

LIKIS-WERLE, S. ELIZABETH, Ph.D. *Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better: An Exploration of the Experiences and Perceptions of Drinking and Gender Identity in the Drinking Choices of College Women.* (2012)
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College drinking is a focus of national attention due to its widespread impact on academic, social, interpersonal, and health domains of student life. Although men have historically had higher rates of drinking than women, college is a developmental time frame in which women's drinking rates have increased (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Shulenberg, 2011; Wechsler et al., 2002). The substance abuse literature has been dominated by studies of men's behavior and risk factors (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Linowski, 2004; NIAAA, 2002; Plant, 2008; Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams, & Young, 2001; Russett, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010; Smith & Weisner, 2000) and has been stunted by the lack of attention to how women may approach drinking differently than men.

Drinking increases need attention because college women are at risk of experiencing consequences from high risk drinking and, as gender roles continue to evolve toward a more egalitarian orientation, current female college students may be influenced by different gender identity expectations than females in previous generations. Researchers have only begun to frame the relationship between gender role, gender identity, and drinking (Huselid & Cooper, 1992; Peralta, Steele, Nofziger, & Rickles, 2010; Smith, Toadvine, & Kennedy, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to gain the college female perspective on how experiences and perceptions of drinking and gender identity may contribute to drinking choices.

Qualitative data from two focus groups and two individual interviews with a total of nine participants were analyzed employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Though there were similarities across all participants regarding their drinking experiences and their perceptions of gender identity, IPA yielded different themes among High Risk vs. Low Risk drinkers. Specifically, an association between how women think of themselves, their Gender Identity, was different for High Risk drinkers than for Low Risk drinkers. High Risk participants tended to identify more with being female and expressing femininity, whereas Low Risk drinkers did not place much importance on this part of their identity. Similarities and contrasts are discussed in light of the previous research, implications for counselors and counselor educators are highlighted, and areas for future research are recommended.

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO I CAN DO BETTER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DRINKING AND GENDER
IDENTITY IN THE DRINKING CHOICES
OF COLLEGE WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

College drinking continues to be a focus of national attention due to its widespread impact on academic, social, interpersonal, and health domains of student life. According to the Association of University College Counseling Centers Directors (AUCCCD) annual report, high risk drinking in the college population has been one of the top concerns of university administrators and student development personnel and was identified as a priority. Additionally, although males across the general population have higher rates of drinking than females, there are certain developmental time frames in which drinking rates of males and females are converging (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002). A closer look at many of the above studies and meta-analyses show trends that female high risk drinking in the college population is rising while male drinking rates in college have remained fairly steady. As women's high risk drinking rates are increasing, little is known about college women's drinking specifically. Therefore, there is a need for more research on college women's perspective.

High risk drinking in college populations has been well documented in the last two decades, primarily about males and their alcohol related consequences, rates of dependence, high risk behaviors, and prevalence in the general population. Hundreds of researchers in the past 30 years focusing on drinking amount and frequencies have

concluded that men have higher rates of drinking, drink more frequently, and have more serious alcohol-related problems than women. Indeed, the addiction literature has been dominated by studies of men's behavior and risk factors, framing it as a predominantly male domain (Covington & Surrey, 1997; NIAAA, 2002; Plant, 2008; Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams, & Young, 2001; Smith & Weisner, 2000). Until recently, theories explaining drinking choices lack the female perspective and often do not apply to women's more relational experience (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Russett, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010). Consequently, the substance abuse literature is stunted by the lack of attention to how women may approach drinking choices differently than men.

Purpose of the Study

Historically, quantitative research findings have documented gender differences in drinking patterns, concluding that men drink more than women and researchers vaguely suggesting that attention needed to be paid to gender differences (Borsari & Carey, 2006; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). However, the alcohol and college student development literature in the last decade points to a convergence in high risk drinking rates of college males and females (Johnston et al., 2002; Piane & Safer, 2008; Wechsler et al., 2002). This convergence needs attention for at least three reasons: (a) most of the addiction and substance abuse literature is based on male dominated theories and measurements, (b) females are at greater risk of experiencing consequences from high risk drinking, and (c) women appear to drink for reasons different from men. The purpose of this study was to gain the college women's

perspective on experiences and perceptions of drinking and of how they view themselves as women to explore these connections to drinking choices.

One avenue for exploring differences in drinking choices is to examine perceptions of gender identity. In the early 1900s, women played a key role in the prohibition movement, and being female was equivalent to being abstinent, moral and pure (Plant, 2008). Throughout the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, females fought a dichotomous identity in which having equal rights with males meant giving up traditionally feminine traits. Even in the 1980s and 1990s, being female was considered a protective factor against drinking problems and alcoholism, as substance abuse literature consistently correlated risk for abuse with being male (Hunter, 1990; Johnston, et al., 2002; NIAAA, 2002; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Straus & Bacon, 1953; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). Results from these quantitative analyses typically reported only the average number of drinks for males and for females, which provided a very limited picture of the college drinking issue and neglected the impact drinking has on those females who do engage in high risk alcohol use.

Gender Differences and Drinking

Most of the literature that was designed to measure gender differences is collectively guilty of a misnomer, according to commonly held views in gender studies and feminist scholarship (Butler, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). By and large, quantitative researchers have focused only on biological sex when they compared drinking patterns and motivations; however, they defined the construct as gender differences. The mistake refers to the categorization of biological sex as gender, which

discounts the difference between what genitalia someone may be born with and how they develop their identity related to this categorization. Subsequently, many studies are titled as correlating drinking and gender when in fact they do not address issues of what it means to be female, male, feminine, or masculine. This distinction is essential to understanding the complexity of how drinking can be viewed based on what messages someone internalizes about how someone of her biological sex should behave, and thus, it informs the development of gender identity. Accordingly, in this study I explored gender differences, defined as the set of meanings that an individual internalizes through interaction with society, peers, and family, that a person adopts as part of her gender identity.

As gender roles have continued to evolve in the post women's liberation movement toward a more egalitarian orientation, the current female generation of college students may not be bound by the same gender identity expectations that females were in previous generations. In a handful of studies, researchers have begun to frame the relationship between gender role, gender identity, and drinking (Huselid, & Cooper, 1992; Peralta, Steele, Nofziger, & Rickles, 2010; Smith, Toadvine, & Kennedy, 2009). Conclusions drawn from this nascent area of research by Peralta and her colleagues (2010) included the following: females endorsing traditional gender roles drink less than those endorsing non-traditional gender roles, further research should be conducted with more current gender measures, qualitative studies be undertaken to more fully understand the ways in which gender identity and expression influences drinking, and, lastly, treatment models need to include women's voices for effective prevention and

intervention for women abusing substances. As gender identity and social expectations are loosening for women of all ages, the simultaneous increase in female drinking must be noted. Thus, there is a gap in research that must be explored to determine if increased college female drinking behaviors are related to perceptions of gender identity.

Researchers in other countries have noticed the simultaneous change in political and social systems and health behaviors of women. The most illuminating studies of gender role change affecting high risk drinking rates have been conducted in other countries over a period of 15 years, including the Czech Republic (Kubicka & Csémy, 2008), New Zealand (Lyons & Willott, 2008), the United Kingdom (Plant, 2008), Australia (Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001) and a multinational study involving 29 countries (Rahav, Wilsnack, Bloomfield, Gmel, & Kuntsche, 2006). In a longitudinal survey of Czech women between 1992-1997, during a period of increasing democracy and social role change for women in that country, Kubicka and Csémy (2008) found support for their hypothesis that gender role orientation contributed to “women’s motivation to drink quantities similar to those consumed by men” (p. 8). Specifically, women who identified as egalitarian and hedonistic were more likely to drink than women with more traditional gender role orientations. In Great Britain binge drinking by young women has been on the rise for a decade, in some cases surpassing men’s; and it is noteworthy that, simultaneously, women’s admissions to alcohol treatment facilities also has increased (Plant, 2008).

However, as one of the most industrialized and developed countries in the world, the paucity of published literature on the phenomenon of female drinking in the United

States is puzzling. Rahav and colleagues (2006) recognized that modernization of societal, economic, political and interpersonal roles in the last 20 years has coincided with an increase in women's drinking rates, and suggested that this relationship needed to be explored further. As the lines between masculinity and femininity are blurred, so too is the alcohol related behavior by sex. Plant (2008) analyzed the role that alcohol has played in women's lives in Great Britain and pointed out that "the 'Convergence Theory' or 'convergence hypothesis' links increases in women's drinking to increases in their social emancipation" (Bloomfield, Gmel, Neve, & Mustonen, 2001). This theory posited that "the more liberated a country, the less hostile an environment it is for women to lead lives comparable to those of men" (p. 161). In many cases, leading comparable lives means engaging in traditionally male behaviors like drinking in public and engaging in risky behaviors (Young, Morales, Boyd, McCabe, & D'Arcy, 2005). Thus, young women in the United States, especially those who have grown up in a more liberalized era of democracy and opportunity, may have a very different perspective on women's roles, limitations, social status, and equality now than in past generations. The lack of longitudinal research in the United States is an area of further research that desperately needs attention and one that could help explain the increase in women's drinking.

