most recent years, alcohol related incidents were reported as occurring in about 2% of the population. The college enforces a strict policy in which a third offense may result in suspension from the college.

Several alcohol prevention programs are offered on campus including Social Norms Campaigns, Alcohol 101 (an interactive DVD), and T.I.P.S. (Training Intervention Procedure for Servers of Alcohol) a nationally recognized two- hour training required for groups who register to host a party with alcohol on campus. O.C.T.A.A. (On Campus Talking About Alcohol), a more individualized program is

targeted toward students who are facing an alcohol infraction. Traditionally, in the Greek system fraternities have been trained under T.I.P.S. more so than the sororities. A newly formed GAMMA (Greeks Advocating Mature Management of Alcohol) has emerged through the joining of the Council on Fraternity Affairs (CFA) and the Inter-Sorority Council (ISC).

The two predominant alcohol suppliers on campus consist of a few local bars within walking distance from the college and the fraternities. The bars appear to be responsible in enforcing the drinking age by closing their doors to underage patrons after 9:00pm. Lastly there is a concerted effort to offer social alternative that do not consist of alcohol.

Participants

Drawing participants from preexisting established groups within sororities to form focus groups resulted in a number of similarities among the dynamics of the members. At the same an identifiable, distinct personality was distinguishable among the focus groups. For example, among all three focus groups, conversation was easily generated from the start. The women were very open about their own drinking experiences, values, personal background, and opinions related to drinking. The women were comfortable in raising differences of opinions or offering a divergent perspective while at the same time being supported by her peers. They often shared similar experiences and related stories of going out together. They were vocal about the bond established both as a sisterhood in which the bond was one of membership, as well as in a stronger form of defined friendships.

Focus Group #1: Alpha Sorority

The first focus group, members of the Alpha sorority, could be described as less self selected but rather appeared to participate as a result of being encouraged or volunteered by their chapter president, the contact for the focus group. This is not to say they were unwilling, only that they were less aware of the intent and details of the research. Consequently, the women initially appeared slightly tentative and uninformed of the purpose of the focus group. They were uncertain where to go for the group and were found lingering in the hallway. Nonetheless once the group started, they were friendly, willing, and open to the process. The focus group was conducted in the late evening at a local campus building, piggybacking with the Alpha's weekly chapter meeting. After explaining the purpose of the focus group combined with the invitation of warm pizza and cold soft drinks, the women quickly settled in and were visibly more relaxed. The women spent some time catching up with one another and eating their dinner while they waited for the focus group to start.

In all, seven women participated; four juniors and three sophomores. All were Caucasian and were all under the legal drinking age of 21. Several of the women wore their sorority letters suggesting a strong connection to Alpha. They appeared to know each other well as was observed by their side conversations and relaxed body posture. Additionally, three of the women lived together in the sorority house. Initially the Alpha women were more reserved in their dialogue. It was an exception for them to talk over one another, but instead they were observed as carefully taking turns in their comments, all the while elaborating on the current discussion and were actively engaged.

Of the three sororities, Alpha fell into the lower range of drinking. Several women (at least three) mostly abstained from heavy alcohol consumption either from the onset of college or had evolved to limited use at this point, while others talked predominately about mild to moderate use. One woman openly talked about her family history of alcohol abuse which was a primary deterrent for her personal use. Despite the overall indications of less consistent alcohol use as well as less abusive patterns, all of the women reported engaging in binge drinking at some point during college and easily related to the topic either through their personal experiences or by those around them. Two of the women related to more consistent heavy alcohol use.

Focus Group #2: Beta Sorority

While the Alpha's were more intentional in their responses, members of the Beta sorority were a highly engaged, energetic group. Although the focus group was held in the middle of the afternoon in a private room in the library of the college campus, the academic environment did not constrict their views or discussion in any way. In fact the women were lively from the onset, friendly and humorous. It was evident they were a close group as they laughed a lot with one another and shared many stories of experiences related to drinking they had together.

In all, nine women from the Beta sorority participated consisting of two seniors, five juniors, and two sophomores. Of the three focus groups, this was the most diverse. One woman identified as African American and another had a thick accent indicative of a Middle Eastern culture. One woman was over the age of 21. Several women had personal items with the Greek letters representing their affiliation with Beta.

This particular group indicated significantly stronger drinking experiences. All of the women indicated their drinking to be an integral part of their lives and college experience. They were open and honest about their level of drinking and shared personal stories related to their drinking experiences. This group in particular voiced strong opinions around the topic of binge drinking and their view of women's role in the drinking environment on campus. Several women talked about having a background in feminist studies and easily identified with issues related to drinking and gender.

Focus Group #3: Gamma Sorority

Finally, the last focus group was held with members of the Gamma sorority. This group was held on a weekday evening at the Gamma house located within the Sorority Court on campus. Pizza and soft drinks were also provided for this group which helped to initiate a connection with the women. The Gamma's were an interesting blend of the previous two focus groups. While they could certainly relate to issues of high risk drinking, a greater mix existed related to levels of use among the women. All admitted to engaging in binge drinking, however the rate and frequency of use varied most within this group.

Summary of Participants

Of the nine women who participated in the Gamma focus group, seven were seniors, one was a junior, and one was a sophomore. All the women with the exception of one were living in the sorority house and all were Caucasian. The women were very comfortable with one another, sitting in close proximity to each other on the couch or laying back in chairs. Several women in this group also wore clothing that displayed

their sorority letters while others were dressed in shorts and t-shirts, pajamas and slippers, or equally comfortable clothing.

The women were open in their discussion of their drinking and shared stories of their experiences together. As this was an older group of mostly senior women, they were able to reflect on how their drinking patterns have changed over time. Some of this group had more knowledge about the definition of binge drinking, but as was consistent with the other groups, had a difficult time relating to the textbook definition of this behavior. Members were respectful of one another but felt comfortable in challenging statements, processing information, and presenting alternative perspectives. In this sense the group had a more distinctive feel of being more mature.

Context of Drinking: Setting the Stage

> *It's all Greek to Me*
>
> Sororities can't have parties. So if you are underage or a freshman, a lot of them go to the frats just to drink because they know they are going to get it, so it puts the power into the fraternities if you want to think about it that way (Beta Sorority).

In an interesting twist, the code of conduct set forth by each sorority does not allow for women to possess alcohol in their sorority house, regardless of age, nor to host alcohol related events. Women consistently said there was little or no drinking in their sorority house as illustrated in the following statement,

> We follow the campus rules and our international rules. So campus rules say that if you over 21 you can have alcohol in your room and drink alcohol in your

room.... our international rules for our sorority say that we are supposed to be

dry permanently as one of our ideals that we uphold (Alpha Sorority).

These guidelines are established by the National Panhellenic Council which provides

guidance, oversight, and advice to its members. The National Panhellenic Conference

(NPC), founded in 1902, is an umbrella organization for 26 national women's sororities.

Each chapter is autonomous with members representing over 620 colleges and

universities, involving over 3.6 million sorority women. Values are expressed by NPC in

order to hold its member organizations to high expectations and standards which they

assert are higher than those articulated by individual college campuses. Several

standards, or minimum expectations outlined by NPC, make reference alcohol including

its use and educational programming. One standard in particular specific to this study

states that as part of the values of their organization, each member group will require a

policy to possess alcohol free facilities (National Panhellenic Conference Office, 2007).

The women in this study expressed that if their National Council were to find out about

alcohol use on the premises of the sorority house, they may be at risk for losing their

membership. While this was of some concern, the women expressed that drinking did

not occur in their house out of respect of their sisterhood as follows,

> I wouldn't come sit down into what I consider to be our house and crack open a
>
> beer in the Chapter room, and just be like, well you all just have to deal, like out
>
> of respect to others more than necessarily that I hope National doesn't take
>
> picture of me bringing in a beer (Gamma Sorority).

For this study, I was able to conduct interviews in two of the sorority houses. One house could be described as a traditional Greek sorority house while the other looked to be a former residential home that had been converted for Greek use. Both houses were smaller in size, accommodating about twenty to twenty five sisters. The houses had flowers in the front yard and were adorned with the sorority Greek letters in prominent places. Inside there were well cared for and highly decorative rooms. Each of the two houses consisted of a large meeting room, dining room, kitchen, and bedrooms. Often Greek houses have a chapter room only accessible to initiated members. The walls in both houses were filled with composite photos of past sorority members and pledge classes. While one house was more stately than the other, both were extremely clean, meticulously kept, and shared a sense of pride for their membership.

From past observation and the descriptions provided by the women, the fraternity houses in contrast resembled more of a "bachelor pad" or a local bar. Although the men live in the house, it is also designed to accommodate large dance parties with big open rooms. While composites of fraternity members hung on the wall and Greek letters were displayed, they tended to be less ornamental. The furniture was well worn, stained, and more industrial looking. The women described the houses as dirty and smelling of stale beer with concrete floors or beer soaked carpets. They shared stories of having to use a dirty bathroom not suitable for a women and not wanting to drink tap water from the sink. At the same time, they were sympathetic to the men living in the house and their lack of privacy. Several women knew of men who preferred not to live in the house due to these reasons. As one woman described a friend living in the fraternity house;

So they moved in and then half way through their semester they wanted to leave because they hated how everyone would come to their house and they would be trying to go to sleep and everyone else would be binge drinking so I think it's really fun to go to somebody else's place and be wild and crazy but I think those guys viewed it differently (Alpha Sorority).

The drinking environment is exacerbated among Greek life due to the close relationship between sororities and fraternities. Throughout the school year, Greek organizations host events such as rush, homecoming, formals, and other social events that involve the participation of both sororities and fraternities, often requiring its membership to take part in the event. For example,

I notice in our sorority, the day before bid day, every semester we have pref night [referring to a step in the rush process] and all of the girls in all of the sororities dress up and go around to all of the frats, and all of the frats have alcohol, and it's the one time our entire sorority, like all 90 girls are together and it's really just a bonding thing, like people you have never talked to before, but your drunk and you're like, look at all of these things we have in common (Beta Sorority).

Alternatives social outlets to the fraternities with alcohol present consisted of small off campus house parties and a handful of local bars within walking distance. Younger women in particular had limited access to these locations due to their age and lack of social connections

Summary of Context

When it comes to drinking venues, women were found in a no win situation. On campus, alcohol consumption occurs most prominently in two locations: the local bars and among Greek organizations. With alcohol being the center of the majority of social events, and in particular among Greek organizations, those that possess alcohol have the power. On campus, there were few alternative drinking venues, particularly for underage students. Fraternities were described as providing a significant social outlet, as well as access to inexpensive alcohol, resulting in a significant amount of power held among one group. On the contrary, by the mere fact that sororities are unable to host events with alcohol per their rules established by the National Panhellenic Conference, they become a disenfranchised group. It could be argued that women are content with this arrangement however this inherent difference has a number of implications. In addition, these findings are so engrained in the college environment that they are often taken for granted and therefore it is particularly important they are made explicit.

Theme One: Campus Drinking Culture

Drinking Is the Party

It's like the weekend activity, as in like a lot of people will ask "what are you doing this weekend" and you'll say "going out;" and "going out" is synonymous with getting drunk, and so it's kind of like how you define what you do with your time (Beta Sorority).

Despite the college alcohol policy that states no person under the age of 21 shall possess or consume any type of alcoholic beverage, participants had little difficulty in accessing alcohol. Underclassman had fewer options in their drinking venue than did

upperclassman that could easily access the bars and other drinking establishments for students over 21. Yet, regardless of this reality by the time students reached their sophomore year they were well integrated into the drinking community. As one sophomore states,

> When I first got here I didn't know like, how much alcohol it took to get me drunk or like where to get alcohol or who I would get alcohol from and all this stuff, and now that I'm more assimilated into the community and how all that social stuff works, I feel like my drinking I guess has increased but not like to a detrimental extent, but it has increased because I guess I just know where to get it and how, like the social events this year compared to last year are much more focused on drinking (Alpha Sorority).

This pattern was repeatedly heard as the women's social group evolved over time. Initially, women described patterns of drinking by incoming freshman as "roaming the campus, stopping at various parties and social events, and meeting strangers." Usually this occurred with a small group of friends in which drinking provided a strong social connection and a means for meeting new people. This was particularly significant for first and second year students who were still establishing a social network. In later years, as the women became more acclimated to the college environment, their social network broadened and relationships became more solidified. Drinking patterns beginning sophomore year and each year thereafter become more established and were generally described as occurring with a small, close group of friends. Several of the participants described the transition in drinking patterns similar to the following statement,

Freshman and sophomore year are spent largely pre-gaming in someone's room

and going to the fraternities or going to an off campus party whether it be a

sport's house or what not. Junior and senior year, at least on this campus, I feel

like it's… more a casual get together with friends and either doing that for the

duration of the night, or maybe going to an off campus party and very rarely

going to one of the fraternities. And senior year a lot more time going out to the

bars, and a lot more senior year there won't be pre-gaming and you'll just go

straight to the bars (Gamma Sorority).

Drinking is Acceptable in College

I immediately thought of Tom Petty when he said "enjoy it now kids, because

when you are an adult it's called alcoholism," like that is a huge stereotype of

what you are allowed to get away with in college (Gamma Sorority).

Reasons for engaging in drinking were fairly typical for this population. One of

the predominant reasons given for drinking was because it is the social activity.

Drinking was described as the weekend activity where "going out" was synonymous

with "getting drunk." Many of the women talked about the lack of alternatives and one

woman even expressed, "if we didn't' drink, what would we do on the weekends"? At

the same time, women did possess significant insight about other groups of students as

illustrated in the following comment, "there is a sizeable population who really don't

drink at all, or who drink very little." Although drinking was described as appealing to a

specific segment of the student body, those students that didn't drink were described

negatively as being "holed up in the library" and as being "overly concerned with their academics."