As more attention has been paid to drinking prevention in general on college campuses, some quantitative studies have investigated sex as a factor in drinking in the U.S. However, there is a scarcity of literature that specifically examines why these changes in female drinking rates have occurred and what elements contribute to this phenomenon. Potential factors that have been investigated included social and peer

influences, changes in gender roles and expectations, and media influences, but, unfortunately, male frameworks have been used to view female behavior. Using theoretical bases and measurements that were designed for male drinking, researchers have attempted to apply constructs about social norms (Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; Lewis & Neighbors, 2004), protective strategies (Benton et al., 2004; Leiva, 2007), motivations (Baer, 2002; Bailly, Carman, & Forslund, 1991) and expectancies (Zamboanga, 2006) to female drinking patterns. Social norms and athletes have received consideration (Lewis & Paladino, 2008) due to the prevalence of high risk drinking among male fraternities and athletes. Zamboanga (2006) extended the exploration of environmental factors contributing to alcohol abuse by comparing different types of residence in which female college students live. He concluded that females who live in residence hall type housing are more likely to engage in high risk drinking than those college females who live in house style quarters.

Pop culture literature certainly has noticed the change in rules for women's drinking, weighing in with questions like "Is feminism driving women to drink?" (Babcock, 1996). *Time* magazine published an article entitled "Libation or Liberation?" (Ehrenreich, 2002) and another by Morse and Bower (2002) who said, "Women are not just drinking more, they're drinking ferociously" (p. 56). *Happy Hours: Alcohol in a Woman's Life* (Jersild, 2001) and in the counseling field, *Women, Girls, and Addiction* (Briggs & Pepperell, 2009) acknowledged the complexity of alcohol abuse by women and attempted to excavate the myriad factors that contribute to women's drinking behaviors.

Lewis and Neighbors (2004) focused on social norms to study the effects of peer norms on drinking behaviors. They specifically examined the difference between same sex and opposite sex-specific social norms in college students and concluded that same sex norms are stronger predictors of women's drinking than for men's drinking, which suggests feedback may be more effective in a single sex intervention program. Another difference between female and male drinking is that college females tend to utilize protective strategies and use caretaking measures when drinking more so than men (ACHA, 2011; Benton et al., 2004; Leiva, 2007; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; NIAAA, 2002). This behavior, ironically, develops into a culture in which young women regulate each other and, subsequently, create an environment in which risky behavior is tempered by the illusion of safety.

Several other notable studies in the last decade have been conducted to investigate male and female drinking differences, motivations, and beliefs. Piane and Safer (2008) found no difference in drinking rates between Caucasian college females and Caucasian college males and concluded that more research is needed to examine the specific cultural, gender, societal, and peer influences that contribute to the increase in high risk drinking in college females. Ricciardelli and colleagues (2001) concluded that women's drinking "needs to be studied in its own right" (p. 135) and was more complex than male drinking. Bailly et al. (1991) investigated "gender differences in the relationship of power needs and drinking" (p. 651) using the Drinking Motivations Scale. They concluded that males tended to drink to assert "Dominance Power" and females drank to assert autonomy. However, males chose more motivations in all categories than did females,

and it is possible that females did not relate to the male constructs and language in the questions. The researchers also suggested that females drank to avoid being dominated by asserting control. All of these authors concluded that in order to more successfully intervene with female drinkers, more studies needed to be executed probing these differences.

Gender Measurements

Peralta et al. (2010) compared different gender scales and drinking patterns in college students to determine if gender identity predicted alcohol use. They explored whether high risk alcohol use was a way to express masculinity and suggested that women, by engaging in binge drinking, could be “responding to sexism through claiming a type of status or power” (p. 359). Though the basis of this study is solid, it can be argued that the gender scales used are sexist, based on roles that are no longer distinct, and therefore, outdated. For example, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) claim that instrumentality is a masculine trait and expressivity is a female trait. Other examples from gender scales include naming leadership as a male trait and caring about children and showing compassion as female traits. Likewise, the measures used in many of the other quantitative studies were designed for assessing male constructs and perceptions and do not adequately capture the construct of gender identity today. New scales that catch up with the current social roles and comprehensively redefine what it means to be female today are needed.

A better conceptualization of gender identity is Hoffman, Borders, and Hattie's (2000) constructs of gender self-acceptance and gender self-definition. Hoffman defined *gender self-acceptance* as how comfortable a female is with her gender and *gender self-definition* as how important being a female is to someone's identity. She demonstrated a need for and designed the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS) in her doctoral dissertation (Hoffman, 1996). These measurements may come closer to giving voice to current college female's conception of what it means to be female and, therefore, may be more useful in exploring if drinking decisions are influenced by these perceptions. More importantly, Hoffman's concept of gender identity is more fluid and personalized and does not constrict meaning to specific stereotypical traits and roles.

Because of the lack of valid measures available that capture the essence of current college females' conception of gender identity, the most recent literature about college women investigating the role of gender and drinking in the last decade has been qualitative, often dissertations commenced by women (Brumbelow, 1993; Ketcham, 1999; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Mishra, 2010; Russett, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005; Zwarun, 2002). Many of the authors of these qualitative studies recognized that there were no current theories and language to properly assess women's drinking and that gap necessitated exploratory studies. Because they are more recent and more in depth, one would think that the results would provide a wealth of information upon which another study could be built. However, each researcher employed a different qualitative methodology and the populations originated in several countries. The fact that each of these studies is unique

compels researchers to attempt to replicate studies with similar theoretical frameworks and methods to test transferability and reach common conclusions. Currently, we lack a critical mass of literature supporting these findings in order to apply them to college females and design appropriate intervention strategies.

Among the various methodologies used and populations sampled to uncover women's experiences of drinking, Lyons and Willott (2008) used a discourse analysis methodology with small friendship groups in New Zealand to determine how young people are talking about alcohol use in co-educational settings, while Sheehan and Ridge (2001) interviewed Australian teenage girls. Both Linowski (2004) and Smith and Berger (2010) purposively sampled traditionally aged white sorority females in the northeastern United States, but the former employed a feminist phenomenological approach with individual interviews and focus groups, while the latter explored meanings using a grounded theory approach.

The research questions from qualitative studies conducted in the last 10 years examined the meaning, purpose, language, and experience of females' drinking. Researchers have identified themes of storytelling, bonding, caretaking, and enhancing connection, as well as the concepts of girl power, sexual attractiveness, and gaining social status within a male dominated world (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; Russett, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005). Thus, there is emerging evidence that women's drinking behavior and motivations appear to center around connection and relationship and the maintenance of those.

As Linowski (2004) espoused, how to connect with others, who to connect with, how to repair connections, and how to cope with ruptures in relationships are all seen as motivations for women's substance abuse. Whereas previous researchers concluded that men tend to drink to assert power and dominance (Bailly et al., 1991), a handful of female researchers have recently applied theories to female drinking that are relationship oriented and contribute to meeting the needs of belonging and acceptance. (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005). There is evidence of women gaining acceptance and being looked upon favorably if they mimic masculine drinking behaviors (Lyons & Willott, 2008; Young et al., 2005). In many of these qualitative studies regarding college females' perceptions and experiences of drinking, similar themes emerged. Though participants may have articulated them slightly differently, many of the overall topics seemed to have been shared by groups across countries and regions of the United States. Themes from other countries and younger age groups (MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001) emphasize freedom, fun and rebellion from their usual behavior, allowing young females to break out and experiment both socially and sexually when they drink. Lyons and Willott (2008) revealed language used to describe females when they drank but there was disagreement between small peer social groups as to what was okay for a female and what was not. For the males, some females who drank beer were cool and others were no longer classy. For the females in the groups, the acknowledgment of a double standard for males and females drinking behaviors weighed on them heavily. Additionally, female drinkers had to consider safety and vulnerability when they ventured out, while males had

the luxury of safety without consciously planning for it. The unfairness experienced by the females was painfully evident and noted numerous times throughout the discourse.

One of the factors identified in both quantitative and qualitative literature is that drinking decisions are influenced by social norms and a culture of drinking. Many of the authors sampled Greek affiliated groups of college females or small friendship groups who were already familiar with one another and, therefore, had developed a shared culture. The drinking choices of these college females may have been influenced by other factors of familiarity with one another or shared experiences and traditions rather than due to a broader view of gender identity. It is possible that gender identity may be more of a collective identity for college females rather than being dependent on these specific shared cultures.

Theoretical differences in gender. Some theories have also been applied to women's drinking that separated it as a unique phenomenon from men's drinking. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT, Miller, 1976; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Covington & Surrey, 1997) and Feminist theory/feminist perspective both offer a framework for analyzing and interpreting themes that emerge from focus groups and interviews. The Relational Cultural model was first conceptualized by Jean Baker Miller (1976) at the Stone Center at Wellesley. Covington and Surrey (1997) elaborated on Miller's premise, adding that substance use meets different needs for women than it does for men. They suggest that, for women, the desire for power is also aligned with mutual connection: "Mutual empowerment describes a process of relational interaction where each person grows in psychological strength or power. This has been described as

‘power-with-others’, as distinguished from ‘power-over’ others” (Covington & Surrey, 1997, p. 338). Feminist theorists acknowledge power differentials and hierarchies and trace their perpetuation to the production of knowledge by the (male) dominant group. Feminist theorists see their focus as unearthing, changing, and adding to the pool of knowledge that currently exists by tapping into marginalized and subjugated groups whose voices have been left out or buried throughout history. The feminist critique of science is based on the realization that there is a gap or an unexplainable part of one’s experience that is not quite covered by existing traditional, empirical scientific theory. What was once accepted as the whole picture is now acknowledged to be missing vital parts and in need of further development to encompass other cultures, races, roles, and classes.