A multitude of other reasons were provided for engaging in drinking. One of particular interest was the strong belief that this group of women was faced with significant academic pressures not typically experienced at other colleges and that drinking provided a means of unwinding. Other reasons for drinking included the need to reduce inhibitions in order to socialize or engage in dancing without feeling self conscious, experimentation of use, to escape stress or pressure, as a means of celebrating, drinking because others were, and the expectation that drinking is part of college life. Several comments illustrate the reasons expressed for drinking,

> On a Friday or Saturday, there isn't that much to do that doesn't involve drinking if you go there. Like, there's the pre-gaming and then there's, I guess there is the game, which I guess would be the party and that is drinking too (Alpha Sorority) You can also make any day a party so you can be like "hey, the clock rolled back, let's black out for an hour" (Alpha Sorority).
>
> I think people drink as well to escape from stress or pressure (Gamma Sorority).
>
> I'm not a very good dancer so I really have to get drunk to go to the dance parties (Gamma Sorority).

Drinking Patterns

> There is a sense of being in college, I don't have a car here, so if I'm going to binge drink, this is the best time to do it....It's just like that attitude that for 4 years you are trying to get the drunkest of your life (Beta Sorority).

The participants in the study described typical patterns of drinking on campus as fluctuating from week to week and within the semester. The academic schedule and demands of classes and exams significantly influenced drinking patterns. An example of this took place during an interview later in the semester when one woman described drinking as, "this time of year it's a lot tamer, and you can notice that especially like with my experience,… in a college setting whenever there are a lot of big projects due, everything just tapers off because everyone is just so exhausted and it's just really busy."

Heavy periods of drinking occurred at the onset of the semester prior to being fully immersed in coursework, and again at the end of the semester as a means of celebrating the completion of their hard work. As one participant said, "after a really hard week, you'll hear people say "oh, I'm going to get so drunk tonight" like a celebration kind of, or even if they have still so much to do, it's just a way of being able to get away from school work." Typically drinking occurred throughout the weekend, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings. Occasionally, the women spoke of drinking that began on Thursday evenings or as a means of celebrating a special event during the week. One student summarized drinking on campus as,

> Everyone is either waiting to start drinking, because it's been a hard week, or because it's a slow week, or because you have nothing to do, or because you can sleep in tomorrow, or because you have to get up early tomorrow but you can do it anyway (Beta Sorority).

During the interviews, it was consistently reported that men not only drank alcohol in larger quantities than women, but also with greater frequency. As one woman said, "I think that the guys that I know definitely drink more than the girls I know" while another woman said, "I do feel like they [men]have more of a range of drinking, whereas with girls I feel like in my experience, it's normally on the weekends, maybe Thursday." Many of the women spoke of men making up occasions to drink and that alcohol was a much greater part of their life. They also indicated that men were more likely to drink with the intention of getting drunk, whereas with women drinking was more closely associated with socializing. For example, one of the women talked about how, although she enjoys playing drinking games from time to time, when she is with a group of her girlfriends drinking they "wind up sitting around talking and that slows you down" whereas men are more competitive in their drinking and will "come right out and say this is a competition."

Women believed the men experienced greater pressure to drink and that is was more acceptable for women to decline a drink. It was repeatedly heard that "plenty of the girls choose not to drink and still have a good time." However it would be unlikely for a man to decline a drink, "in fact I rarely find a guy that is not drinking," said one of the participants. In the presence of other women, drinking was described as a "non-issue," but in the mixed company of men, the pressure became more apparent. Although women may have decided not to drink for the evening, they were frequently asked by men if they wanted a drink. Some perceived this behavior by the men as "being good hosts" while others said the men didn't want to "drink alone."

Most drinking patterns described by the women were consistent with the text book definition of binge drinking, or having four or more drinks within a two hour time frame. As this was found to be a significant theme in my findings, details about binge drinking will be discussed in detail later in this section. Sometimes drinking was described as an intentional behavior such as consuming heavy amounts of alcohol in a short time frame, while other times it was less deliberate but had the same results. For example, "I think it also depends on your mood set, I know certain nights I just want to drink but not get drunk and other nights I'm like I want to get trashed."

Intentional binge drinking by participants included engaging in "pre-gaming" activities as well as drinking games for the purpose of getting drunk. Women would often "pre-game" events, described as taking multiple shots of liquor in a short period of time prior to going out. They explained that they did this because they knew alcohol was not accessible for the rest of the evening or because they wanted to achieve the effects of alcohol, such as reducing their inhibitions prior to going out. For example, women might pre-game prior to going to a formal dance described by one woman as, "go, go, go, drink as much as you can" because there [at the formal]we can't bring alcohol in obviously." While another women described it in the following way,

> It's not like 'oh we need to pre game to get drunk for formal' because I'm not one of those people that has to be drunk to dance because, like I'll dance right now, but it's just one of those things that's kind of like tradition, it's like what you do, like the whole atmosphere is so much fun (Alpha Sorority).

Likewise, drinking games which are designed to achieve high levels of intoxication in a short period of time were prevalent in the college environment. Drinking games mentioned by the women include: Kings, Quarters, Beer Pong, Case Races, Chandeliers, Never Have I Ever, and Power Hours. Women also talked about drinking to excess though they had not intended to do so at the beginning of the night. The following comments illustrate how drinking games are a significant part of the college drinking environment:

> like one frat we were at, they had a drinking game night where each room was a different drinking game, like one was Kings, one was Quarters, one was Beer Pong, like each room had a different game and it's just a lot of fun (Beta Sorority).

Another woman indicated this occurs more often with men,

> I mean girls definitely play drinking games but a lot less, it's sort of more in mixed company and where it's a bigger group (Gamma Sorority).

And finally one woman stated that by engaging in drinking games she was able to get to know people better,

> So games are a big part of it because it also allows for more social interaction.... you are all in a circle, and I think social drinking games bring out things in people (Beta Sorority).

Summary of Theme One

The drinking culture portrayed by the women reveals a number of similarities with past research in this area. The women described drinking as a thread that tied social

activities together. Whether drinking or not, alcohol plays a significant role in the life of these college women, to the extent that they couldn't imagine what else they would do on the weekend. They described drinking as an acceptable and expected behavior among college students. Even the women who came to college as non drinkers found themselves drinking on a more regular basis. Men were thought to drink significantly more than women and were perceived as having more pressure to do so. Drinking games and pre-gaming activities were described as a regular occurrence and served as a vehicle for social interactions. A distinction between under class and upper class drinking was identified whereas younger students appeared to engage in more sporadic and reckless drinking patterns while older students were more established in their drinking patterns. These findings were very consistent with past research and contribute to the authenticity of the study.

Theme Two: Binge Drinking

The first prominent theme that emerged relates to women's understanding and perceptions of binge drinking. Early on in the study the discrepancy that exists between women's construction of high risk drinking or binge drinking and the literature based definition became evident. While the women acknowledged they, or others, engaged in drinking patterns consistent with the definition of binge drinking, they did not believe their alcohol use to be high risk, nor did they consider it binge drinking. Additionally, women did not view binge drinking negatively if it was done in moderation. However they did express strong opinions about students who engaged in binge drinking (as defined by the participants) on a regular basis.

What is it?

Well, I think that is hard because I think what the technical definition is, I feel

like that is kind of low, I guess in my mind, binge drinking is more of a long

term thing too, like I recognize that you can binge drink in one night, but in my

mind, binge drinking sounds so bad, it has a bad connotation, and then when you

realize like, I, or probably most of my friends binge drink on probably a pretty

regular occasion, but I don't really have a bad connotation of that. So I guess to

me, binge drinking is drinking way beyond your limits and getting sick, puking,

that whole thing. Whereas I feel like their definition of binge drinking wouldn't

make me sick so it's hard for me to kind of reconcile my limits with the

definition, because by definition I'm a binge drinker but I wouldn't say that I

drink to excess in my opinion, and get sick on a regular basis. So I guess that is

probably my problem with the definition of it, in my opinion your ability to

drink, like how much you can handle is such a case by case basis, that's it's hard

to put a definition on everyone (Gamma Sorority).

Participants reacted mostly with surprise when they were presented with the

"text book" definition of binge drinking, as defined in the literature as four or more

drinks in a two hour time frame. Some of the women were familiar with this definition

but still were incredulous of the meaning as several women made similar comments to

the following:

I hear that statistic and every time I hear it, it shocks me. I remember hearing

these definitions before and every time I hear it, it shocks me again because the

definition of binge drinking in my head is just so much more than that, maybe 4 drinks an hour or 4 drinks in a row (Gamma Sorority).

By these standards most of the participants acknowledged they engage in binge drinking nearly every time they go out. A comment made by one of the women was met with resounding consensus when she said "by that definition than every single person... I don't know anyone who fits that definition or drinks responsibly." One student even said for her, this definition would describe her drinking behavior prior to going out, referred to as "pre gaming." Although many students acknowledged their drinking patterns as fitting the definition of binge drinking, they did not view themselves as engaging in high risk drinking. When asked participants how they would define binge drinking, they readily came up with a number of criteria that would fit into their understanding of high risk drinking, as well as what would not. The following is a description of how participants understand binge drinking.

(a) Drinking is perceived as individualized. A particular number of drinks did not seem to be a good marker for judging binge drinking as the women described everyone's limits as different, regardless of gender. In other words, the women seemed to be referring to tolerance levels. For example:

I feel like it's not really fair to say this number of drinks is binge drinking because everyone's limit is different and whereas you know, three drinks for me would be binge drinking, it would take seven to be someone else's (Alpha Sorority).

This sentiment was echoed by many of the women who felt like four drinks would barely have an effect on them. Another woman stated "even if you are drinking 5-6 nights a week and you can handle it and you're responsible about it, it's not high risk in my mind."

(b) College is a unique drinking environment. The women did not feel this definition was appropriate for a college setting. They believed their pattern of drinking was unique to college and that they would not sustain this drinking style later in life. They thought the definition might be more suitable for adult's post- college or for "people in the working world." This was illustrated by one of the participants who said "I think that definition needs to be changed. Yeah, as an adult, but when you are in college setting, you're not like I'm going to have one glass of wine and go out, it's just not realistic."

(c) Behavior as a marker for binge drinking. For the participants, observable behavior provided an indication of what binge drinking looked like. For example, several participants made similar comments to the following: "I also think of it as ending up with throwing up, like the end of binge drinking results in throwing up or blacking out." Binge drinking was closely associated with the lack of personal control or unmanageability. Visible indications of binge drinking included such activities as: blacking out, throwing up (which was described as a "social faux pa"), stumbling around, being incoherent, and having experienced negative consequences as a result of drinking. Many of the women in the study didn't personally experience these behaviors,

at least not on a regular basis, and therefore didn't believe their drinking style was binge drinking.

(d) Understanding binge drinking was subjective. Similar to behavior that describes binge drinking was the notion of "crossing the line." Drinking was not perceived as binge drinking, despite the frequency, quantity, or time, as long as the person didn't "go over their limit." For instance one student said "it's where you cross that line, I guess its maybe where you go into binge drinking, maybe that's where that line of demarcation comes, when you've hit you're limit and you keep going, that's where binge drinking comes in." This sentiment was echoed a number of times among participants.

(e) Patterns of alcohol use consistent with binge drinking. Certain styles of drinking, particularly with the intent to get drunk, were perceived as binge drinking such as playing drinking games, engaging in pre-gaming activities, or any type of drinking that required taking consecutive drinks in a very short time period. "Like activities that I can think of that I would consider binge drinking would be keg races, case races, anything to do with drinking fast or drinking liquor very quickly." However, if an individual had similar quantities of alcohol over the course of the night rather than in a short time frame, this was not considered binge drinking. One woman compared this to Weight Watchers saying,

> If you eat one muffin it's 3 points but if you eat half in one hour and the other half in another hour than it's like 1 point and 1 point so it would only equal 2; but like in alcohol, if you drink it all at once than that is a binge but if you drink

the whole bottle plus some in like a matter of 3 hours and you're fine [it's not a binge] (Beta Sorority).

Another woman stated

I would say it's drinking so much, either always constantly having a drink in your hand and continually drinking throughout the course of the night, it doesn't even matter in my opinion how long you are drinking for, it's more about the rate and with the intent of getting very drunk.

(f) Terminology. Strong negative reactions were expressed toward the term "binge." The women associated this with "binge eating" or similar over indulging behaviors. They expressed that "binge drinking" had a strong emotional or negative connotation associated with the term and did not want to be associated in the same context. One participant described this in the following statement

I think binge drinking has an emotional connotation to it, like when I think about binge eating, you are drinking in excess or because of a personal traumatic experience or you are dealing with something emotionally so this is a coping mechanism, that is my understanding of the word binging is that it is a coping thing, so if you are not coping but just going out and having fun…[it's not binging] (Gamma Sorority).

(g) Populations who binge drink. The act of binge drinking was more strongly associated with the behavior of men on campus and of freshman in general, "with freshman I would say more often than not, when they are drinking, they are binge

drinking." Likewise, most women expressed that binge drinking decreased over the course of time in college. In describing this transition, one participant explained,

> [as a freshman])…if you really intend to get drunk you are going to pound a bunch of watery beers or take a bunch of shots or drink a lot of mixed drinks. Where now it's like sipping on wine or enjoying the taste of a nice beer. Now it's more about being social than it is about having alcohol (Beta Sorority).

Although this distinction between drinking patterns among underclassman and upperclassman was frequently discussed, it is questionable if actual drinking levels decreased, or if in fact tolerance levels increased. What did appear clear was that intentional binge drinking seemed to lesson with age and maturity. Several of the women shared the following sentiments when reflecting on their experience of drinking over time,

> My freshman and sophomore year I went out all the time. I think my responses would have been very much the same although I wouldn't have the perspective of more casual drinking that we do this year now that we are 21, now it's been 4 years of a lot of drinking. I think we are all sort of done with that, at least the girls are (Gamma Sorority).

However, this did not hold true regarding the perception of men who were perceived to continue drinking at the same level, "I would say for guys it's been pretty much the same across the board for the past four years….I would say usually when the guys are drinking they are binge drinking and not as much for the girls anymore."

Summary of Theme Two: Understanding Binge Drinking

Two predominant findings emerged in the second theme: first the definition of binge drinking did not resonate with the women, and second, binge drinking was generally an acceptable behavior although some distinctions emerged in relation to gender and frequency. The women described college as a unique time in which binge drinking was not only tolerated but often times an acceptable behavior. Although many of the women had heard of the standard definition of binge drinking, their definition or understanding of this behavior differed significantly. For the women, binge drinking was not tied to a specific amount of use but instead was more closely associated with overt behaviors such as throwing up, stumbling, or passing out. Engaging in drinking games or rapidly consuming large volumes of alcohol was also considered binge drinking. Mostly the women did not perceive their drinking as risky behavior though many clearly engaged in high risk drinking.

Perceptions of Binge Drinking

And I think that when other adults, like people in the community, when they look down on us for drinking and they are not helpful and just out to get us, it just encourages people to engage in more risky behavior (Beta Sorority).

In addition to acknowledging women's definitions of binge drinking, it is also significant to gain an understanding of how participants made meaning of this behavior both through personal insight and through their perceptions of others. During the interviews, participants were asked about what they believe society thinks of college binge drinking, as well as their view of others (men and women) who engage in this

behavior. The women believed society and most adults were very out of touch with the realities of their drinking behavior and that most outsiders had a distorted image of college drinking similar to that depicted in popular movies such as "Animal House" or "Ben Wilder." This disconnect was felt in particular with regard to how society views students actions related to drinking. The participants described others as seeing them as irresponsible, immature, and out of control. As they talked about these perceptions, some of the women became agitated, frustrated and were resentful of these comments. They talked about how residents would "take advantage of the cultural things our school has to offer" but perceived students as "awful kids who are doing nothing with their lives." The participants did not perceive themselves as irresponsible but instead described the group of women who drank on a regular basis as *"fun, social people"* who "work hard.... for lack of a better word, it's 'movers and shakers on campus' It's not a group of girls who want to get wasted, it's group of girls who are very well put together."

Compared to the narrow view believed to be held by society, the participants were very tolerant and understanding of others who engaged in binge drinking on campus. For example one sophomore who rarely drank prior to coming to college said:

> I've also become more accepting of it, which I don't know necessarily if that is a good thing, but I think that as you are more exposed to it, you find that it's just more and more common in a way and it's hard to see people who you really respect and you know they are high risk drinking, but you trust them and they probably know what they are doing (Gamma Sorority).

Participants saw binge drinking as something that most students would experience. As a result they were very accepting if a peer were to "get out of control" or ended up "throwing up," particularly if it was an occasional experience, such as was expressed by one of the women in the following,

> I feel like if it's a one- time thing, you know you just kind of let them go, because it happens to all of us that you drink too much one night and you do throw up (Alpha Sorority).

However, if "out of control" binge drinking occurs more regularly this was viewed with greater judgment, as the same participant goes on to describe by saying

> …but if you see the same girl out every single weekend and all the time she is throwing up, all the time she is falling over, then you don't think very highly of her, you know you think she is stupid for doing this all of the time (Alpha Sorority).

Gender Differences and Perceptions

> I feel like my best drinking experiences though were definitely when I went out with a group of girls. Like my favorite ….nights for example are when we would go out together [gesturing around the room] or over the summer I went out with a bunch of girls and that was when we went streaking through the [campus]and it was really funny….. My more negative experiences, a least when I got sick, were in mixed company. I think the sickest I have ever been was playing beer pong with a guy and he was like, let me drink your beer and I was like 'no, I drink my own beer, I'm going to do this myself, I'm going to stick it out' things like that,

it was a bad idea, and think because I didn't want to come across as a pansy or whatever, I was like, 'no, I'm going to do it myself (Gamma Sorority).

A fine line of binge drinking existed for both men and women in which occasional binge drinking was acceptable but repeated behavior was met with a more critical eye. Of particular note, women acknowledged they were more judgmental and more disapproving of other women who engaged in repeated binge drinking than they were of men. As one woman stated,

> She was drunk like every single night, she would come home like 3:00 in the morning and would never go to class, and it was awful and I know that personally, I was her harshest critic and I would not talk to her (Alpha Sorority).

Stories such as this were repeated by several of the women. For instance, another women commented

> I would....judge other women who are drinking.... Like there are girls in our

sorority who we refer to jokingly as "drunk sluts" because that's what they do. They get drunk and they hook up with whomever possible (Beta Sorority).

The participant's view of men engaging in similar behavior was less of disapproval and simply expressed as someone who they would not want to pursue a relationship with or who they would want to date. Men who drank too much were described as "more unattractive and you cross off the list of guys you would normally date." The participants expressed frustration and annoyance for individuals who repeatedly engaged in binge drinking, regarding men as "dumb" when they engaged in this behavior. Several times this behavior, whether it was men or women, was

questioned and the women wondered why others couldn't "stop" or "learn from their actions." Those that did learn from their mistakes and modified their behavior in the future earned more respect. An example of this as described by a participant in the following,

> She talked to us about it and I think that by talking about it and learning from it really builds respect. But if you continue to do that all of the time, the guys don't respect some girl who is always drunk, they mock people like that, they create nicknames, they mock them the whole thing, and I think in my mind it's less of a mocking situation and more of why do you do this to yourself, you don't control yourself two nights, three nights out of the week (Alpha Sorority).

The ability to engage in high levels of binge drinking without subsequent negative consequences (also indicative of high tolerance levels) was believed to be regarded with a degree of esteem by the men. Of note however, this belief was almost exclusively perceived as being held by the men. None of the participants expressed a sense of regard for other women who could drink large quantities, nor did they think highly of men who drank a lot. For example,

> There is a certain amount of respect with that, like if you are going out and you are hard core, there are certain people who will think that she is really cool, which isn't necessarily a good thing.... and I think that especially boys think it is cool; like look at this girl, she is so much fun to be around, she can drink (Gamma Sorority).

There were also a number of comments about how men appreciated women who drank heavily, such as in drinking games. The participants believed men wanted women to drink with them, and that men equated such drinking with having a good time providing it didn't "cross the line." For example,

> At the beginning I think that the guys generally do like the girls who can play beer pong and who can just like drink from the Gin bucket and have fun without going overboard and then as soon as they are overboard, either they are going to try to get with you or they leave you cause they don't want to have to deal with you (Alpha Sorority).

Women with high tolerance levels were perceived as more attractive by the men because they could "hang out and play drinking games longer" but men also desired women who could "still be feminine and wear make-up and whatever your going out clothes are," in other words be able to fit into traditional female gender roles. According to the women, the men saw women's drinking as sharing a similar interest and equated it with the ability to have fun, be social, and friendly. The following statement illustrates this perspective

> guys want to know that you have similar interests as them, since that is a big part of the social scene, they want to know that you are social and friendly individual, so if you are willing to hang out and chill, and not necessarily go crazy but just fit in, blend in (Alpha Sorority).

Men too were perceived as seeing other men's high level of drinking as something of an accomplishment. Men who could "handle" a lot of drinks were held in

high regard among other men and it was perceived as *"cooler"* if a man could *"drink a lot as opposed to very little."* For instance one woman said,

> If they can handle a lot of drinks, then it's, they are considered very good and very cool, I've had guys who will sit there and discuss, 'oh remember the time when I took 19 shots'... 'oh yeah, well X did 21' and they will have competitions of who can take more (Alpha Sorority).

Men would comment on other men's ability to drink such as "oh, he's such a man, look how he can take it" and if a guy turns down a drink he is told to "man up and drink something." Often oppressive and offensive comments were used to describe men who cannot drink a lot as "being like a girl" or referred to as other derogatory terms used to describe a woman. Other distasteful words were used to describe men who didn't drink large quantities as being "so gay" and suggest that being able to consume a lot of alcohol is affirming of their masculinity. The lack of tolerance was associated with being "a loser" and indicated a lack of respect. Women did not see men's drinking behavior in the same way, as an accomplishment, but did find it acceptable providing it was not a continual or out of control behavior. For example, one woman stated "I think there is a fine line between manliness and a drinking problem."

Certainly a double standard exists in how the women believed binge drinking was viewed between genders. For example, among men, "tolerance equals manliness" while for the women "tolerance does not equal femininity," instead women are questioned or judged for this behavior. For men, it is acceptable and expected, while for

women binge drinking is recognized as acceptable only in the context of having fun with other men. As one participant said:

> I was trying to think of any guy I know who drinks a lot who has a bad reputation from it and I couldn't think of a single one, and I could name of a list of girls, so like I don't necessarily know what the difference is but I just think it's definitely more acceptable for guys (Gamma Sorority).

The women went on further to describe this behavior. They stated for men, actions such as getting arrested or thrown out of a bar were almost perceived as funny or a badge of honor, while women are judged for similar actions. Women who engaged in binge drinking frequently and who "crossed the line" with "out of control" behavior were given nicknames and a negative reputation on campus among both men and women.

> I mean I think if a women who is doing that, if it's not the norm or it's not a typical behavior then there is more concern and more worry, like why is this behavior happening, where is this coming from, but I think if it's more like a consistent thing then there is a lot of judgment involved and a lot of looking down on them (Gamma Sorority).

Summary of Theme Two: Perceptions of Binge Drinking

Several sub-themes emerged related to the perceptions of binge drinking. Overall the women believed the outside world, or society, perceived college students as engaging in reckless and out of control drinking, while they described themselves as intelligent and responsible. However of particular significance were the underlying double standards that began to emerge among women's descriptions of their perception

of binge drinking behaviors. Several subtle distinctions as well as more overt differences emerged related to gender. Men in general wanted others (men and women) to engage in binge drinking behaviors with them. They were described as receiving more pressure from other men to drink more frequently and in larger quantities than women. Men were more accepting of women who chose not to drink, but at the same time desired women who could drink larger quantities and participate in drinking games. Women on the other hand perceived drinking as a means to socialize. While they were generally tolerant of binge drinking, they viewed excessive alcohol use more negatively. Women were particularly judgmental of other women would binge drink with resulting out of control behaviors, while at the same time would generally dismiss men who engaged in similar activities but did not stigmatize men in the same way. Neither gender was particularly understanding of others who engaged in frequent binge drinking that resulted in negative behaviors. Women would more often take care of others who were inebriated than would men, but were resentful of having to do so. This theme is particularly relevant in that it ties in closely with the subsequent themes that follow.

Theme Three: Drinking in a Male Dominated Environment

A third theme that emerged in this study indicated that virtually all aspects of the drinking environment were dominated and controlled by men, including access to alcohol and the types of drinks served, where drinking occurs, and the hierarchy of drinking privileges. As a result of the high level of power and control possessed by the men, the drinking environment is set up to exploit, sexualize, and marginalize women.

... as in it's definitely not a gender neutral party setting, the power is definitely in the males hands, they control the space, the alcohol, who's drinking, what they are drinking, how long they are drinking and like.... the girls on campus don't really get to make a lot of the decisions (Beta Sorority).

A Closer Look

In taking a closer look at the dynamics of the party it is clear to see how men are in charge of the drinking environment. The following is a description of how men control the alcohol and access to drinking as well as the power exhibited by the men through sexualized parties and drinking games.

Getting in the door

I think to go out, especially here, to go out you need to know people. If you are a freshman, and even if your not....you have to know people in that frat or in the house or wherever your going.... otherwise your just kind of chillin' and that's fine, but you have to know people here, and I know at other schools if you walk into a frat house, someone hands you a drink, but here it's not like that (Alpha Sorority).

For freshman, sophomores, and other women who are under the legal drinking age, the majority of alcohol consumption occurred in one of two places: either behind closed doors in their own student housing or in a fraternity house or predominately male house. This is illustrated by one of the participants who said "I feel like when girls drink, they go out to drink. Where are they going to? 'a guys room,' guys are the ones who have more alcohol on hand." The fraternity house is known for having dry dance parties

in the common area with drinking occurring only behind closed doors in the "upstairs" referring to men's bedrooms. The men controlled access to parties and the women consistently talked about the need to "know someone" in order to be invited to a fraternity or house party and needed an "invitation" to access alcohol upstairs. This influenced drinking behavior in several ways. First, if women (typically under classman) didn't know the fraternity men well, they would drink heavily prior to going out. Those that did have close friends in the fraternity believed they could more easily monitor their drinking once they arrived. This was made clear in the following statement,

> So when you are older you know people before you get there so you don't need to be wasted before you go out, actually it gets to the point where you're not really at the dance party part anyway you are just hanging out upstairs with your friends so you don't feel the need to take tons of shots before you go because you can just casually drink while you're there and it's not a big deal (Beta Sorority).

Drinking

> I think one thing that differs sometimes is that a lot of girls refuse to drink beer, and I know we were talking about earlier that often times that's what is around, I also know that at some parties the guys will make, they will have a keg or cases of beer for whoever wants it but they will have their 'girly drink' for the night and so it's often served in large tubs so you can never really,..., I think that is definitely more dangerous because you don't know what is in that cup (Alpha Sorority).

Women spoke of drinking most any form of alcohol that was available to them, though their preference changed with age. Generally this would mean drinking cheap beer particularly as first and second year students which they referred to as "Natty Light," a nickname given to an inexpensive brand of beer. If women participated in drinking games or "pre gaming" they would take shots of liquor. As the women pointed out, there were no other alternatives to drinking available such as non-alcoholic beverages or bottled water, making it difficult to regulate their alcohol intake.