Statement of the Problem

Though research with college women has shown promising directions, specific exploration to determine how college women see themselves as women and if this affects their drinking choices is virtually nonexistent. Thus, there is a need to explore conceptions of gender identity in relation to drinking to determine if this is a factor in the drinking choices of college females. What has not been explored adequately is the way college females define themselves as women and if that impacts their perceptions and behaviors of high risk drinking. This study aimed to explore how females think of themselves as a female and how their gender identity intersects with how they think of themselves as a drinker. Specifically, the author sought to expand on how perceptions of gender identity among a random group of college female current drinkers in the

southeastern United States impact drinking choices. Through the lens of Feminist Theory and RCT, this study provided a forum through which to explore the most salient experiences and perceptions of gender contributing to the increase in college women's drinking.

Need for the Study

The NIAAA and the Higher Education Center both have identified subgroups, such as college women, as an area in which further alcohol research must be undertaken (NIAAA, 2007; Smith & Weisner, 2000). As Wechsler and his colleagues' (2002) analysis of prevention efforts in the last 20 years suggests, enormous resources have been poured into college high risk drinking prevention and intervention, but with little progress in reducing drinking rates. With additional information about how gender identity and social expectations of drinking contribute to women's drinking choices, this research will help form the basis for prevention and intervention programs targeting specific areas that are unique to females' needs and motivations. Specifically, if differences in how females perceived their gender identity in relation to others contributed to their higher risk drinking rates, then targeted programs can be enhanced to address the interaction of gender identity and drinking choices within social circles.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study revolved around open ended concepts of experiences, perceptions, and stories in order to gain a fuller picture of how college women think about drinking, how they conceive of themselves as women, and if there was a connection between the two. Interview and focus group questions were generated

from a phenomenological orientation and a feminist perspective. The three research questions that guided the interview protocol were:

RQ1: What are the experiences and perceptions of drinking as a college woman?

RQ2: How do college women think of themselves as women?

RQ3: How do these experiences and perceptions influence a college woman's choice to drink?

Definition of Terms

College female is used to describe traditionally aged college students 18-24 because they typically have higher drinking rates than non-traditional aged females and represent the shared culture of college students who are in a particular developmental stage of identity. For the purposes of this study, female students in this narrow age group have grown up in a generation that emphasizes equality and may have different conceptions of gender identity than non-traditional aged female students.

A *Current drinker* is defined as someone who has had an alcoholic drink in the past 30 days. *High risk drinking* refers to a pattern of drinking resulting in intoxication above the legal limit, impaired behavior, and places the college female in a risky situation. This can refer to the amount of alcohol consumed; the frequency with which she drinks; and attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions that impact drinking decisions. Though historically the alcohol literature commonly refers to binge drinking, this standard amount, 5 or more drinks for males and 4 or more drinks for females in one sitting, is based on biological sex regardless of weight, height, or other confounding factors that affect Blood Alcohol Concentration. This definition is problematic because it does not

consider the myriad individual characteristics such as muscle mass, body type/shape, tolerance, hormonal changes, enzymatic differences that break down alcohol, or protective strategies like amount of sleep and food someone has had prior to drinking. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recently proposed changing the definition to any amount of alcohol that raises a person's blood alcohol concentration to legal limit of .08. For the purposes of this study, a High Risk Drinker is defined as someone who scores a 7 or above on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT, Saunders, Aasland, Babor, de la Fuente, & Grant, 1993).

Gender Identity is defined as how a woman thinks of herself as a woman, which is a fluid concept that includes both gender self-definition and gender acceptance (Hoffman et al., 2000). Hoffman differentiated between gender acceptance, gender self-confidence, and self-definition in the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005), wherein gender self-acceptance is defined as how comfortable a female is with her gender and gender self-definition measures how important being a female is to someone. The HGS has two versions, one male and one female version, with 14 items each that help define the connection between gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance.

Organization of the Study

This study will be presented in five chapters. Chapter I provides an overview of the topic of college women's drinking and the rationale for exploring gender identity to explore increases in college women's drinking choices. An outline of previous research and directions for continued investigation form the basis for the need of the study, and the subsequent research questions and definitions of constructs are presented. Chapter II will

review the literature relevant to the topic of college women's drinking and its intersection with gender identity as outlined above and will comprehensively illustrate the gaps in the literature which this author seeks to address. Chapter III will outline the methodology and design of the proposed study, will delineate the procedures and participants, and will describe the pilot study and the modifications made to the study proposal. Chapter IV will present the findings and data from the focus groups, including themes and interpretations, and Chapter V will discuss the implications of the findings for counselors, counselor educators, substance abuse professionals and student development personnel to more successfully intervene with college women's high risk drinking. Future research areas will be recommended and next steps identified for extending the literature on college female high risk drinking as it relates to gender identity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I will highlight the most relevant and recent literature addressing what we know regarding each topic and construct as it relates to the study. The literature review will cover college student drinking, increases in female college drinking, quantitative and qualitative studies on female drinking, gender role change, gender identity, Feminist Theory, RCT, and the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which will be used as the methodology for the study.

College Drinking

College drinking continues to be a focus of national attention due to its widespread impact on academic, social, interpersonal, and health domains of student life (ACHA, 2011; AUCCCD, 2010). The drinking problem as a whole, the minimum legal drinking age debate, as well as trends in the last 20 years on college campuses have been analyzed from various angles in the student development, addiction, counseling, public health, higher education administration, and popular media arenas. High risk drinking in college populations has been well documented in the last two decades, with an emphasis on alcohol related consequences, rates of dependence, high risk behaviors, and prevalence compared to the general population. In the National Institute of Drug Abuse's (NIDA) *Monitoring the Future Study* conducted every two years, one of the more recent

reports indicated that by 12th grade, the lifetime prevalence of students who have used alcohol is 75%, compared to 44% using marijuana and 13% using amphetamines (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2006). By their first year in college, the percentages of drinking prevalence increased to 80-90%, depending on region of the United States.

The American College Health Association (ACHA) has been surveying college student behaviors for the past decade with the National College Health Assessment (NCHA). This survey broadly covers several domains of college student health, including physical, emotional, and academic experiences. Specifically, the survey asks about prevalence of medical illnesses, sexual activity, relationship violence, mental health, and substance use. The ACHA publishes a national reference group executive summary each spring and fall so that university staff who choose to survey their own students can compare trends to the national response pool of college students. In the most recent summary for the spring 2011 survey, 105,000 college students nationwide responded. Of the college students surveyed, 66% of females and 65.7% of males reported using alcohol in the last 30 days. An additional 13.4% of females and 11.7% of males reported using alcohol, but not in the last 30 days, for a total of 79.4% of females and 77.4% of males using alcohol (American College Health Association, 2011).

Beyond the concerns of mere prevalence of alcohol use are rates of high risk drinking and the dangers of this behavior. High risk drinking can be measured by amount, frequency, intensity of usage in a short time period, and the contexts in which drinking happens. Wechsler and his colleagues examined a decade of trends in alcohol use, abuse,

and consequences as reported by the Harvard University School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) in 1993, 1995, 1997, and 2001. Specifically, the authors broke down these drinking patterns by setting, sex, race, Greek and non-Greek affiliation, and athletic and non-athletic participation (Wechsler et al., 2002) and tested differences over time. The authors asked the typical questions about alcohol usage in the last 2 weeks and also asked about binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks for a male and four or more drinks for a female. Percentages of those college students who engaged in drinking alcohol in the past year ranged from 79.8% to 83.6%, with binge drinking reported by 44% of students remaining fairly unchanged. Frequent binge drinking, however, increased significantly during this period of time from 19.7% to 22.8% of students reporting this behavior (Wechsler et al., 2002).

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) Advisory Council changed the definition of binge drinking in their 2007 update on college drinking. They defined binge drinking as those drinking alcohol in amounts that raise Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) above .08, which generally means four or more drinks for a female and five or more drinks for a male in a two hour period (NIAAA, 2007). Though the overall average high risk drinking rate has hovered steadily at 44%, males rates have decreased slightly and females rates have increased (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002). A closer look revealed that the alarming trends are not just about the amounts college students are drinking, but also the increased frequency of drinking as well and contexts within which drinking is taking place. Greenbaum, Del Boca, Darkes, Wang, and Goldman (2005) investigated the average

weekly consumption patterns of freshmen college students during the academic year. They analyzed data from 279 freshmen who reported drinking alcohol in the past year and found that spikes in drinking occurred not only on weekends; college students also reported consuming more alcohol on days leading up to the start of the academic calendar, for special occasions like homecoming and fall break, and weeks preceding academic breaks such as Thanksgiving and Christmas (Greenbaum et al., 2005). A more recent study indicated that college students' drinking on 21st birthdays surpassed all of the holiday and special occasions (Neighbors et al., 2011). Thus, an important question remains for counselors, student development staff, and substance abuse professionals: since college drinking has become increasingly prevalent, dangerous, and accepted as part of college culture, we need clearer information on how professionals can intervene effectively.

Why is Collegiate Drinking Problematic?