> They tell you to switch off between having a beer and having water, I think that
>
> would be a lot easier to do if you didn't have to go to the really sketchy gross
>
> fraternity bathroom and just get whatever from the sink (Alpha Sorority).

As the women grew older and had increasing access to other forms of alcohol, they primarily preferred drinking wine or mixed drinks and reported drinking at slower rates.

Knowing that many women dislike the taste of beer, the men create ways of ensuring alternative forms of alcoholic beverages are available to the women such as the "Gin Bucket." Drinking from the "Gin Bucket" consisted of a large trash can filled with a mysterious concoction of liquor such as Vodka and juice drinks to mask the taste of hard liquor and to create a more palatable beverage. Fraternity members were described as giving fancy names to these drinks such as "Caribbean Love Song" in order to make it more desirable for the women. Several factors make this alternative choice dangerous and difficult for women to regulate their alcohol intake. First, by creating a more desirable taste, women commented on how much easier it was to drink larger quantities and not being able to recognize the effects of the alcohol until it was too late. Also, these

drinks are often served in 16 oz Solo cups which are larger than the standard 12 oz drink, so women may believe they are having two drinks, the equivalent to 32 ounces, when in fact they are having almost three drinks, or 36 ounces. Lastly, it is almost impossible to know the type and strength or proof of the alcohol mixed together. Men predominately drank beer and it was even suggested that they stay away from the mixed liquor as this was to be reserved for the women.

The women also spoke of the men having more practical knowledge of alcohol because they were around it more.

So you know I think that is something that maybe girls get lost on is that, guys you know it is more acceptable in some sense for alcohol to be a bigger part in a man's life as opposed to a women's so I think if they are in a fraternity or an organization they have more information about alcohol in some senses, ...
we've all have had the same classes about one shot is this and one that, but just in the sense that this is an actual shot, this is how you would pour it, this is what it is, and stuff like that (Alpha Sorority).

As a result, women perceived themselves as being at a greater disadvantage than men regarding alcohol. In addition to distributing the alcohol, the men also generally paid for it and therefore were more discriminate in giving it away "if you aren't the one purchasing it you just kind of pour indiscriminately I guess, but if you are a guy and you think, I've got to go buy another bottle of this when it's gone" therefore they were more conscientious about making it last.

The Party

We arrive first, because we are already drunk and we go down there and we are as slutty as possible, it's like a slave market, it's awful, "look at how good I am, look at how I can dance, look at how slutty I dressed, look at how drunk I am," and the guys scope out a girl and make a bee line for her and stay with her for most of the night, like whisper her little sweet nothings and keep getting her drinks, and with the intention that she is going home with me tonight (Beta Sorority).

Sexuality and binge drinking were strongly interrelated. Fraternities were portrayed as not "just a brotherhood of friendship" but a "brotherhood of drinking and sex." Dance parties were described by one woman as "guerilla warfare" in which the women would arrive first and wait for the men to join them, at which time the men and women would usually pair up for the night. As she describes this,

The frat situation is really very gender biased because most of the dance parties ….you know how the dance floor is on the lower part- the dance parties are from like 10:00 to 2:00am, well no one is ever actually on the dance floor until like 11:30, but all of the girls are down there with all of their friends and all of their hall mates and the guys always stand on the stairs and scope out girls, always (Beta Sorority).

She went on to describe this scenario as being "very animalistic" in that the guys would look for their "mate for the evening." As the evening proceeds, she commented the couple would dance for awhile and eventually head upstairs to consume more alcohol.

The evening would end around 2:00am with "last call" which the women said they hate because it felt like a "cattle call." This was described as,

> The men turning the lights on and shutting down the music around 1:45am. Then the men would zero in on a girl they had been dancing with for at least some part of the night even if it was just like a minute ago, and I think they judge how much she has been drinking just by the way she looks, like some girls, it's pretty obvious, like she has been drinking for 5 hours, she is pretty gone, and so they just pretty much like grab, like latch onto one and that leads to someone's room, so it's like the last dance of the party, you pick who you really want to be with and you just go from there (Beta Sorority).

One fraternity was even described as announcing the end of the party in the following way "at 1:45 they cut all the lights off and they say if you are not sleeping with a [frat name] or if you're not dating one then get ... out. And they say this over the loud speaker."

As this scenario illustrates, parties are highly sexualized and possess a significant underlying goal of "hooking up," particularly among men who were perceived as viewing drinking as a conduit for having sex. Often the parties had sexually explicit and demeaning themes created by the fraternity members. Some of the themes mentioned during the interviews were "Golf Pro's and Tennis Ho's" and "Sec's and Exec's" (in which the women were scantily dressed secretaries and the men were well dressed executives). A similar theme discussed was called "Professional Ladies and Deadbeat Dads," described by the women as a reversal of traditional gender roles, implying that

generally the men are the professionals and the women are the caretakers. In all of the themes, women were seen as sexual objects and the men maintained the role of power and control. The women acknowledged the themes as "sexist" yet participated in the events.

The next day

They [men] also don't have all the consequences we were talking about, like guys rarely get sick….they go to bed. Like most of us go to the frats, if you are at a frat house and you are a girl and you are drunk and it's 1:30 in the morning and your wasted, and some guy is like "Hey" and you're like, "well your room is right there," you can see how bad decisions can happen very quickly whereas a guy can be drunk at 1:30 and say "my bed is right there" and go to sleep (Gamma Sorority).

Some women talked about the day after the party as starting off with the "walk of shame." This was described as a time woman would leave the man's room early in the morning, likely still hung over from a night of drinking, and walk across campus still dressed in her clothes from the night before back to her residence, hoping not to see anyone she knew. As one woman stated, "you hear the "walk of shame" and things like that and you are just like I don't really want to be another story for some guy to tell." Later, "Sunday Brunch" was described as a time that women recapped the events from the party the night before. Many of the women spoke of making poor choices or doing things they regretted while under the influence of alcohol and the negative feelings they had associated with this behavior, "The next day at brunch or whatever, everyone would

laugh about these things but on the inside they were actually feeling bad about it, or guilty or dumb, or whatever word you want there."

Outskirts: The Marginalization of Women

> Say a guy finds a girl on the floor, they dance for about a half hour, she obnoxiously yells out "I need more liquor, do you have some?" He is like I know where some is, let's go and they go and he probably doesn't drink nearly as much as she does, she gets drunk and either they go back out on the dance floor or they go to someone's room, it's never like, 'let me take you home because you are drunk', instead it's like why don't you just come make a decision that you will probably regret in the morning (Beta Sorority).

The women often talked about how the men treated other women they didn't know as objects or as "toys." In one example, men controlled the amount of alcohol one of the women would consume in order to witness the effects,

> …and so they would almost want to treat her like a toy, they would be like, here have a shot and then she would just run around and be really happy and they would cut her off, like they knew that was where she was supposed to be and they would take things away from her, they would say 'no you can't have that drink,' they just thought she was cute and funny and loved that she could only have one shot and just be like the energizer bunny for the rest of the night (Alpha Sorority).

Freshman women particularly were treated as objects as men laughed at, and made fun of them in the presence of their older female friends. Women described

situations of hanging out in a guy's room drinking, when a group of younger freshmen girls would enter. They witnessed the men treat the younger girls as objects, exploiting and laughing at them, and then once these girls left, they would act sincere and treat the older women as "real friends." They described this type of behavior over and over as younger women would enter a dance party dressed in scantily clad clothing, drinking as much as possible, acting sexually toward the men and becoming out of control as a result of drinking. This was illustrated by one of the women, who stated,

> It's like a really weird dichotomy, because they really want girls to dress [provocatively] to get drunk but once they do then it's like when the judgment comes, like oh my god, she is such a slut, it just blows my mind that that is the perception girls get, like if you want to go out to the frats then you have to be, like wear really revealing clothing, get really, really drunk, and then they will like you, but on the guys part, it's like she's easy ... it's just so crazy (Beta Sorority).

The women were able to recognize how these behaviors changed over time as a result of developing a closer relationship or friendship with the men. The women expressed relief that they no longer had to act or dress like that in order to access the fraternities and have access to a social drinking environment. They were also able to reflect on their behavior when they were younger and wonder why the younger women would expose themselves to this form of ridicule weekend after weekend, despite the fact they once were in that position. For example,

Freshman and sophomore girls are all trying to meet those guys so that's where
they go [to the fraternities]. The juniors and seniors, you've done that scene for
two years and once you have done that scene and you reach a certain age and you
can watch the younger girls doing that you realize how pathetic it is sometimes
and you would rather be removed from it.... I would say the only time junior or
seniors would go to a fraternity is if, maybe for a dance party, because there is
nowhere else to go to dance in this town, so it's sort of mixing it up a little bit
(Gamma Sorority).

The transition described from men treating women as objects to men treating
women as friends were met with ambiguity. In one regard, women enjoyed the
relationships they held with the men, particularly when they weren't drinking "I can talk
with them when they are sober, like we are friends" but abhorred their behavior when
they were drinking "and then you turn around and you put five shots in them and they
are like 'who am I going to have sex with tonight'? So that is so pathetic." The women
acknowledged that men treated women like "an absolute object" rather than a person and
didn't want to be known as "just that [explicative] that I'm probably going to have sex
with tonight." The women recognized the irony that they judged other women as well,
and talked about them as being "that drunk slut" when in reality they were just as likely
to be drunk and quite possibly go home with someone they didn't know.

Interestingly, women who binge drink were considered to be interested in sexual
partnerships by both men and women. For example, one woman said,

> We almost, link girls who get drunk too much to also be like sexually available,
> and if you see someone falling over drunk you kind of also assume that she is
> like [sexually promiscuous] even though it doesn't necessarily correlate, it's kind
> of what you assume (Alpha Sorority).

Likewise, men were consistently described as viewing women who are heavily intoxicated as "easier to get with" or are "*easy*" and that all men are thinking about is how to "get as many girls as naked as possible. " The women described themselves as being "the harshest critics" to other women and who held strong judgments. This was in part out of fear for the women's safety and out of genuine concern. Several women described accounts of women they knew who had lost their virginity while drinking, were sexually promiscuous, and who had gained a reputation for sexual behavior. Men however did not gain a reputation of sexuality but were praised for "hooking up." The participants consistently talked about women as being judged as "promiscuous" and were labeled as "sluts" and "ho's" while the men, who were referred to as "pimps" were not judged in the same way and were even encouraged for this behavior. A particularly poignant statement was made by one of the women who stated "It's like sexual behavior too, like guys congratulate each other and girls judge and that just goes along with the male/female being."

Summary of Theme Three: Drinking in a Male Dominated Environment

Since the majority of underage drinking occurs in fraternities, it should be of little surprise that it is a male dominated environment. In fact, many of the women were well aware of the gender biased setting and the way in which parties were controlled by

men from the beginning to the end. They described how men controlled the admission to the parties including, access to and the type of alcohol served. The women acknowledged it was the men who decided who could remain at the fraternity house at the end of the evening and who would have to leave. Parties were described as a conduit for men to have sex, often had sexually explicit themes, and women were described as objects. While the women could articulate these differences at some level, even expressing the injustices, they possessed little insight regarding the implications of this social structure. Similarly, they described themselves as powerless to do anything about it. In several instances they expressed discrepancies in their feelings toward the male dominated structure. For example, they enjoyed socializing with the men, yet they didn't approve of the way they treated other women, particularly the younger women; they expressed the themes of the parties were demeaning, yet they engaged in the role play; and they felt it was unfair that drinking only occurred at the fraternities but admitted they wouldn't want strangers in their house. These discrepancies and ambivalence resulted in the women remaining in an unchanging system. What emerged in the final theme were the implications the male dominated system has on the women.

Theme Four: Fitting into a Man's World of Drinking

A final theme emerged that indicates how women have had to adapt in order to fit into the power exerted within a male dominated environment. This includes adjusting to the social pressures and expectations of drinking, acting a particular way to access parties, and the stereotypical gender roles that continue to exist. In response to this

environment, women were seen to modify their behavior, a finding that became known in the final theme.

It's not fair that they [men] don't live up to the same standards that we do, not that I wish we had their standards, I wish they had our standards. I wish that if a guy was going to behave in a sexually promiscuous manner that the guys would judge them for that, because maybe they would do it less (Gamma Sorority).

Adaptation: Changing Behaviors

I kind of feel like that is how big parties at fraternities can get sometime, like just go crazy, have fun, just do whatever, and I'd just much rather sit with some good friends and listen to some music or hangout with some people... and I guess just part of it is just growing up and just deciding that's not where you want to be (Gamma Sorority).

Since the majority of drinking occurs in a male dominated environment, if the women wanted to participate they had little choice but to conform to the male standards. Additionally, due to the close relationship between fraternities and sororities and participation in mutual events such as homecoming, women often found themselves in these situations due to their Greek membership. Women spoke of adapting their behavior in a number of ways to assimilate into the college drinking environment. One obvious example was the way women dressed to attend parties. In order to gain access or to be accepted at fraternity events women commented that they were expected to dress in a particular way as one woman explained,

It tends to make the girls dress [in a provocative manner] because they are going to get more alcohol, like if I showed up in this sweatshirt, a guys not going to be like 'here's a shot' so you wear as minimal clothing as you can, and the power is all in their hands, like they are like oh you're not pretty … so I'm not going to give you alcohol because that is just wasting my time (Beta Sorority).

Although women were particularly limited in their options of places to drink that were not predominately male dominated, some women sought alternatives locations while others modified their behavior. In one example of seeking a more gender neutral territory, one sorority talked about affiliating with a predominately gay fraternity to avoid the sexual undertones,

So like one frat that associates with us pretty regularly, they are mostly gay actually, which is pretty nice because there is never any intention of 'oh I'm going to get her drunk and we'll have sex' so that is pretty cool so a lot of my sorority goes and drinks with them because there are never any strings attached to it and they have quite a bit of alcohol, they are providing… (Beta Sorority).

Other women talked about adjusting their drinking behavior altogether to avoid negative stereotypes associated with binge drinking. Some participants spoke of intentionally limiting their alcohol consumption because they did not want to "be 'that girl' who is drunk and hugging everyone so you are definitely more conscientious like that" nor did they want to be the girl that everyone has to take care of for the evening. Likewise, the sexual underpinnings of the fraternities were actually a deterrent for heavy

drinking among women who did not want to be another "notch in a man's bedpost" or "another story for some guy to tell one of his friend's about" in the morning.

Overall, there was not a significant distinction in most areas of the perception of high risk drinking among sophomores, juniors, and seniors. However one area of significance that stood out was the shift that occurred in drinking patterns beginning around their junior year. This time was best described as when women are stuck between a rock and as hard place as they described themselves as "being too old to go to the fraternities, but not old enough to get into the bars." This suggests that as the women entered their junior and senior year they had greater insight and were able to reflect on the drinking environment of the younger women from a different perspective. The women expressed that only once they turned twenty-one and drinking shifted to the local bars that the in balance in the environment began to level off and more gender neutral settings were accessible, for example: "the drinking spaces are gendered and we mentioned before that the [Bars] are much more equal footing than the frats are, and that is definitely true, like whenever you go there it's definitely a male space."

Pressure to drink

I definitely think its pressure. So whether...it's from a guys perspective, 'well I'm drinking a lot and having fun tonight, you should be too' otherwise I'll [the man] feel guilty that I'm not going to get up and do work tomorrow or I'm not doing work right now. 'I want you to do this with me so that we are in it together' type of thing. And I think girls are the same way sometimes, but yeah, I do think its pressure and more often than not, its negative pressure. If someone

doesn't want to drink, they don't want to drink. You don't need to talk them into it, so that would be something nice that I would like to see changed (Alpha Sorority).

Although overall, the women perceived less pressure to drink than men, the pressure existed nonetheless and contributed to women altering their behavior. Once at the parties, several women commented on the explicit pressure they felt to drink, while others talked about the pressure they felt as inherent in their surroundings. Usually the pressure would come in the form of being asked why they weren't drinking, for example,

> if you are at a fraternity and you keep meeting all of these guys, all of them are going to say 'do you want to drink, do you want a drink'? and you're probably going to say I'm not drinking, and you'll keep saying 'no, no' and they will probably ask you why and then you have to say 'well I'm not drinking' or whatever, so sometimes it's just easier to have something to make them stop asking (Alpha Sorority).

In a similar example, another woman commented on being tired of always having to justify why she wasn't drinking and being questioned, such as "if guys would stop being like 'why aren't you drinking, why aren't you drinking'?' You just get sick of it after awhile." These questions came almost predominately by men and happened so frequently that women talked of adapting their behavior in order to avoid being asked questions. For example, many of the women talked about holding a Solo cup in their hand just to appear as if they were drinking or as one woman stated "sometimes I'll go

out and just fill a Solo cup full of water and I won't get the questions anymore and I'll

just do that to avoid all of the pressure coming my way from the guys and sometimes the

girls."

Feelings

As a result of being marginalized by men, women struggled with issues of

blame, guilt, and shame, as well as understanding their role and personal responsibility.

On hand the women felt like "when you are drunk you need to take responsibility for

your actions," yet they also felt like "a lot of guys take advantage of you." As one

women commented,

> It's my experience that I have done things that I think the next morning, not so
>
> much that I regret, I'm fine with what I did, but things that maybe don't seem
>
> like the best idea when you are sober….. and there are other times that I've been
>
> with people that I really trust and you know, I end up passing out and waking up
>
> having no idea what went on and things like that and I do attribute it drinking
>
> and it's the double edged sword because I did drink and so is it my fault? I mean
>
> I did drink, I know I said 'no,' is it my fault? (Beta Sorority)

Another woman talked about "hooking up with a guy" at which time she had sex with

him and while she did not consider this rape, she did believe her friends would have

considered it as such. She describes this event as follows,

> I don't even know if he remembers me because we were both fairly inebriated
>
> and I had class with him the semester after that and I just remember being so
>
> ashamed and at the same time, I'm like why am I ashamed? It was a mutual

thing, but I was really drunk, I guess you could call that rape but I don't consider it rape, I really don't. That might be a naïve viewpoint but I don't think it was (Beta Sorority).

Another woman shared a similar example,

I don't know if you want to assign blame to anyone, because I feel like if everyone is drunk, no one is operating under full capacity and that is the problem, the problem is that you weren't planning, no one was planning on having sex, no one was planning on streaking [across campus] tonight, but now we are doing it! (Beta Sorority).

In these examples and many others, women attributed their behavior and decisions to drinking. As the women recapped the party the next day among their friends, poor decisions were either perceived as a joke; "I don't really know how else to deal with it other than to laugh it off" or minimized; "well I was drunk so it doesn't count" due to the influence of alcohol. While the women attempted to justify their behavior, they admitted often there was a sense of shame or guilt associated with their choices. For example, "Everyone thinks it's so funny at the table and you're like 'ha, ha, ha, I'm so [terrible]" and every girl deep down is like –oh …, did I do that? How awful of me." Several women commented that they "shove their feelings aside" and "pretend it didn't happen." One woman stated "I still have a lot of guilt over the things that I have done, but it's completely my fault." Those women that did share their feelings about their experiences were relieved to find out they were not alone. Several women shared the feeling that its,

Just nice to recognize that you are not alone in feeling that way, because that's

what we were trying to tell my friend last night, like you are not alone in feeling

this way, people may act like that's how they feel, but they are feeling the same

way you're feeling whenever they have done something stupid too (Alpha

Sorority).

Traditional Gender Roles

I know recently the men are the ones who people have turned to if they've had

too much to drink, like call your friend and be like, 'hey walk me home or take

me home.... like a lot of times, like nights that I'm taking care of someone I'd be

like 'hey can you help us and walk us home? (Alpha Sorority)

As a means of adapting to drinking in a significantly gender biased setting,

traditional gender roles of men as masculine and women as caretakers were observed.

An underlying thread in many of the interviews was the notion of the traditionally held

roles by men as strong and protective or as heroes and self sufficient, while the women

are portrayed as in need of help, in care taking roles of others, and in domesticated roles.

Several examples depict men taking care of the women. At the fraternity house, the men

would save the liquor for the women and ensure they had drinks if they chose to drink.

The men were described as associating drinking with having a good time. The women

had a dichotomous view of this behavior. On one hand, they viewed the men as caring

while in other circumstances this behavior was viewed as an attempt to take advantage

of the women with the intent of getting them drunk.

The participants described multiple situations of men caring for the women's safety and welfare. Often the men were called on to walk the girls back to their residence and ensure they made it home safely. The men sometimes perceived this as "cute" and on occasion enjoyed this role.

> The first time they have to take care of a girl and feed her water and walk her home and make sure she gets into her bed ok, it's kind of cute, and they are like 'oooh, we'll take care of you, how adorable' but the 3rd time, the 4th time, the 5th time, they are like don't come back to our fraternity we don't want to take care of you anymore (Alpha Sorority).

The women shared how they knew of particular men in each fraternity who they could rely upon to look after their sisters if need be. For example, if a woman perceived another sorority sister or girl as reaching their personal limit, she would ask one of her male friends to cut the girl off and to keep an eye on her. This is another example of how men controlled the drinking environment. Another story exemplifies how women are cared for by men. One sorority described the tradition of having a "tuck in" in which her big sister arranged for one of the fraternity men to come to her room with a cheap bottle of wine, tuck her into bed, and read her a bedtime story prior to leaving for the night.

The women described how they took care of other women, whether they knew them or not. One woman talked about seeing another girl in the corner of the room that obviously had too much to drink. She would check on her and make sure she was connected with a friend. Other gave examples of taking care of women they didn't know and ensuring they got home safely. For example,

But I was going home and I think it was like 7:00 [am] and we, me and my other friend, we were leaving to go home and we were walking to go out of the [house] and we heard this 'wait' and we turned around and there was this girl, no shoes on nothing, and she was coming up the stairs, I guess she had fallen asleep in the bathroom and no one knew she was in there, and so she woke up in the morning and didn't know where anyone was, she was a freshman, and didn't, I guess she had left her purse and stuff somewhere else and she was locked out of the basement and her shoes and coat and everything were there, so we had to go upstairs and ask our guy friends, we borrowed a sweatshirt and shoes for her to wear and took her home, I didn't know this girl, never met her before (Beta Sorority).

Other participants had similar stories and shared how they believed women would take care of each other more often, whereas men would leave their friends to pass out somewhere or wait well beyond the point of being able to care for them. This was exemplified as a gender difference as stated by the following,

I think it's definitely gender roles because women are nurturers so and the guys have to live up to this stereotypes where 'I don't cry when I watch Disney movies,' that sort of thing so when one of your brothers are I guess in distress, like throwing up, it's like 'oh he just couldn't take it, he'll be fine,' where with girls, I need to help her, it's that kind of need I think, gender roles definitely play a big part (Beta Sorority).

Another woman said "Well, men don't hold back each others' hair, if a guy is puking in the bathroom I don't think all of the other fraternity brothers are like 'oh, let's go help him." The women recognized the difference in part was due to not being in their own environment and needing to get home. They also expressed that they would hope someone else would take care of them if they were significantly intoxicated. However, there certainly was a stereotype that existed about what is acceptable and expected behavior of men and women.

One woman talked about how the dynamics of their group changed and a difference in activities once men entered the picture, particularly in larger numbers. She described how after a night of drinking, if she was with a small group of women, they would typically go back to their apartment and watch T.V., enjoy a snack, and socialize. If however, a group of men came back with them, they would instead engage in drinking games and continue consuming alcohol. She described it as the men "bringing the frat house with them" as she states,

> The girls house is kind of like a frat house because sometimes people, like all our friends will come in and sometimes the guys will come in and take over, well not take over but they'll bring stuff with them [referring to liquor], it's different because you are not in a fraternity, you are in a house owned by all girls, at the same time, it can still be kind of a male, like when beer pong is going on, and they are like "come and do the beer table" (Beta Sorority).

She also acknowledged this as "being kind of gendered" as the women take on the role of cleaning up and taking care of the men while they are there.

Girl Power

> I think that's how, in the ideal situation, that's how big sisters and little sisters are set up in sororities, um, they not only give you someone to watch out for you but it also gives you someone who introduces you around and who, and through her I met a lot of people in different fraternities which I feel made me safer (Alpha Sorority).

Although the women sometimes described themselves as succumbing to a male dominated environment, they also spoke of the power, safety, and security they felt as part of their membership in their sorority. During several of the interviews I heard how the women perceived being in a sorority as a protective factor and that women were generally more aware of one another's whereabouts at parties and social functions. One woman talked about how it was rare, if not almost impossible, to go out without running into at least one other sorority sister and more often several women in her sorority. In one situation, a girl was described as "being fed alcohol" by a fraternity member and since the sorority members keep an eye on one another they were able to intervene "before anything happened." Another woman described her big sister having looked out for her in the following way,

> I've always had my big sister to protect me or watch out for me so I was kind of able to do whatever I wanted, and knew that if she thought I had three beers and that was all she thought I should have then she would not give me another beer and that was fine and I knew that she watched me and that was great (Alpha Sorority).

This woman also talked about as she got older that she reduced her drinking and took on

a similar role in looking out for her younger sister. The notion of older sisters as a role

model was mentioned in several interviews. This provided both younger women a guide

of how to act, as well as providing the older women with a sense of responsibility to care

for younger sisters. This pre existing social structure embedded within sororities may

serve as a protective factor against excessive drinking and subsequent consequences.

Summary of Theme Four: Fitting into a Man's World of Drinking

Women were found to have made several accommodations in response to their

environment. For example, they altered their dress, changed their drinking patterns, and

conformed to more traditional gender roles. Sometimes these adaptations were

associated with negative feelings such as shame and guilt. Evidence of this was seen

through the poor decisions women acknowledged to make while under the influence.

Other times, they justified their behavior or denied the seriousness of it by

attributing their decisions to the lack of choices they had. One potentially positive result

that emerged in the final theme relates to the inherent power found among sororities.

They expressed significant responsibility in looking out for one another's well being and

safety. Too often negative judgments are associated with the Greek system, yet there

may be strong protective factors inherent in these groups that should not be discounted.

Summary of Findings and Analysis

The findings presented are the result of four predominant themes that emerged in

the data analysis. Of particular significance within these findings are the patterns related

to drinking in a male dominated environment and the implications for women related to

this structure. It is likely no surprise that in this study the majority of drinking on campus occurred at fraternity houses. Most colleges with Greek organizations probably would have similar findings. What is profound is that not only do we expect drinking to occur in these venues or that it is often accepted, but that it is actually promoted as a result of women's own National Panhellenic Conference. As a result of the NPC policy forbidding sororities to hold parties or events with alcohol in their house, sorority members are dependent on fraternities or other locations to socialize in this manner. This coupled with the power, control, and exploitation of women that occurs at fraternity parties, contributes to an environment that is unsafe and exploitive of women. In addition, findings from this study indicate women had significantly different understanding of high risk drinking and its associated consequences, despite the fact the readily acknowledged engaging in this behavior.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Five begins by revisiting the purpose of the study, reviews the initial

research questions posed, and delves further into the significant findings and themes that

emerged in the previous chapter. In the final stage of data analysis and synthesized data

reduction, the themes uncovered are closely examined by the researcher. Through

further consideration and reflection, a comprehensive understanding of the findings

emerged. In this final chapter the identified themes are discussed in depth, are tied to

known research, and important future considerations are raised. The researcher provides

recommendations for logical next steps within the research and suggests implications for

practitioners. Both areas of need related to future work with this population as well as

potential strengths are presented. Finally, limitations and assumptions of the study are

discussed.