For colleges and universities, college drinking affects retention and student well-being, not only of those who choose to drink, but also those in the residence halls who choose not to drink but are affected by drinkers' consequences. Misuse of alcohol uses the majority of Student Affairs resources on college and university campuses, from residential living staff, and the Dean of Students Office, to the Campus police and health and counseling professionals. According to the 2009-2010 survey of the Association of University College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD), alcohol abuse was the most frequent issue after anxiety, depression, relationships, and suicidal behaviors cited by college students who presented to counseling centers, with 11.3% of the clients endorsing

alcohol and drug (AOD) problems (Barr, Rando, Krylowicz, & Reetz, 2010). In fact, substance abuse has consistently ranked in the top 5 issues for several consecutive years in this annual survey.

For students, alcohol related consequences are frequent and far reaching, interfering with safety, physical and emotional health, relationships, academic goals and progress towards graduation, as well as mental health and well-being. One well known and often cited resource—www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov—has compiled several studies in the last few years that highlight just how widespread and serious alcohol related consequences can be. They offer a snapshot of high risk drinking consequences in a given year in college aged students that included nearly 600,000 students reporting unintended injuries in addition to another 700,000 students who reported being assaulted by a student who had been drinking. One out of four college students experienced academic problems such as missing class or performing poorly on a test due to excessive drinking, and 400,000 college students engaged in unprotected sexual activity. Astonishingly, 97,000 students a year reported being sexual assaulted/raped when alcohol is involved, and there are more than 1,800 alcohol-related deaths each year.

Given the volume of research on college drinking, many experts in the college student development and addiction fields are puzzled that interventions have not successfully reversed trends of alcohol abuse and its consequences. To address this conundrum, a panel of higher education administrators, alcohol experts, and students were appointed to a Task Force as part of a project of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Task force members ranged from college presidents to

esteemed directors of substance abuse research facilities. They reviewed and synthesized 20 years of studies, meta-analyses, and programming efforts across the country addressing college drinking to determine evidenced based practice and provide a roadmap for college personnel to utilize. The resulting report issued in 2002 was titled “A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of College Drinking.” In their report, the task force proposed that college students did not arrive on campus “hard wired to drink,” but that the culture created and maintained on college campuses promoted and encouraged high risk drinking behaviors. The authors identified three levels of intervention, at the individual, campus, and community domains, and issued recommendations for evidenced based interventions to be implemented by campus staff and researchers to help bridge the gap between science and conventional wisdom. An update to this original report was published in 2007 entitled, “What Colleges Need to Know Now: An Update on College Drinking Research” (NIAAA, 2007). In that report, tailored interventions for female drinkers was labeled as an area to watch for pertinent information about changing the culture of drinking on college campuses. Likewise, women have been identified by others as a sub culture about whom more information is needed to effectively intervene and address substance abuse (Smith & Weisner, 2000).

Female Drinking

In the early 1900s, women played a key role in the prohibition movement, and being female was equivalent to being abstinent, moral, and pure (Plant, 2008). With the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, females fought a dichotomous identity in which having equal rights with males meant giving up traditionally feminine traits. Even in the

1980s and 1990s, being female was considered a protective factor against drinking problems and alcoholism, as the substance abuse literature consistently correlated risk for abuse with being male (NIAAA, 2002; Straus & Bacon, 1953; Wechsler et al., 1995). Women's drinking rates have increased in the past 30 years in several age groups and across several countries and cultures (Bloomfield et al., 2001; Grucza, Norberg, Bucholz, & Bierut, 2008; Keyes, Grant, & Hasin, 2008; Plant, 2008; Rahav et al., 2006). Two recently published studies were designed to compare birth cohorts from the past 80 years to determine trends in female drinking compared to male drinking in the United States. The authors noted overall increases in amount and frequency of women's alcohol use as well as decreases in the age of onset of alcohol use, all of which raise the risk of alcohol dependence later in life (Grucza et al., 2008; Keyes et al., 2008). This finding is significant because women are at risk of becoming addicted more quickly than men, and the longer the body's systems are exposed to alcohol the greater the potential for health related consequences.

In the first study, Grucza and his colleagues (2008) from Washington University compared data from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey (NLAES) conducted in 1991-1992 and the 2001-2002 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC, 2001-02). They specifically were examining the cross sectional comparisons between rates of alcohol use, dependence, and age of onset of drinking by birth cohort and sex. Both surveys were completed by non-institutionalized random samples across the United States, and age groups were analyzed by comparing birth years and dividing them into ten year age ranges. For example, AOD,

alcohol use, and life time prevalence for dependence data from a birth cohort of women from 1934-1943 in the NLAES was compared to the birth cohort from 1944-1953 in the NESARC. A regression model was also used to determine if age of onset predicted dependence issues.

Gruza and his colleagues (2008) found that

much of the increased risk for alcohol dependence among women, which began with the 1954–63 birth cohort, is accounted for by earlier AOD. This pattern was most pronounced for White women. Reductions in age at onset of drinking are apparent for both men and women born after 1943, however, the reductions for women were larger than that for men. (p. 1499)

The age of onset decreased more for females than males. The authors concluded that “the significantly increased lifetime prevalence of alcohol dependence among women born in recent decades may be attributable to earlier age at onset of drinking” (p. 1500), thus making the case for earlier prevention and intervention with women.

In the second study, Keyes and colleagues (2008) from Columbia University analyzed data from one of the same surveys, the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC, 2001–02). They found that the adjusted odds ratio, defined as the men’s drinking rates compared to the women’s within each birth cohort, for prevalence of lifetime frequent binge drinking decreased from 10.55 in the birth cohort 1913-1932 to 2.66 in the birth cohort 1968-1984, and that the male to female ratio of mean largest number of drinks decreased from 2.91:1 in the 1913-1932 cohort to 2.1:1 in the 1968-1984 cohort. They concluded the following:

gender related difference in drinking and alcohol use disorders is declining. Particularly noteworthy is the finding that frequent binge drinking decreased among men in the youngest birth cohort but showed a monotonic increase in younger cohorts among women. Women may thus need specifically targeted prevention and treatment efforts...and future research should examine the socio-cultural factors that have encouraged the expression of alcohol abuse and dependence in women. (p. 27)

Together, these two large cross sectional studies paint a picture of the trends up to this current generation of college females. Assuming that the trends of the last four birth cohorts in the past century are continuing in the same direction, the needs of college females who engage in alcohol use and abuse cannot be ignored. As suggested by Keyes et al. (2008), this study explored some of the socio-cultural factors and perceptions from the point of view of those experiencing and living the phenomenon, and helped shed light on potential tailored interventions.

Female College Drinking

Although males across the general population have higher rates of drinking than females, there are certain developmental time frames in which drinking rates of males and females are converging (Johnston et al., 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002). Wechsler and his colleagues (2002) compared data from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS) over a period of nine years to determine how the trends of college student drinking changed, particularly in light of increased funding for and intervention efforts aimed at college student drinking. They examined four administrations of the CAS in 1993, 1997, 1999, and 2001 to scrutinize the outcomes of the increased prevention efforts made possible by national alcohol groups and generous government grants during that same time frame. For college women, the percentage who reported binge drinking

ranged from 38.4% to 40.9%. One of the most salient findings was that frequent binge drinking had increased significantly for women at both co-educational (17.4% in 1993 to 21.2% in 2001) and at all women's colleges (5.3% in 1993 to 11.9% in 2001; Wechsler et al., 2002). More recent figures from the ACHA National College Health Assessment (2011) indicated even higher rates of risky drinking for females. Of the more than 105,000 college students surveyed nationally in the spring of 2011, 24.7% of females reported consuming more than 4 drinks the last time they socialized.

These findings are similar to the overall trends mentioned in previous birth cohorts, but specific social and environmental factors appear to have accelerated the trends in increased female drinking and, thus, researchers have begun to raise concerns about the specific dangers to women. In fact, several studies have been conducted in which the researchers found no gender difference in drinking rates in adolescents (LaBrie et al., 2007; Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Piane & Safer, 2008) for the 12 to 17 year old age range. Females are starting to drink at earlier ages, a factor that has been correlated with higher likelihood of developing alcohol dependence. There is also controversy around and more research needed to dissect the idea that women have shown to be at higher risk of telescoping, defined as having a shortened duration from time of first substance usage to clinically significant problems (Briggs & Pepperell, 2009; Johnson, Richter, Kleber, McLellan, & Carise, 2005; Keyes, Martins, Blanco, & Hasin, 2010).

Assessing Female Drinking Risk Level

A pertinent fact that is often overlooked in the alcohol and college student development literature is that often a question measuring high risk drinking in

quantitative studies asks how often a college student drinks five or more drinks in one sitting, and the results have shown a higher percentage of males report this than females. However, although at first glance this surface statistic may be true, the effects of a female drinking five or more drinks in one sitting is far riskier and more dangerous on average than the effects of such behavior by a male. The amount that college females report drinking compared to males may be misleading due to the increased physiological risks, body size, and higher Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) that women experience with fewer drinks than males do. Therefore, college females are at greater risk for harm than are males at similar or lower drinking levels (LaBrie et al., 2007), including alcohol toxicity, sexual assault, impairment, and health consequences. Korcuska and Thombs (2003) also endorsed this alternate lens of viewing women's drinking, stating that even though most surveys indicate college men drink more heavily than college females, "these self-report measures do not account for sex differences in body weight and metabolism. Thus, when they drink, it is entirely possible that as a group, undergraduate women achieve similar levels of intoxication as their male counterparts" (p. 204). The aforementioned perspectives illustrate how the substance abuse literature and, specifically the college drinking research for females, has been stunted and needs further attention.