Purpose of the Research Study: A Review and Summary

According to several well known national surveys, rates of binge drinking and

frequent binge drinking among college women are steadily increasing. Despite the

multitude of prevention efforts aimed at this population, overall rates of binge drinking

have remained remarkably consistent over the past twenty years (O'Malley & Johnston,

2002; Wechsler, et al., 2002; Presley, et. al., 2004). This study strived to uncover the

unique aspects of high risk drinking among college women, an area that has been

particularly absent from the existing research. With the exception of two studies (Young,

132

et al., 2005 and Williams, 1998) researchers have paid little attention to why this is occurring and specifically have not examined this phenomenon through qualitative research or with a feminist lens. Both studies are groundbreaking in that they use women's voices to explore and analyze the role of substances in women's lives. Outside of this, the unique experiences of women in the literature have been remarkably absent. It was from this starting point that I entered my research with the following questions in mind:

1) What are the experiences of college aged women with high risk drinking?

2) How do these experiences shape women's perceptions of drinking?

3) How do these experiences affect women's behaviors related to drinking?

In addition to these guiding questions, a feminist lens was used to understand and analyze the findings.

This study used a qualitative research design consisting of three focus groups and six individual interviews inclusive of a total of 25 college aged sorority women. Using a phenomenological approach allowed women to talk at length about the details surrounding their experiences with college drinking, the environment, and the drinking culture on campus all of which have contributed to a greater insight to the questions posed. The information gleaned from this study provides a picture of college student drinking that is not only consistent with multiple facets of what is already known in the existing college drinking literature, but also raises new areas of consideration. What is especially noteworthy are the additional issues uncovered related to women drinking in a predominately male dominated environment, including the marginalization of women

through issues of power and control, and women's construction and understanding of binge drinking.

In this final chapter the identified themes are discussed within context to the professional literature, specifically with regard to important similarities and differences identified. What were uncovered through this qualitative study about high risk drinking among college aged women are two predominant, interrelated themes; (1) an underlying marginalization of women exists in the context of the college drinking environment, and (2) the traditional body of research describing binge drinking does not adequately match the reality constructed by the participants. These two findings lead to a third issue for consideration; how to best address the unique needs of college women's high risk drinking which is discussed in detail later in this chapter. Additionally it was clear that a feminist lens plays an integral role in interpreting, understanding, and considering future implications of this study.

Experiences of College Aged Women with High Risk Drinking

Consistency with Prior Research

The drinking culture described by the women in the present study could easily be portrayed as that of any college university in America. Both during the focus groups and individually the participants present a particularly consistent account of typical college drinking and associated behaviors including; when, what, where, why, how, and with whom. Overall, most of the women described drinking as a regular occurrence and as a significant part of their college experience. Similar to much of the research (Johnston, et al., 2001; Wechsler, 2000) the women reported the frequency and consumption of alcohol as being higher for men than for women and that men tend to drink beer while

women preferred hard liquor or wine. In addition, men were perceived more often as "drinking to get drunk" or drinking in a competitive manner while women reported drinking as a vehicle to socialize and getting drunk was more likely to be an unplanned outcome. Ricciardelli, et al., 2001 is one of many studies that discuss similar patterns of drinking.

Consuming alcoholic beverages was perceived as a significant function of the social environment and as an expected behavior in college, similar to that portrayed in the media (Presley, et al., 2002; Alva, 1998; Vicary and Karshin, 2002). Access to alcohol was not perceived to be a problem by the participants, though the implications of this will be discussed later. Individuals reported a wide range of reasons for engaging in drinking including as a means to celebrate, to relieve stress, and for increasing socialization. Similar motives for drinking were summarized by Vicary and Karshin (2002) in their extensive review of the level of the drinking problem among colleges. Binge drinking was common among participants as was engagement in drinking games. Pederson and LaBrie (2006) found drinking games to be of particular concern for women because they found women to drink significantly more on these occasions and suffer greater consequences as a result than did their peers.

As previous studies have indicated, members of the Greek social system are more likely to engage in heavy alcohol use (Wechsler et al, 2002; Presley, et al., 2004; Cashin, et al., 1998; Alva, 1998) and the women from this study were no exception. All of the women reported engaging in binge drinking at some point during their college experience and the majority indicated this was a regular occurrence. Turrisi et al. (2006) discussed how membership in a sorority offers extensive opportunities to engage with

fraternities and to participate in activities that frequently are associated with drinking such as homecoming and formal events. The women in this study spoke of their frequent socialization with fraternity members both individually and through formalized activities. They also indicated that most events involving fraternities and sororities involved alcohol.

Drinking patterns reported by the women beginning in freshman year and transcending through their senior year concur with a number of studies (Schulenberg, Maggs, Long, Sher, Gotham, Baer, et al., 2001; Wechsler, 2000). One study in particular (McCabe, 2001) found women reported drinking progressively less with each academic year while at the same time no noticeable drinking differences were found among the men. McCabe found sophomore, junior, and senior male undergraduates to engage in more heavy and frequent drinking than freshman men, and a reverse trend was noted among undergraduate women in which upper class women drank less than first year students. This finding reported by McCabe (2001) was also consistent with patterns found among the women in this study who reported "maturing" out of high risk drinking at an earlier stage than their male counterparts. Though this researcher did note that as women became older they reported drinking to get drunk on fewer occasions and having more control over their alcohol use, however when they did drink it was still in large quantities. This may suggest that while the women had a better understanding of the effects of alcohol, their level of use may not have decreased but instead may be indicative of increased tolerance levels. The above account of findings synthesizes a number of known factors in the existing literature pertaining to high risk drinking among college aged students. These findings have been well established in the research and

while they are not groundbreaking they do contribute to the credibility of this study and provide significant insight into understanding college drinking. However it also demonstrates the need for researchers to look beyond what we are so conditioned to finding. My research indicates some of the most significant issues related to college drinking are so engrained and accepted in the college culture that researchers may be missing the obvious.

Drinking in a Man's World

The marginalization of women in relation to the drinking environment found in this study is clear and overwhelming. Several popular journalists and academic researchers (Ehrenreich, 2002; Morse & Bower, 2002; Zailackas, 2005; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 1978) suggest that women are drinking at levels similar to that of men as a form of women's liberation, as a means of exerting their right to do so, and as an attempt to seek gender equality. Young and colleagues reported women copied men's drinking behaviors in relation to binge drinking but did not want to be like their male peers (2005). This significant piece of literature presents only a partial picture of the marginalization of women. What is revealed in this study suggests the strong gender bias inherent in the environment at this college, and likely most colleges, plays a significant role in women's drinking behavior resulting in a social setting where women have limited choices, minimal power, and the potential to be victimized. The strong gender biased setting also promotes patterns of stereotypical traditional gender roles for men and women, results in women altering their behavior to accommodate the environment, and as a consequence women are exploited and devalued in this context.

What appears fairly obvious to an outsider looking in was only minimally recognized by the participants and rarely discussed in the literature. One of the most apparent biases in the drinking environment was evident with regard to the location where actual drinking occurs, which for the most part is within fraternity houses. The international rule that prohibit sororities from drinking in their own house as one of the ideals they uphold, as compared to fraternities who are allowed alcohol on the premise, not only sets different standards for drinking for women than men, but also suggests drinking is an immoral activity for women. This was highlighted by women who said they were strongly opposed to drinking in their sorority house out of respect for sisters. Many of the women were aware of how this sets up a gender biased setting from the onset (e.g., having to go to the fraternities, needing to know someone to gain entrance, and acting and dressing in different ways) but few had insight as to the implications of this setting (e.g., giving up control, lack of choices, powerlessness). Not one of the participants expressed the need to change this policy and little, if anything, is mentioned in the literature about this inherent difference.

In the past, referring to a "double standard" of alcohol use meant that women did not have the same freedoms to experiment with drinking as men. The literature continually demonstrates that common perceptions held within our society suggest that drinking is more socially acceptable for men than for women (Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Wilke et al., 2005). This no longer seems to be the case, particularly with rates of women's drinking closely matching those of men. Now women are free to drink, sometimes even encouraged to do so, but they have to do so in a man's world.

Today the double standard of alcohol use refers to the stereotypical gender roles exhibited by men and women. Rhoads (1995) showed fraternities portray a patriarchal system in which men and women are separated and men are elevated to a higher status and privilege. His findings go on to state that fraternities marginalize women and potentially promote the victimization of women through the exclusion of or by including women in their social functions only under certain conditions. Similarly, the current study found significant evidence of a patriarchal social system and perpetuated the stereotypical gender roles. Women described themselves as nurturers and caretakers while the men were portrayed as dominant, experienced, and powerful. Evidence of caretaking roles by women was exhibited in situations of heavy drinking where they helped one another get home safely, took care of other women who had too much to drink, and looked out for the general safety and wellbeing of other women who clearly had too much to drink. The role for men as caretakers was defined as protecting the women by walking them home or by regulating the supply of drinks to women (sometimes referred to as being good hosts). Otherwise the role men cultivated was one of aggression, dominance, and authority. The men were perceived as more experienced in regard to alcohol because they purchased it, poured it, and controlled its access, making them more knowledgeable and equipped to handle alcohol. Similar findings were presented in past studies in which drinking was perceived as symbolic of "manliness" for men and traditional feminine traits were exhibited by women. (Lemle & Mishkind, 1999; Ricciardelli, et al., 2001). These stereotypical gender roles suggests less inherent power for women and a reliance on men for access to drinking and control of their alcohol intake.

The gender biased culture that emerged is particularly important to understanding the context of women's drinking behavior. While the fraternity houses and other male run organizations offered women an opportunity to socialize as well as access to drinking, the circumstances under which this occurs contributes to the oppression of women. Similar to findings by Rhoads (1996) who looked at male behavior in fraternities, women in this study were portrayed as objects to have sexual relations with and devalued as human beings. Both men, and surprisingly women, perceived other women who frequently engaged in binge drinking as being sexually promiscuous. However women who engaged in this behavior did not see themselves in this way, and acknowledged this as a double standard. For example, the women admitted they drank consistent with the definition of binge drinking, but saw others as being sexually promiscuous while this did not apply to them.

Parties had sexually demeaning themes requiring women to dress in a provocative manner and role play positions of lesser power (such as in the theme "secretaries and executive"). Parties were described as being intentionally appealing to freshman women whereas upper class women found other venues to attend. This was not always the case for men who continued to enjoy attending these parties and were described as intentionally trying to connect with younger women. While not all of the women engaged in sexual behavior, those that did often developed a negative reputation on campus or experienced feelings of shame and guilt. The same did not hold true for the men who were perceived to be held in high regard (by other men) for engaging in sexual encounters. With incidents of sexual assault and high risk drinking already significantly correlated (Abbey et al., 2002) this environment, particularly within the

Greek system, can only exacerbates the problem. Mohler-Kuo et al, (2004) found women who belong to sororities and who reside in a sorority house are at increased risk for rape while intoxicated. However the male dominated drinking environment lacks alternative choices for women. Until women turn twenty-one, by necessity they are forced to conform to a male set of standards.

Binge Drinking

In addition to the marginalization of women, a second and interrelated theme uncovered relates to the significance of women's construction of binge drinking. In the literature, binge drinking is defined as five or more drinks in one sitting for men and four or more drinks for women. While this definition may be helpful in identifying and discussing patterns of heavy alcohol use and the subsequent impact it has on the body when used at this level, the term binge drinking did not resonate with the women in the study. Researchers at Rutgers Communication and Health Issues Partnership for Education and Research (CHI) learned of this finding almost eight years ago at which time they proposed the term "dangerous drinking" to be used rather than the term "binge drinking" (Lederman, et al, 2000). Although most women in the study admitted to consuming high levels of alcohol or associating with others who do so, most found nothing wrong with this behavior, particularly if it wasn't a regular occurrence.

When the participants were asked about their understanding of binge drinking they identified very different meaning and connotations about this behavior than what is commonly accepted in the literature. The standard definition of binge drinking is closely associated with the quantity of intake and does not take into account the individual, types of alcohol consumed, or the resulting behaviors associated with drinking, all of

which were factors identified by the women in this study. Most of the women didn't think a specific number of drinks defined unhealthy drinking behaviors. Rather, the women suggest the number of drinks required for a student to "cross the line" varies from person to person, a finding indicative of tolerance levels. This is consistent with other research in which most students don't believe five or more drinks are too much to drink (Lederman et al, 2000).

Instead, problem drinking was associated with daily drinking, drinking out of necessity, or frequently "crossing the line" in which behavior was described as out of control. These findings were consistent with other research (Lederman, et al. 2000; Weschler & Kuo, 2000). Similarly, Lederman et al (2000) found in a random survey that 71% of students indicated that students measured their drinking by behavioral consequences rather than a set number of drinks. In this study the women were found to associate the resulting behavior of having too much to drink as a significant factor related to alcohol use. Some of the behaviors associated with inappropriate alcohol use include blacking out, throwing up, stumbling, or acting out of control, such as inappropriate crying or acting belligerent.

The women found the term binge drinking to be value laden and associated it with a negative connotation of drinking. Binge drinking was described by the women as something others did, despite the fact they acknowledged their own drinking patterns fell into this definition. They also had a strong emotional connection with the term "binge," describing it as something that might be associated with an eating disorder or someone who is dealing with strong emotional issues. The use of this word conjures up

images of extremely negative behavior making it less likely for students to associate their own drinking with this definition.

Perhaps the more worrisome results to come out of this study is that women are cognizant, at least on the surface, of the gender inequality and power differential that exists in the college drinking environment. For example, women spoke of the power and control that men held as being unfair, yet willingly participated in it. Despite this inequality, women find it acceptable to engage in heavy alcohol use within this context. Likewise, they do not see this behavior as dangerous or unhealthy and therefore drink at alarming rates. Therefore, it appears the challenge lies in a) helping women cross from simply acknowledging that they are engaging in binge drinking behaviors and b) that these behaviors occur within a male dominated environment and finally to c) fully understand the implications of these behaviors as it relates to their ability to make decisions and maintain control.

Recommendations and Implications for Practitioners

Implications from this study are significant for both prevention programming and policy change and are relevant to all levels of stakeholders with a vested interest in college student drinking. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered as a means to create a safe and equitable environment for college women.

Policy Change

First it is critical to examine the inequalities and power differentials that are inherent in the drinking culture on college campuses and develop and implement policies to create change within this environment. Possibly administrators are already

aware of these dynamics, believing that by containing underage drinking it makes it easier to monitor. However administrators need to be informed about how the current gender based drinking culture contributes to the exploitation of women, and especially of the vulnerability of freshman women, in addition to the potential for increased sexual victimization. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) needs to be challenged to uphold the same standards for men and women at the most fundamental level. Administrators, Greek leadership advisors, and others need to advocate for a change and equitable standards for both sororities and fraternities. Colleges need to implement policies that support these changes.

An important implication of changing the drinking policy among the Greek system is that it may simply result in driving underage drinking off campus, resulting in a catch twenty-two. However the inherent inequality in choice of drinking location cannot be ignored. Perhaps calling attention to this inequality and exploring alternatives can provide women with options and remove some of the stigma imposed on the Greek system.

Prevention Programming

A second recommendation pertains to prevention programming. Prevention efforts geared toward college drinking have moved away from an abstinence only approach and accept the reality that the consumption of alcohol is likely to occur for the vast majority of the population (Larimer & Cronce, 2002). For years, prevention specialist and health educators have been looking for new programs and new ways to encourage college students to change their drinking behavior with little to no avail. One

explanation is that educators and researchers have been looking at this phenomenon from a different perspective from the students; the former sees it as problem while the latter does not. It is really no wonder that students continue to drink at alarming rates given that they do not see this behavior as a problem or as dangerous. Perhaps we are asking students to change their behavior before they are ready. Therefore, it would seem the first challenge would be to have the student's recognize patterns of drinking as unhealthy behavior.

Prochaska's Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM), first developed in the late 1980's provides a useful framework in understanding the stages college students would pass through in understanding and changing their drinking behavior. The stages of behavior change consist of five areas as follows: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). In assessing college students understanding of binge drinking and their readiness to change this behavior it would appear that most are in the pre-contemplation stage, with some, particularly older students, in the contemplation stage. Likewise, women's understanding of the inherent power differentials with regard to a gender biased drinking environment could be described in much the same way. If students don't perceive their drinking behavior as a problem, or see the male dominated location as a concern, they have little reason to change. Chapman (2007) notes it would be particularly useful to examine the transition that occurs from underclassman to upperclassman where it appears women move from a pre-contemplative stage to a contemplative stage in order to help effectively target interventions at the most appropriate stage.

Similarly, Vicary & Karshin (2002) contend that most of the prevention programming geared toward this population makes the assumption that students have contemplated a behavior change and are prepared to do so, when in fact most have not considered this change. Likewise, developmental theorist suggest that providing levels of programming that are inconsistent with the level of functioning of the participants can create a miss educative experience. Research has shown that an individual's stage of cognitive development is useful in determining the most appropriate intervention that will benefit them the most (Sprinthall, 1978).

Prevention programming should be aimed not only at the appropriate stage of change but within the appropriate developmental stage as well. By gaining a better understanding of women's perceptions of drinking as compared to the reality of their experience leaves a window for targeting appropriate programming. For example, the women perceived the drinking venue [fraternities] as an opportunity to socialize and meet men. However at their brunch the next day they also talked about feelings of shame and guilt associated with drinking and the subsequent decisions they had made under the influence. Further understanding these discrepancies can help develop and target the most effective prevention programming.

Closely related to the Transtheoretical Model of Change and appropriately matching prevention interventions is the use of Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). This approach has already demonstrated promise as a component to an effective prevention program as described in NIAAA (2002). Motivational Interviewing (MI) addresses student's ambivalence about change and promotes students' intrinsic desire or motivation to change their behavior. For example, the women spoke of their

ambivalence of socializing at the fraternities. Some, particularly the older women, recognized the inherent power differential, yet felt they had no alternatives. It is this type of ambivalence that MI would be useful in helping to raise awareness and promote change. Perhaps this is already occurring as observed in the transition in drinking from underclassman to upperclassman. However, the use of MI may help facilitate this change sooner.

In addition to understanding how students perceive drinking, prevention programming needs to consider gender specific programming. To date prevention programming has virtually ignored the unique needs of women and the understanding of binge drinking from their perspective. While some prevention initiatives have begun to consider the larger campus environment and its impact on drinking, such as limiting the density of alcohol retail outlets near campus, restricting the hours of sales, and prohibiting low cost drink specials such as "ladies night," there has been an overwhelmingly neglect to recognize the inherent male dominated drinking environment.

Clearly the needs of women differ from men in many ways. Therefore, it is recommended that prevention specialist begin implementing prevention programming that is gender specific. Such programming would address women's issues of personal safety, empowerment to make choices, and to raise awareness of the inequalities that exist. Additionally the majority of prevention programs do not provide sufficient attention to the potential for sexual assault while engaging in heavy alcohol use, an inherent risk of sorority membership and the college environment. Lastly, membership in sorority may also serve as a protective factor, a facet that can be built on.

A Proposed Framework for Prevention Programming Among Women

The proposed framework does not suggest a specific prevention intervention, but rather provides a structure for implementing effective programming. The framework that emerged utilizes a comprehensive approach through the use of multiple theories and models and specifically addresses women's issues. First, the use of the Stages of Change model is useful in appropriately assessing student's desire to make changes. Second, a developmental matching model will help ensure appropriate interventions resonate with students. Third, the use of Motivational Enhancement Theory or Motivational Interviewing will raise awareness of issues among women and will help foster the intrinsic desire to change. Finally, gender specific programming should be taken into account in which women's unique needs are considered. This framework, depicted in figure 5.1, is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of this population. However it should be noted that this should only be one facet of a larger, comprehensive system of prevention programming and should be inclusive of an evaluation to assess outcomes.

Figure 5.1: Framework for Implementing Effective Prevention Programming

Among Women
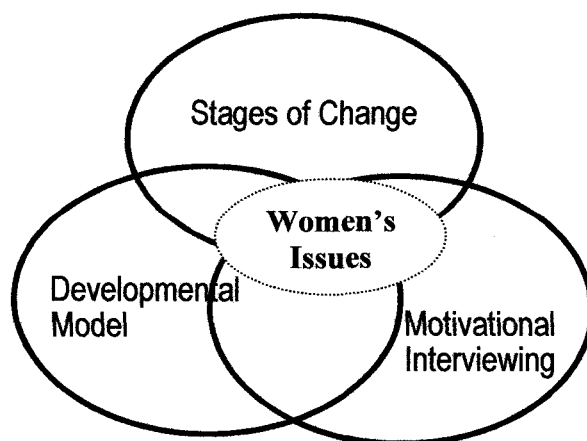
Redefining High Risk Drinking

A third recommendation addresses the overall concept of the term "binge" drinking. The language commonly used to describe heavy engagement in alcohol use did not match the reality of the participants in this study. Therefore dangerous alcohol use was perceived by the women as something others did, while they were unaware of their drinking patterns as high risk or it was easy to deny given they did not buy into the definition of binge drinking. As a result of this research and past studies, it is suggested that when working with the college population, the term binge drinking should be avoided. Some have chosen to use "at risk drinking" although this has been found to be potentially appealing to risk taking behaviors. Others have suggested the term "dangerous drinking." I am proposing the term "unhealthy drinking patterns" which is not as value laden or judgmental and fits in more closely with today's image of striving for a healthier lifestyle, such as in Healthy People 2010. Women may find this definition more appealing as well as it implies looking at the wellness of this behavior. In the study, several women spoke of their personal concern, or that of others, related to the intake of calories and having a healthy meal prior to going out drinking rather than simply a salad. The use of "unhealthy drinking patterns" or the promotion of adopting "healthy drinking patterns" may impact several areas of concern related to women's drinking issues. In addition, it focuses on behavioral concerns rather than quantity or frequency alone. Until an acceptable term is found that is more suitable for this population, administrators working with college students should be aware of this disconnect found in using the term "binge drinking." When attempting to convey

messages to the college population about the notion of binge drinking, researchers and administrators should find out what is meaningful from the student's themselves making it more likely to be an effective strategy.

Summary of Recommendations

Issues related to women and binge drinking need to be addressed through a comprehensive approach. The recommendations proposed from this study, including issues related to policy, prevention programming, and language, should be utilized as part of a larger, comprehensive system. In sum, changes in policy can influence the inequality that exists within the college environment and promote a gender neutral setting for men and women. Prevention programming and its underlying theoretical framework needs to take into account the ambivalence and discrepancies expressed by women related to a gender biased environment and empower women by raising their awareness and promoting responsible choices. In addition, programming needs to be developed specifically with women in mind, taking into consideration how they construct this issue and at what level they perceive it to be a problem, if at all. The simple steps of changing the language used to "unhealthy drinking" and raising awareness of gender inequalities is an easy and cost effective way of beginning to make changes. By understanding drinking and related behaviors through student's eyes, only then can we begin to put forth new programs and communicate in ways that will resonate with them.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

This qualitative study lays the groundwork for a multitude of follow up studies related to how students make meaning of high risk drinking and with a particular

understanding of how a gender biased environment influences these behaviors. In addition to other qualitative studies in specified areas of this topic, follow up quantitative research is needed to validate and operationalize specific findings and constructs. It is suggested that further consideration is specifically needed in the following areas:

1) Alternative drinking environments and groups need to be researched including;

(a) All women's colleges: Past surveys indicate binge drinking has significantly increased on all women's campuses (Wechsler et al, 2002; Presley et al, 2004). If a male dominated culture contributes to rates of binge drinking, it poses the question how an all women's school would be impacted.

(b) Co-ed social organizations: How does a gender neutral setting impact the dynamics of drinking? Does a gender bias exist in this context?

(c) All male groups: Understanding high risk drinking from a male perspective will provide a comparison group to understand an alternative perspective of these inequalities.

(d) Groups of diversity: Traditionally drinking rates among African American sororities are far lower than predominately Caucasian Greek organizations. Exploring the drinking patterns and protective factors of these groups is needed.

2) All women's groups such as sororities, athletic groups and other in-tact groups of women may possess a unique protective factor against heavy

episodic drinking that has not been tapped into and should be further
explored. This strength needs to be further assessed to potentially educate
and raise awareness to women's groups and the power they possess.

3) Research from a critical humanistic perspective could help understand the
level of awareness by women. Using this perspective would help to increase
awareness of women as part of being participants in the study.

4) Investigate the policies and procedures associated with gender bias and
college environments including the impact of a dry campus, alcohol policies,
and national Greek oversight.

5) Assess student's desire to change and motivation to do so through the Stages
of Change model and Motivational Interviewing techniques.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study are not without limitations and are bound both within
context and time. Consistent with a phenomenological study, generalizations cannot be
assumed for the entire campus population or to colleges in general. First, the unique
attributes of the participants and environment must be taken into consideration. This
study was conducted on a moderately sized, four-year predominately white, public
university. Participants consisted of 25 women who were self selected from three Greek
student sororities. It was assumed due to their Greek affiliation that participants would
be familiar with one another and respond in a manner consistent with their membership.
Likewise, this researcher believed the participants to be open, honest, and willing to
engage in thoughtful discussions about their personal experiences of high risk drinking.
The use of a purposefully selective small sample allowed thick rich descriptions of data

to be generated and to further understand the constructions of women's experiences with high risk drinking, yet the limitations of this population sample must be taken into consideration.

Second the time frame of the study must be taken into account. The study occurred over the fall semester during which time events such as holidays, course examinations; campus specific events (such as homecoming) and other related factors were reported to influence patterns of drinking behaviors among the participants. The use of one semester to collect the data also limits the prolonged engagement of the researcher with the participants.

Lastly the topic of high risk drinking and subsequent behaviors is an extremely sensitive topic and over two thirds of the participants were underage. Though the women were extremely forthcoming, it should be noted this could affect their responses.

As with all qualitative studies, generalizations of the findings are limited to the sample of participants and are not representative of the student population as a whole. Although findings are not statistically generalizable, the rich descriptive findings provide significant contributions to a field of study that has been struggling with college student drinking for years. The implications discussed in the results, as well as the findings presented in the women's own voices, enables readers to draw from his or her own experiences and make logical connections between this study and other similar settings.

Conclusion

It's hard to fathom that research has not looked more closely at the obvious inequalities inherent in the college environment associated with drinking. The vast

majority of research on college drinking related to women has focused on quantitative variables, including the increase in levels of binge drinking, consequences, and health concerns, yet have virtually ignored the power structure inherent in the drinking culture. The simple matter of raising these attributes and the importance of this study shows it can no longer be ignored.

This research sheds light on the unbelievable power differential and significant levels of power and control experienced by women. The words spoken by the women sometimes are inconceivable, yet the differences are so engrained in this community that women are not even hearing their own voices, much less others. In no other environment in the United States does this occur so overtly and yet with such little awareness. Women, parents, and administrators should be bringing attention to these inequalities, yet their voices are silent, but for how much longer?