Social, Cultural, and Environmental Factors

Though there is some research correlating measures of female drinking to known risk factors for males, there is limited literature that specifically examines why these changes in female drinking rates have occurred and what elements contribute to this phenomenon. Potential factors that have been investigated include motivations and

expectancies, social norms, peer influences, changes in gender roles and expectations, and media influences. Conventional wisdom postulates that this increase in women's drinking is due to the general acceptability of females entering many domains of public and social life and participating fully in all aspects that may have been previously divided by sex. Now with women entering education at all levels in higher numbers than males, one pop culture article quoted Jon Morgenstern, a professor of psychiatry and vice-president at the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, as saying, "The more educated a woman is, the more likely she is to drink. College is really a training ground for becoming an alcoholic" (Morris, 2008, p. 2). Indeed, Chou, Dawson, Grant, and Stinson (2004) researched college drinking rates in college versus non college peers and found that college students were more likely to engage in heavy drinking than those of the same age not in college. Timberlake et al. (2007) also studied the differences over time in drinking rates and patterns between those attending college and not attending college for adolescents and youth aged 18-29 and found similar results. Those who had never enrolled in college were less likely to drink in a risky fashion than those who attended college. Moreover, those who initially had not engaged in high risk drinking prior to entering college and then later attended college surpassed their non-college peers in high risk drinking rates once they enrolled.

The change in drinking behaviors while in college suggests that elements in the college environment and culture lead to drinking as more acceptable or the dominant social norm. However, the mere quantitative correlation between obtaining an education and increasing drinking does not complete the picture or delve deeply into the

sociocultural context which may be influencing drinking choices in the college environment. Nearly a decade ago, Baer (2002) reviewed the extant literature on the variation found in research conducted on college drinking, and he concluded that social processes such as drinking games, social affiliations, and peer contexts may have more of an impact on drinking behaviors than individual personality traits. I would argue that these social processes may look different for female students than for males due to relational, cultural, and gendered positions.

Motivations for Drinking

Numerous factors have been explored as the motivations underlying college student drinking, and researchers have generalized these motivations to both female and male college students. Typical factors cited include that drinking is part of what a college student is supposed to do, it is a rite of passage, and that increased media portrayals of adolescents and college students normalize the presence of alcohol. Other researchers have framed drinking as a means to express equality, power, fun, sexuality, and freedom, and as a way to relieve stress and negative emotions (Baer, 2002; Bailly et al., 1991; Jones, Corbin, & Fromme, 2001; Huselid & Cooper, 1992; Piane & Safer, 2008). Bailly et al. (1991) examined gender differences in drinking motivations and power needs, hypothesizing that women and men would have differing outcomes based on what motivated them to drink. College students ($n = 420$) were sampled and given the Drinking Motivations Scale, which consisted of four categories of drinking motivations: Personal Psychological, Positive Social, Assertiveness Power, and Dominance Power. Examples of Personal Psychological motivations reflected escape or coping while

Positive Social Motivations reflected fun and celebration. Examples of Assertiveness Power motivations were feeling more confident and being able to express oneself whereas Dominance Power motivations were for the purpose of controlling others and gaining power over them. The researchers concluded that women may use alcohol for self-expression and may drink to gain confidence and thus avoid domination, whereas males endorsed more Dominance Power motivations to control others.

Psychologists from the United Kingdom (Jones et al., 2001) reviewed research linking expectancy theory and alcohol consumption as an explanatory model for drinking. They hoped to elucidate the connection between addressing and challenging expectancies and affecting treatment outcomes. Expectancy theory as related to alcohol purports the following:

behaviour is explained by the individual having expectations of particular reinforcing effects as the outcome of performing the behavior in question . . . that positive expectations (such as I expect to be the life of the party if I have a few drinks) represent an important component of motivation to drink while negative expectations (such as I expect to have a hangover if I have a few drinks) represent an important component of motivation to restrain. (p. 59)

After examining numerous studies on alcohol expectancies, the researchers concluded that results were mixed. In some studies, alcohol expectancies did not differ between males and females, while for other studies, sex differences were marked. One interesting finding was that alcohol expectancy interventions were more successful with lighter drinking females than those females who drank more heavily. However, in all of the studies mentioned, the researchers measured constructs with scales normed on and

designed for males and applied them to females with no modifications. Thus, the question remains whether there are different motivations and factors for women and men.

Social Norms

One angle for explaining drinking behavior stems from the social cognitive perspective, that one's peers influence what we think is acceptable and what we ultimately decide to do. This is typically known as Social Norms Theory, which postulates that we are influenced by what our peers are doing and how we perceive others' behaviors (Berkowitz, 2004; Perkins, 2002). For instance, college students are more likely to believe that their drinking behavior is typical if they believe others drink in a similar manner or at a higher level. Additionally, college students tend to overestimate how much and how often other students drink, thus making their own choices more permissible and justifiable. The basic premise underlying the use of social norms in marketing to reduce college drinking is to identify misperceptions between actual drinking behaviors and perceived norms. This discrepancy between perceived and actual use is then relayed to students, with the expectation that they will change their behavior to align with more realistic—and lower—drinking patterns.

The research on social norms interventions is contradictory, but what is evident is that students tend to think the normative information provided is credible if it refers to proximal peers, or those closest to them, compared to distal norms that describe the typical student on her campus (Korcuska & Thombs, 2003). If college females consider a close peer group as one consisting of males and females, then their perceptions of a peer group of drinkers is based on male drinking behavior. If the close reference group that a

college female considers is made up of same-sex peers, then her behavior is based on those drinkers. Lewis and Neighbors (2004) extended the research on sex-based norms to study the difference between same-sex and opposite sex-specific social norms in college students and concluded that same sex norms are stronger predictors of women's drinking than for men's drinking, which suggests normative feedback may be more effective in a single sex program. LaBrie and his colleagues (2007) explored how the drinking patterns of high school females transferred to the first semester of college, depending on how successfully they navigated the social transition. They concluded that intention to affiliate with a Greek system (sorority) was more highly correlated with high risk drinking rates for female freshmen than those who did not intend to be Greek affiliated.

Peer Influence

Closer examination of female friendship groups was recommended by Borsari and Carey (2001) to explore the social construction of alcohol's role and meaning. Later, Borsari and Carey (2006) developed a model of the relationship between peer social influences and high risk drinking for both males and females, publishing a conceptual article examining the mechanisms of peer influences on alcohol consumption. They posited that the levels of stability, intimacy, and support in peer relationships all affect alcohol-related social norms. These researchers found gender differences that were more traditional and concluded that females did not base social interactions on the presence of alcohol like males did. For example, Borsari and Carey (2006) stated the following:

men are more likely than women to develop and maintain a set of 'drinking buddies' with whom drinking is a key element of socialization. Women are less likely than men to use alcohol to foster socialisation and do not appear to develop

social networks whose focus is on drinking. For example, the desire for affiliation has been found to significantly predict heavy alcohol use in male freshmen, while the influence of social affiliation on female alcohol use is negligible. (p. 365)

However, the sources they cited to support this statement are from 1992 to 1994 and the changes in gender identity, drinking patterns, and social milieu for college women has changed significantly in the past twenty years. Since this article was published, some qualitative studies on college women's drinking have been undertaken and have shed light on how peer influences play out in the lives of female drinkers. These findings contradict earlier assumptions about the nature of college female drinking norms and may indicate a shift in gender and culture change.

The importance of peer group influence extends beyond the perception of norms and comprises how drinking behaviors are being communicated in male and female peer groups. In New Zealand, two researchers recently examined the language used in particular established co-ed social groups to talk about gender, expectations, and alcohol use. Lyons and Willott (2008) sought to "explore how women are redefining their gender identities in relation to men" (p. 696) through consuming alcohol. Their qualitative study was conducted in an urban area in New Zealand and specifically examined how young men and women talked about their alcohol use in existing small friendship groups. A total of 32 participants who ranged in age from 20-29 were divided into eight groups by their similarity in type of profession. Examples of these groupings were the Professional group, IT group, Media group, and Retail group. The discourse revealed controversy between groups regarding whether a female who drinks beer is considered cool or uncouth and the representation of "gendered drinks" regarding the acceptability of what

females drank. The authors found that more males in the study held the belief that if a woman drinks what is considered a more masculine drink she is legitimized as being one of the guys. This process transferred some of the power or status that males held onto the female, thus elevating her position.

Peer influence, then, has been studied in relation to discourse analysis in another country but has been limited in its application within a group of U.S. college students. Two examples of research conducted with formalized small groups targeted sorority members (Linowski, 2004) and those living together in residence halls (Zamboanga et al., 2009). These subgroups have been studied to determine the influential nature of shared cultures in shaping drinking behaviors. Zamboanga and his colleagues (2009) studied the relationship between alcohol use and housing style in an effort to test the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) of alcohol use, which emphasized culture and environment over individual processes when determining alcohol behaviors. Employing the AUDIT (Saunders, Aasland, Babor, de la Fuente, & Grant, 1993) and the Comprehensive Effects of Alcohol Use (CEOA; Fromme, Stroot, & Kaplan, 1993) surveys, they surveyed 362 college females at a women's liberal arts college about their living situation, their drinking habits, and their expectations of what would happen if they drank. Specifically, students were asked if they lived in residence hall type housing or a house style setting to determine if there were differences in the risks associated with drinking locations and settings. The researchers found that alcohol use was higher among college females who lived in a residence hall style housing than in house style settings.