Research in college student drinking that addresses gender as a factor has lacked the thick descriptions that qualitative analysis provides. More work needs to be done to understand the college drinking culture, specifically with regard to how male dominated social organizations contribute to high risk drinking and subsequent behaviors. Investigating the voices of college students from alternative perspectives, such as men, upperclassman, underclassman, and other women's groups is needed to gain a greater understanding of how young adults make meaning of high risk drinking. Only after this is accomplished can we begin to make a difference.

We need to rethink how we approach college student drinking related to prevention initiatives and policy issues. Current approaches view college drinking as a gender neutral setting, which clearly it is not. The women in this study illustrate the

complexities of the drinking environment and the inherent gender differences that are so ingrained and accepted. As those in the field of college student drinking continue to seek answers to this complex problem, the issue of gender inequality cannot be ignored. I have built my research on the shoulders of a just a slight few who have begun to shed light on women's issues from a feminist perspective. I hope this study provides new insight to an ongoing problem and encourages researchers to continue to explore this line of research.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

FLYER: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

AN INVITATION TO SORORITY MEMBERS

Over the past several years, the number of college women engaged in high risk drinking has slowly increased. Research indicates women metabolize alcohol differently, run an increased risk of serious health problems related to high risk drinking, and may benefit from alcohol education specific to the needs of women. Yet little is known about the motivation of women who engage in risky drinking behaviors.

As part of my dissertation research, I am studying College Women's Perceptions of High Risk Drinking. One time focus groups are being established among Sorority members in order to gain your perspective regarding alcohol use on campus and to share your thoughts about the role of alcohol among women. I believe women have a unique perspective related to college drinking and I 'm interested in hearing your stories related to this topic. Data collected in this area may lead to future publication.

Please Participate in a **ONE HOUR FOCUS GROUP** about
College Women and High Risk Drinking

A series of focus groups consisting of 8-10 members from individual Sorority chapters are being held to discuss high risk drinking and related topics. Focus groups are one hour in length and all responses are confidential with no participant identification.

PIZZA and DRINKS will be provided.
Each participant will be compensated with a **GIFT CARD**
OF YOUR CHOICE to either **WAWA or TARGET!**

Thank you for helping me in this very important study on women's issues by including your Sorority in this study. If you are willing to participate please contact me to set up a time for your focus group. Thank you!
Jill Russett, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education * jlruss@wm.edu

Appendix B

PERSONAL LETTER: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

October 23, 2007

Dear _____, President, [Sorority Name]

I am writing to seek your help in collecting information for my dissertation study titled: College Women's Perceptions of High Risk Drinking: an Interpretivist Study. I am seeking participants to join in a one time focus group as part of this study.

I would like to extend an invitation to your Sorority to participate in my research project. I believe women have a unique perspective related to college drinking and I'm interested in hearing your stories. Data collected from this study will be used to guide my dissertation and may lead to future publications. As women, your personal experience surrounding alcohol as well as your campus experience is invaluable. I hope that by getting your feedback, women's issues and needs pertaining to alcohol use can be further identified.

The focus groups will consist of about 8-10 members from your chapter who will meet with me to discuss a series of questions related to alcohol use through an informal process. Collected responses are confidential and participants will not be identified. The focus group is about one hour in length. I would be happy to provide pizza and drinks and work around a time that works best for you. In addition, participants will be compensated with individual $10 gift cards of your choice to either WaWa or Target.

I hope you will help me in this very important study on women's issues by including your chapter in this study. Please let me know if your chapter is willing to participate, and if so, what times and dates best fit your needs. If your Chapter is interested in participating, please respond to jlruss@wm.edu. Thank you for your consideration and your willingness to help.
Sincerely,

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUP

I agree to participate in an interpretivist study involving college women's understanding and perceptions of high risk drinking in a college environment. The purpose of the focus group is to examine how college women perceive the use of high levels of alcohol consumption commonly referred to as "binge drinking." I understand the research will focus on the participants' lived experience and perceptions of high risk drinking. The researcher is conducting this study as part of her dissertation research at the College of William and Mary.

As a participant, I understand the intention of this study is to explore my perceptions, ideas, and understanding of high risk drinking among college women. I understand that my involvement in the focus group is purposeful in that students who are members of sororities were chosen to participate in this research. The focus group will take approximately 1-1 ½ hours to complete.

I understand that there is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. Additionally, I understand that I am under no obligation to answer any questions that I do not wish to respond to and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time.

I understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, administration, or with the College in general. All responses are confidential and cannot be traced back to specific respondents. I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing or an assigned number that will allow only the researcher to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with this study will be destroyed. I acknowledge that focus groups will be audio taped to ensure accuracy of information. Such tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

If I have any questions or problems that arise in connection with my participating in this study, I should contact Dr. Rick Gressard, dissertation chair at 757 221-2352 or cfgres@wm.edu. By signing below I agree to participate in the focus group discussion, I am signifying that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have read of this consent form, and that I consent to participating in this study.

_____   _____
Participant Name   Date

_____   _____
Investigator   Date

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INDIVIDUAL

I agree to participate in an interpretivist study involving college women's understanding and perceptions of high risk drinking in a college environment. The purpose of the individual interview is to examine how college women perceive the use of high levels of alcohol consumption commonly referred to as "binge drinking." I understand the research will focus on the participants' lived experience and perceptions of high risk drinking. The researcher is conducting this study as part of her dissertation research at the College of William and Mary.

As a participant, I understand that my involvement in the individual interview is purposeful in that students who are members of sororities were chosen to participate in this research as well as students who have participated in an initial focus group on this topic. I understand the intention of this study is to explore my perceptions, ideas, and understanding of high risk drinking among college women. The interview will take approximately 1-1 ½ hours to complete and may consist of a follow up interview.

I understand that there is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. Additionally, I understand that I am under no obligation to answer any questions that I do not wish to respond to and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time.

I understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form. My decision to participate or not participate will not affect my relationships with faculty, administration, or with the College in general. All responses are confidential and cannot be traced back to specific respondents. I have been informed that any information obtained in this study will be recorded with a pseudonym of my choosing that will allow only the researchers to determine my identity. At the conclusion of this study, the key linking me with this study will be destroyed. I acknowledge that individual discussion will be audio taped to ensure accuracy of information. Such tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

If I have any questions or problems that arise in connection with my participating in this study, I should contact Dr. Rick Gressard, dissertation chair at 757 221-2352 or cfgres@wm.edu. By signing below I agree to participate in the focus group discussion, I am signifying that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have read of this consent form, and that I consent to participating in this study.

_____   _____
Participant Name   Date

_____   _____
Investigator   Date

Appendix E

INTERVIEW GUIDE: FOCUS GROUP

Question 1: What is drinking like on campus?

Follow up: a) Describe what a typical week looks like in terms of drinking
b) How many drinks do you typically have? What types of drinks?
c) Where do you drink? When? With whom do you drink?
d) How is drinking similar or different when considering gender?

Question 2: What motivates you to engage in the drinking behavior you just described?

Follow up: a) What are some of the positive/negative experiences of drinking?
b) What has the greatest/least influence on drinking behavior?
c) How has this changed over your college career?

Question 3: High risk drinking, also known as "binge drinking" is defined as 5 drinks in one sitting for men and 4 drinks for women. How would you describe drinking on campus using this definition?

Follow up: a) How would you define binge drinking?
b) What do you think of this definition?
c) How does this fit for men/ women?

Question 4: How do you think *women* who engage in binge drinking are perceived by: Society? On Campus? By other women/ in your sorority?

How do you think *men* who engage in binge drinking are perceived by: Society? On Campus? By other men/ within their fraternity?

Follow up: a) How have women responded to high risk drinking?
b) How have men responded to high risk drinking?

Question 5: Are there additional comments regarding women's drinking that you would like to share that have not been covered or that you would like to add?

Appendix F

INTERVIEW GUIDE: INDIVIDUAL

Question 1: Tell me what your drinking experiences have been like since the focus
group?

Follow up: a) Would you describe this as your typical drinking pattern? (where do you
go/ what do you drink?)

b) In thinking about the focus group, reflect on what part of the discussion
stands out for you? How did this impact your drinking experiences over the
past 2 weeks.

c) In thinking of some of the discussion from the focus group, when you have
gone out over the past 2 weeks what have you noticed in terms of gender
relationships?

Question 2: What personal experiences influence your view about drinking?

Follow up: a) Describe some of the positive and negative experiences you have had
while drinking?

Question 3: How would you define binge drinking?

Follow up: a) How does this pertain to your style of drinking?

b) What are your views regarding women drinking?

c) What are your views regarding men drinking?

Question 4: If you were asked these questions a year ago, how do you think you would
you have responded?

Follow up: a) How has your understanding of high risk drinking grown or changed?

Question 5: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix G

RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT STATMENT

Foundational to qualitative research is the notion that it is not value free. As such, my construction of high risk drinking among college women were influenced by my personal experiences as a woman, as a past sorority member, and as a former undergraduate college student immersed in an atmosphere of binge drinking. In addition, my educational training, clinical experience, and personal development contributed to my current understanding and reflection of this phenomenon.

First, my educational training consists of a strong background in cognitive and behavioral development. I entered this study with an understanding of where I believed these women to be within their developmental level and a deeper understanding of how they might construct and make meaning of their experiences related to binge drinking. Additionally, as a woman and student engaged in feminist theory, I am aware of the inequalities and issues of oppression likely face by the women. I wondered about the level of insight the women who have of these differences and how this might influence the interview process.

Second, my clinical experience and training in substance abuse helps me to understand the contextual and personal issues related to binge drinking. I expected to be able to assess the level of engagement in binge drinking by the participants and identify those who would likely discontinue this pattern of use upon graduation, from those who might have more problematic issues with substance abuse.

Lastly, my personal development, belief system, and values are interwoven within the study. My drinking patterns and understanding of binge drinking are derived

from my experiences in college, nearly fifteen years ago. My affiliation with my sorority was one of friendship and a venue for social relationships. I valued the bond of friendship and loyalty formed among a sisterhood. Despite the fact that I lived for two years in my sorority house, I was not deeply connected with "being a sorority member." That is, I often found excuses not to go to Chapter meetings as I felt them to be long, tedious, drawn out events and felt my time could be used in other ways. I never held, nor desired to hold, a chair position within my sorority. My affiliation with my sorority was strongly connected with a few individual members and was a source of social interaction, including that of drinking, parties, formals, and association with fraternities.

My drinking pattern varied during my college years. I entered college having had episodes of drinking during high school, though I did not engage heavily in drinking during my freshman year. My following sophomore, junior, and senior years could best be described as very connected to the social scene on campus and progressively changed with maturity. During my first and second year I spent more time at the fraternities while my later years were spent at the bars or with smaller groups of friends.

For me, drinking on campus was heavily associated with the weekend activity (which sometimes started on Thursday), fraternities, and after hour parties. I had wide access to bars and therefore more of my time was spent there, going to "happy hour" and staying beyond closing time. Alcohol was easily accessible even while underage. I didn't need to use a false ID, but instead had social connections that allowed me access to underage drinking. Drinking games were also a strong component of my undergraduate experience.

Prior to entering this study, I hadn't given much considered the notion of gender differences in regard to drinking and my experience as a woman on a college campus. However, as I considered issues of oppression, power differentials, and feminist underpinnings they were certainly central to my college experience. For example, fraternities hosted the parties; controlled the hours, themes, and access to the events. The relationship between alcohol and sexuality was strong. It was evident that most men drank more both in terms of quantity and frequency than did the women. Men were expected to drink and those who drank more were viewed with a high opinion. Women were not overtly pressured to drink, but those who didn't lacked a level of respect, while those who could keep up their drinking patterns with the men were held in higher regard.

Regardless of how these experiences were understood, I would be negligent if I did not consider how my personal experiences and constructs impacted this research. Therefore I engaged in personal reflection at the onset and for the duration of this study.

Appendix H

Excerpts from Reflexive Journal

10/29/07   Requested to attend ISC; Greek advisor directed me to one of the students
            who welcomed me to join the group this coming Sunday; Feeling
            optimistic that I can solicit some participants at the ISC meeting, face-to-
            face will help build relationships & trust

11/05/06   First focus group set for 8:00pm at the UC following a chapter meeting.
            Focus group got started late due to meeting running over.8 women
            participated. Surprised to find this sorority to have few high risk drinkers.
            Felt less connected, group took turns talking, open and willing to talk

11/05/07   Received a 2 individual emails indicating students would like to
            participate. Uncertain where they obtained info; council meeting, flyer, or
            other; Unsure was to what to do with "random" emails. Discussed with
            committee. Requested women to try to pull together a group to meet with.

11/10/07   2nd focus group conducted at the library at 2:00 in the afternoon. 9
            women participated. Highly engaged, interactive with one another, open,
            honest. High level of binge drinking acknowledged.

11/12/07   Confirmation em received from focus group #3; concern expressed that
            this would be confidential and no sorority named would be used;Assured
            limits of confidentiality

11/15/07   Member Check- Sent Summary to Focus Group #1; asked if anyone was
            interested in a follow up; 5 members requested to follow up;

11/20/07   Conducted individual interview #1 (Junior) at participant's sorority
            house, interview lasted about 1 hour; Participant appeared relaxed (put
            legs up on chair) showed me around the house; talked after the interview
            about part of her pledge experience and how some sororities hazed while
            hers did not, just initiated their pledges; saw a few other women at house

12/12/07   Conducted individual interview #6 (junior) from focus group #2. Met in
            library. Participant was very honest. Shared personal stories. Indicated a
            high level of personal binge drinking. Had family history of drinking.
            Open and descriptive about drinking situations on campus.

2/5/08   Completed transcribing all data. Transcripts were completed verbatim.
            Already beginning to hear consistent ideas related to perceptions of what
            binge drinking is, the role of gender and differences were apparent,
            feminist perspective; identified power and control strongly associated
            with men

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