Though Borsari and Carey (2006) were astute in making a case for more exploration of peer influences, results from quantitative data provide a limited picture and do not address the nuanced ways in which female peers may set the tone for drinking behaviors in small groups in different ways than males do. The few studies that have been conducted regarding female peers and drinking influences in the United States revealed different profiles emerging for women drinkers than the studies on which Borsari and Carey's (2006) analysis was based.

Different Profiles for Male and Female Drinkers

A few recent studies have highlighted the differences between male and females in drinking risk factors, cognitions, and expectancies. DeMartini and Carey (2009) investigated a group of college males and females with scores on the AUDIT that indicated high risk drinking, higher than 7 for females and higher than 8 for males. They were interested in which demographic variables, health indices, and alcohol and drug use patterns not measured on the AUDIT were associated with high risk drinking. Utilizing surveys measuring factors such as amount of sleep, caffeine intake, substance related consequences, age of first drug and alcohol use, and estimated typical Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC), correlations between these AUDIT scores and other risk factors emerged. The result was the creation of two different profiles for male and female drinkers. Whereas for men risk status was "predicted by higher blood alcohol concentrations, more alcohol-related consequences, and lifetime illicit drug use, for women it was predicted by frequency of binge episodes in the last month and a greater number of alcohol-related psychosocial consequences" (p. 237). The authors

recommended “more detailed assessment of gender-linked alcohol and drug use patterns is needed” and that because there are different profiles of correlates for men and women who engage in high risk drinking, “gender based tailoring may be warranted” (p. 238).

Ricciardelli and her colleagues (2001) conducted a study of college students in Australia, with the purpose of examining relationships between gender stereotypes and drinking levels. Specifically, the authors were interested in exploring the current paradox they observed about women’s drinking: “more liberal and loosely defined gender roles have increased the acceptance of women’s drinking, and perhaps even increased the social expectation that more women will drink” (p. 130), in contrast to the traditionally held views that women’s drinking is negative. The variables measured included the ability to resist drinking in particular cue states, restrained drinking, positive and negative gender stereotypes, alcohol amounts, frequency, and alcohol problems.

Results indicated that both college females and males who engaged in high risk drinking, compared to more moderate drinkers, experienced response conflict, which means they were aware they were drinking too much but were influenced to drink more. Interestingly, this conflict was more pronounced in women who tended to worry about what others thought. Additionally, college females had lower self-efficacy when refusing a drink. Essentially, the college women they surveyed were self-conscious about the amount they drank and were more susceptible to social and emotional cues of the double standard for gender and drinking. The authors concluded that “in order to increase our understanding of the complexity of high risk drinking among young women, additional studies are needed which consider female drinking in its own right rather than a simple

adjunct of male drinking” (Ricciardelli, 2001, p. 135). Yet we do not have accurate and relevant measures that fully have explored and captured college women’s beliefs about why they do what they do.

Environmental Factors

In addition to a residence hall setting (Zamboanga et al., 2009), researchers have examined other factors in the social environment that are associated with increase in drinking. Some researchers have found that women’s drinking increases in certain contrived drinking environments. Clapp, Min, Shillington, Reed, and Croff (2008) sought to extend the literature on the causes of college drinking from the individual to the environmental impact. They approached a variety of student groups to gain access to actual parties to enable them to study drinking patterns and Breath Alcohol Concentration (BrAC) in real time. At the different types of parties, observers asked college students about their reasons for going out as well as their plans for the rest of the night, and then measured each student’s BrAC as they left the venue. The authors found that though males reportedly consumed more alcohol than females in their study, “women had higher Breath Alcohol Concentrations (BrACs) than men at themed parties and no difference in level of intoxication between men and women at non-themed parties” (p. 105). This was surprising for two reasons—females had higher BrAC than men even though males had reported more alcohol consumption, and females drank in riskier ways when the drinking environment was themed (e.g. dressing up as characters for Halloween, Mardi Gras) than in a typical environment. The authors suggested that college females are more susceptible to the changes in drinking environment than males, meaning that it became more

conducive for females to drink more alcohol. What is lacking from this quantitative relationship is an exploration of the reasons college females tend to drink more in some contexts. The finding that women drink more when their identity is concealed or potentially transformed into another character, such as at theme parties, may suggest that women are indeed experiencing a duality or a crisis in who they are comfortable being, and the presence of a mask allows them to engage in riskier behavior than they normally would. Additionally, the sexualized nature of the costumes and the personas adopted by the women at the themed parties should not be overlooked as it may be related to gender expectations and, therefore, warrants further attention in assessing the drinking experiences of college women.

Media Influence

This generation of college students has been exposed to exponentially more mediated communication, meaning technological interactions rather than interpersonal, than any previous generation. According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report, considering television, music, computer, video games, print communication, and movies, the total daily media exposure of 8-18 year olds in the United States is 10 hours and 45 minutes (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010, as cited in Borisoff & Chesebro, 2011). Mainstream media has the capacity to shape and influence social norms and expectations regarding drinking behavior and is an integral piece of how college females interpret social norms. Current researchers from the last ten years have focused on the media's role in contributing to socially constructed messages about how college women should behave in terms of drinking choices. Several types of media have been linked to beliefs about

drinking, including television (Engels, Hermans, van Baaren, Hollenstein, & Bot, 2009; Lederman, Lederman, & Kully, 2004; Mishra, 2010; Russell & Russell, 2009), social media websites (Morgan, Snelson, & Elison-Bowers, 2010), and beer commercials (Zwarun, 2002). Portrayals of young women drinking in film, television, and commercials have increased exponentially, even spawning new phrases in the last decade such as “Girls Gone Wild” (Mishra, 2010). Some researchers have focused on the recent phenomenon of the tagline and associated behaviors of “Girls Gone Wild” in women’s drinking (Mishra, 2010; Zwarun, 2002) while others examined the increase in marketing of alcohol specifically to women. Jernigan (2008), of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, scrutinized magazine advertisements for alcohol and found that “alcopops,” which are defined as the fizzy, sweet malt liquor beverages like Smirnoff Ice and Mike’s Hard Lemonade, were most often advertised with female images to female consumers. Similarly, in Ridburg’s (2004) *Spin the Bottle* educational DVD, the increased use of sexualized women in Bacardi commercials was highlighted. The DVD features a set of commercials in which the duality of female identity was presented with taglines such as “Librarian by Day, Bacardi by Night” and “Veterinarian by Day, Bacardi by Night” perpetuating the idea that women must be all things to be successful and sexy.

Morgan et al. (2010) studied social media websites like Facebook and Myspace to examine portrayals of substance abuse and related behaviors. They found that depictions of women and alcohol were more prevalent than portrayals of men and alcohol, while more men were portrayed using marijuana. Dal Cin, Worth, Dalton, and Sargent (2008) used content analysis to investigate alcohol brand depictions in 534 movies from 1998-

2003 and surveyed 10-14-year-olds in the United States to determine if they had seen a sample of these movies. They found that alcohol use was present in 83% of all the movies, regardless of rating, and alcohol brands appeared in 52% of the movies. Surprisingly, there was no difference in alcohol presence between PG -13 movies deemed appropriate for adolescents and R-rated movies for adults. In fact, 56% of G/PG-rated movies for younger children contained alcohol portrayals. This pervasiveness through the lifespan may highlight one reason why alcohol has become viewed as benign and acceptable and, subsequently, why there has been a rise in alcohol use in adolescents and college females.

Russell and Russell (2009) sought to update a previous content analysis of prime time television conducted by Christenson, Henriksen, and Roberts (2000) to reflect changes in the frequency of alcohol prevalence. Whereas the former study analyzed television from the 1990s and found that 77% of the samples portrayed alcohol in some form, Russell and Russell (2009) concentrated on television from the 2004-2005 season. They identified top television shows from the Nielsen ratings at five major networks and viewed a total of 144 episodes from 18 programs. They extended the literature on mere frequency by coding the alcohol exposures on several measures, including whether it was visual or auditory, whether it was seen in the foreground or background, how central the alcohol was to the program's theme, what was being said about the alcohol, and whether it was actually consumed. They found that alcohol was present in at least one episode of every program coded and was present in every episode of 10 of the 18 programs. The most alarming finding was that "actual consumption is depicted in half (50.0%) of the

instances involving teenage characters” (p. 119). The authors concluded that alcohol exposure has increased substantially in the last decade and suggested that since alcohol is more prevalent in programs with teenage characters, the embedded messages must be monitored.

As pervasive as media is as a communication tool for this generation of college students, it would be imprudent to ignore its effect on the drinking culture for college women today. Lederman et al. (2004) linked the social construction of media messages to college drinking behavior and described the co-construction of myths as a combination of pervasive images and social expectations as follows:

No myth in the media has been more pervasive and more sustained than the image of college drinking as inevitable. These images are reinforced for them by alcohol advertising, media messages, and sports events in which beer/alcohol sponsorship is evident and specific, as well as alcohol-related promotions for particular times of the academic year, such as spring break. But these studies indicate that students’ perceptions of drinking behaviors are distorted (Burns, Ballou, & Lederman, 1991; Burns & Goodstadt, 1989). Students often do not recognize their drinking as excessive because their perception is relative to those around them—and they believe that the people around them are drinking excessively as well. For every student who drinks, there is another who seems to drink more frequently and to have more drinks per occasion. (p. 131)

This stance supports the Social Norms Theory as a popular explanation for college substance abuse to research in the media’s influence of college drinking.

Mishra (2010) examined several types of media, including MTV music television, film, and commercials that portrayed the outrageous behaviors of “girls gone wild.” Girls gone wild is a phrase that communicates the outrageous behaviors exhibited by young females that typically occurs as special occasions drinking rather than typical everyday

drinking. Portraying and promoting outrageous behaviors of college females in the media included women lifting their tops during Spring Break or Mardi Gras in exchange for free alcoholic drinks or being held upside down by shirtless college men to perform inverted keg stands amid cheers of approval. Mishra (2010) and other media analysts (Lederman et al., 2009) purported that depicting these outrageous behaviors of young women is aligned with the Social Norms Theory that the more often risky college student behaviors are seen on television, the more acceptable the behaviors become and, thus, more prevalent in reality. Essentially, if college females are expected to behave in this way, then on a given holiday or special occasion, college women are justified and encouraged to live up to an image of women acting in risky and sexualized ways. Mishra (2010) also addressed females wanting to feel strong, calling this persona “girl power.” It seems logical, then, that addressing and discussing media influence and media literacy would be an essential part of a prevention or intervention program for college women engaging in high risk drinking shaped by their gender identity.

In a recent comparative thematic analysis of how young women and drinking are portrayed in popular media, Likis-Werle (2011) found two different profiles emerged of women who drink. Based on college students’ self-reports of which media outlets they most saw women drinking, the author compared Bud Light commercials and the reality television series *Jersey Shore* on five criteria, including how women are portrayed, in what types of behavior the women engaged, and what integral messages were being given about women. The first media outlet, Bud Light Commercials, portrayed women and men in fairly equal roles and number, and showed well dressed, casual groups of 2-4 adults

acting responsibly and consuming one drink at time. Product loyalty was evident, as groups of co-workers would even try to get fired from their jobs if Bud Light was given as a severance package. The message conveyed through the limited dialogue and taglines was that drinking alcohol was a part of everyday life and a healthy way to unwind with friends. The primary characters on *Jersey Shore* were female housemates who were shown drinking on every episode, for a variety of purposes such as before going out to clubs, to welcome a new housemate, to bond, and in everyday activities such as going to get manicures and pedicures, as well as when they were bored. Resultant behaviors of the women were that they were often drunk, engaged in numerous verbal and physical fights with both females and males, slept with other's significant others, and even got arrested for public intoxication. The prevalence of these outrageous behaviors shown by young women on *Jersey Shore* seemed to give permission for bad behavior, as if every young person lived this way or should aspire to do so. As long as the purpose was to bond, have fun, make oneself sexually available, and relieve stress, frequent high risk drinking and alcohol related consequences were accepted and expected. As Lederman and colleagues (2009) proposed, the more we see this type of behavior, the more accepted it becomes as part of reality.

Gender Role Change

To accurately and holistically consider the change in women's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in the United States, it is necessary to broaden the scope of gender role change and consider the worldwide progress that has been made in women's rights and lives in the last few decades. As mentioned previously, the connections between women's

drinking rates and their status in society have begun to emerge. However, the most illuminating studies of gender role change affecting high risk drinking rates have been conducted in other countries over an extended period of time. The changing position of women in society has been studied in the Czech Republic (Kubicka & Csémy, 2008) New Zealand (Lyons & Willott, 2008), the United Kingdom (Plant, 2008), Australia (Ricciardelli et al., 2001; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001), and in a multinational study involving 29 countries (Rahav et al., 2006).

In a longitudinal survey of Czech women between 1992-1997, during a period of increasing democracy and social role change for women, Kubicka and Csémy (2008) analyzed data from 718 women aged 20-49 years old. The authors originally conducted structured interviews in the women's homes in 1987 assessing drinking frequency, quantity, and type of beverage, and also piloted a women's gender role orientation (GRO) scale. After conducting exploratory analysis, they then followed up in 1992 and 1997, adding revised questionnaires. The GRO questionnaire was an instrument developed by the authors that divided into four scales: egalitarianism, liberalism, feminism, and hedonism; the other questionnaire added was an unpublished social desirability scale. For the purposes of the article, only the 1992 and 1997 data were compared, and a regression analysis was used to see if the GRO in 1992 predicted the women's 1997 alcohol use. A bivariate Pearson's correlation was used to determine the relationship between GRO and drinking patterns. In conclusion, the researchers found support for their hypothesis that gender role orientation contributed to "women's motivation to drink quantities similar to those consumed by men" (p. 8). Specifically, women who identified as egalitarian and

hedonistic were more likely to drink than women with more traditional gender role orientations.

Plant (2008) highlighted the role alcohol has played in the lives of women in Great Britain and compared the changes in women's drinking at different developmental levels to trends reported in other countries. Since the standard of living and the societal makeup is similar in many respects to what young women experience in the United States, trends there may inform or mirror those in our country. In Great Britain, binge drinking by teenaged young women has been on the rise for a decade, from 20% reporting binge drinking in 1995 to 29% reporting in 2003. At the same time, numbers for teenage males shifted from 24% reporting binge drinking in 1995 to 33% in 199, and then fell significantly to 26% in 2003. In the young adult demographic, aged 16-24, then, in some cases the women's high risk drinking rates had surpassed men's binge drinking. Plant (2008) attributed some of the widespread increases in drinking to changes in social roles, but rather than framing drinking as a liberating role in equality, she asserted that women drank due to increased responsibility and strain causing stress in women's lives. She further suggested this stress caused women to drink more heavily to cope and, subsequently, questioned whether this increased stress was correlated with the simultaneous increase in women's admissions to alcohol treatment facilities (Plant, 2008).

Convergence Theory of Gender Roles

Women are entering social, economic, educational, and political fields in greater numbers each year. As the lines between masculinity and femininity have blurred, many

gender roles that traditionally were divided have converged. The traditional boundaries related to alcohol related behavior by gender have also blurred as some countries have seen a convergence between male and female drinking rates. In a study of women's alcohol consumption in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland, Bloomfield et al. (2001) coined the term "Convergence Theory" or "convergence hypothesis."

Bloomfield and colleagues (2001) linked increases in women's drinking to increases in their social emancipation and posited that the more liberated a country, the less hostile an environment it is for women "to lead lives comparable to those of men" (p. 161).

Similarly, another recent international study was conducted to analyze associations between gender inequalities, alcohol, and other indicators of societal economic and social progress. Building on an earlier collaboration between The European Commission, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the National Institute of Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA), Rahav and partners (2006) investigated the results of the global GENACIS project, which was titled, Gender, Alcohol, and Culture: An International Study. This project involved 29 countries and aimed to "identify the pattern of gender differences in drinking across societies" (p. 47). The variables examined were alcohol consumption by frequency and amount; serious alcohol consequences such as death, cirrhosis, motor vehicle crashes, and aggression; indices of economic status, modernization, and standard of living; cultural masculinity; and women's position in society. Women's position in a country was measured by the divorce rate, the fertility rate, and a composite score of gender empowerment developed by the United Nations Human Development project. This score was derived by calculating women's economic

and political participation and power over resources. First, though the prevalence of drinking for women was less than men in every country surveyed, there was much more variability in women's drinking rates by country than there was for men's drinking rates. For example, the percentage of women who had a drink in the last year ranged from 6% in Sri Lanka to 91% in Finland, whereas for men the range was from 42% in Uganda to 93% in Austria. Next, two measurements of women's status, gender empowerment and gender equality, were negatively correlated with the gender drinking ratio, meaning that as women's status rose, the gender differences in alcohol consumption and consequences became lower. As women experienced more equality and their lives improved economically, their drinking choices were more likely to converge with men's.

In summary, Rahav and colleagues (2006) recognized that modernization of societal, economic, political and interpersonal roles in the last 20 years has coincided with an international increase in women's drinking rates, and suggested that this relationship needed to be explored further. Plant (2008) applied Convergence Theory to the drinking patterns observed in women of Great Britain in recent years, especially with younger women who have adopted typically male behaviors of patronizing pubs. Thus, it would follow that women in the United States, especially those who have grown up in a more liberalized era of democracy and opportunity, would have a very different perspective on women's roles, limitations, social status, and equality which might help explain increases in their drinking patterns. There is, however, a gap in similar longitudinal research in the United States, and thus this is an area of further research that desperately needs attention and could shed light on the increase in college female

drinking. As one of the most industrialized and developed countries in the world, the paucity of published literature on this gender-related phenomenon in the United States is puzzling. As these changes in gender roles and stereotypes of gender have evolved, perhaps the current generation of college women perhaps do not feel confined to these stereotypes and are exploring the boundaries of social drinking (Beere, King, Beere, & King, 1984). In the United States, we are in a position to we learn from our international colleagues and apply what we know to date to the gender perceptions of college students as related to drinking decisions.

Gender Identity

West and Zimmerman, sociologists who studied differences in language patterns of male and female college students, revolutionized the conceptions of gender with their work “Doing Gender” published in 1987. They proposed that gender is a series of ongoing activities and accomplishments that is recurring and routine and is an embedded “feature of social situations” (p. 126). They distinguished gender from biological sex and sex-defined roles, rejecting that gender was a biological trait. Since roles can change based on type of work, career, the division of domestic labor, and economic situations, the authors asserted that we are recruited and taught to “do” actions of gender that match our sex according to the dominant social paradigm. Essentially, they contended that doing gender is not who we are but what we do. We convey certain natures based on what we have learned and what we want others to see. Similar to Judith Lorber (1994), West and Zimmerman were proponents of the social construction of gender. Because there are collective and institutionalized notions of what gender is, each person’s accomplishments

and activities are measured as either adherence or non-adherence to those gender specific notions. West and Zimmerman (1987) described doing gender as a social arrangement in which we are steeped rather than a natural inherent portrayal of our personality.

West and Zimmerman (1987), and later, Fenstermaker and West (2002), differentiated between sex, sex category, and gender. They defined sex as being assigned the label male or female at birth based on the presence of respective genitalia. Sex categorization is more complicated, involving certain outward displays of appearance and the simultaneous collective recognition of such displays as female or male, feminine or masculine. Since society readily recognizes agreed upon behaviors, clothing, and mannerisms as gendered, we learn to fit into our categories. Gender is achieved by these repeated “accomplishments” and it consists of everyday expressions, interactions, and conduct in a manner consistent with the attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category. This conceptualization of gender is an appropriate lens through which we can view college females who engage in high risk drinking behaviors.

In investigating some of the ways in which women choose drinking behaviors, the concept of Gender Performativity may also be applicable (Butler, 1999). Gender Performativity was described by Butler as a “ritual social drama,” who added,

the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated over time. This repetition is at once a reenactment and a re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (p. 178)

Thus, college females’ behavior may be seen as emulation, mimicking, or a representation of how they think they should act according to assigned gender roles.

Perhaps imitating the stereotypical performance of the male gender (being a real man and drinking heavily) is a way for college women to acquire the power that males have historically had.

As a result, in gender studies, there has been an evolution of gender from gender roles and gender traits to describing and conceptualizing gender as a social construct and part of a larger field of the study of identity. More recently, Hoffman and colleagues (2000) proposed that gender is part of one's self concept and can be broken down into gender self-definition and gender self-acceptance. Historically, gender roles were connected to domestic division of labor, workforce positions, head of household, primary caregiver, and biological functions. Since those roles have changed dramatically with the progression of educational, social, and technological advances, so too has the need for new definitions. Gender traits implied inherent biological personality differences between females and males and ignored the societal influences that shaped our identities. For example, in the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem 1974), instrumentality, independence, agency, and leadership were all considered male attributes or qualities by chromosomal nature. Expressive traits such as emotionality, nurturing, and cooperation were thought to be inherently female or feminine (BSRI; Bem, 1974; PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

How researchers define what is meant by gender role change and gender identity in the context of the twenty-first century remains ambiguous. Researchers who have attempted to operationalize terms like equality and power face a daunting task because acknowledging a need or desire for power and equality may be considered an unfeminine

behavior to which current college students are reluctant to proscribe. Even more confounding is the position that some college females take that equality may be considered a non-issue. By this I mean they do not readily embrace feminist notions that there are still inequalities in our society because they may not yet have experienced them firsthand. In identity development models, this stage is akin to identity foreclosure in that they have not yet experienced a crisis that calls into question previously held conceptions of gender (Hoffman, 2006). To complicate gender identity, some theoretical and pop culture literature highlights that many young women who believe in equality often do not call themselves feminists (Babcock, 1996; Ehrenreich, 2002). In this current generation of college women, our privileged western society has perpetuated the idea that equality is no longer an issue, that because Title IX was passed, and we have a handful of female Congresswomen, opportunities are perceived as equal, and inequity is a historical problem.

Introducing the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000) in a focus group may be a more relevant way to gauge gender identity within a generation of college females that minimizes any perceived differences or does not recognize inequalities due to sex or gender. Because gender self-concept and gender self-acceptance can be easily explained, the questions in this scale may provide a language for discussing gender identity in a nonthreatening way. Current college students may not be old enough to recall being treated differently because of their biological sex or because of gender expectations and may have grown up with inherent expectations of egalitarianism and privilege.

Gender Identity and Alcohol Use

Three quantitative studies conducted in the U.S. on adolescent or college women involved the relationship between alcohol use and gender roles, attributes, and traits. In one additional study, the researcher aimed to incorporate gender role conflict into alcohol use and perceived norms, but framed the former construct as a reason to drink rather than as an explanation of how gender roles inform expectations about drinking (Korcuska & Thombs, 2003). Huselid and Cooper (1992) studied adolescent drinking patterns and their identification with certain gender roles traits and gender role attributes. The sample consisted of 1,077 teenagers from Buffalo, New York, who self-reported drinking alcohol in the last six months; they were aged 13 to 19, with 65% white, 35% Black, and a mean age of 17.3 years. Interviews were conducted with respondents over a 14-month period, and variables measured were sex, race, age, gender role attributes, attitudes toward gender roles, and alcohol use and problems.

Gender measures included the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), and a modified version of the Fem scale (Smith, Ferree, & Miller, 1975). The researchers did not use a standardized assessment for alcohol use and problems, and I was unable to find the Fem Scale mentioned above. The age range of the respondents lends itself to increased variability in responses due to the nascent identity development in this particular period of life. The authors claimed that this study provided “the first direct evidence that sex differences in alcohol use are substantially mediated by gender-role attributes and gender roles ideology” (p. 358). They concluded that females endorsing traditional gender roles drink less than those endorsing non-traditional gender

roles. Though this was a much needed beginning point in the substance abuse literature, the assessments need to be updated. In addition, the attitudes and attributes measured may no longer be relevant to current adolescents or college students. Therefore, further in-depth research is imperative to explore the links between gender identity and drinking patterns among young females.

Peralta et al. (2010) compared two gender measures and drinking within a college population in an effort to tease out the role of gender expression from biological sex differences. Using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1974) and, like Huselid and Cooper (1992), a later version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), the authors were interested in “the significance of gender in shaping substance abuse behavior” (p. 357). They acknowledged that gender could be expressed through various actions on a continuum and that college students were constantly in the process of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) to experiment with identity. Peralta and colleagues (2010) hypothesized that both male sex and adherence to masculine gender role orientations, regardless of biological sex, would predict higher rates of drinking than female sex or adherence to more traditionally feminine gender roles. Using a multiple regression model, authors found that higher scores on masculinity predicted frequent and occasional high risk drinking and low scores on femininity predicted frequent binge drinking. Interestingly, when results from the two gender measures were analyzed separately, the BSRI did not yield any findings between any level of femininity and risky drinking, but the PAQ regression model significantly demonstrated less femininity predicted frequent risky drinking.

Peralta and his colleagues (2010) concluded that gender identity does impact high risk drinking behaviors and suggested three areas of continued research. First, further research should be conducted with updated gender measures; secondly, qualitative studies should be undertaken to more fully understand the ways in which gender identity and expression influences drinking, and third, "female-centered/ gender incorporating treatment models" (p. 371) need to be considered in the prevention and intervention for women abusing substances.

Smith and colleagues (2009) were interested in the relationships and perceptions of gender role attributes and alcohol as it related to sexual expectancies. In a mixed methods study, they surveyed 67 college female undergraduates with a mean age of 19, all Caucasian and heterosexual. They employed a shortened version of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, only asking the questions related to feminine gender role traits, the Alcohol Expectancies Questionnaire (AEQ; Brown, Christiansen, & Goldman, 1987), and a sexual opinion survey. Later, they conducted two follow up focus groups inquiring only about sexual attitudes and behavior changes when drinking alcohol. They did not, however, state a theoretical or methodological basis for analyzing the qualitative responses gathered during the focus groups, and there were only two main questions that were very narrow in scope. (e.g. in what ways do your sexual attitudes and behaviors change when drinking alcohol?) There was no exploration of what it meant to be female or endorse feminine traits compared to endorsing traits that the scales deemed masculine. The results showed that the Pearson correlation between gender role traits and alcohol

use was $-.25$, indicating a negative relationship. Similar to Huselid and Cooper (1992), those females who scored higher on feminine traits reported lower alcohol use.

In all of these endeavors, the scales measuring gender role or identity were more than 30 years old. It is possible that current college students may not relate being female to being nurturing and expressive. A female college student today may very likely identify with being assertive, independent, and capable of making choices on her own. Though these researchers made important connections between traditional value-laden traits for females and expected behaviors, conceptions of gender identity have shifted dramatically since they completed their work.

Qualitative Research on College Female Drinking

In the most recent literature about college women and drinking in the last decade, almost all of the studies have been qualitative and/or were dissertations undertaken by women across a variety of professional disciplines (Brumbelow, 1993; Ketcham, 1999; Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; Mishra, 2010; Russett, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005; Zwarun, 2002).

Three of the most prominent studies were conducted in other countries to examine young women's drinking culture, yet may illuminate similar culture shifts for females in the United States. First, Sheehan and Ridge (2001) examined high school females in Australia. Their main purpose was to explore the role alcohol played in the lives of these young women and to further paint a picture of how adolescent females perceived consequences and harms from drinking. Binge drinking was defined slightly differently

here, as consuming three or more drinks in a sitting met criteria for binge drinking compared to four drinks in the United States. The authors found that the storytelling and narratives about drinking experiences were an important piece of relationship building for the adolescents and that, if the significance of this view was ignored, harm minimization messages to Australian teenage females would fall on deaf ears. The sentiments expressed by these adolescents are comparable to the theme Linowski (2004) titled “good girl/bad girl duality” in which students live by the rule, “do your work and your community service during the day and then let loose at night.” The college females felt they had something to prove—they could be just as bad as the guys and still maintain their good grades.

In a unique investigation of how young adults are communicating about drinking and gender identity, Lyons and Willott (2008) studied small friendship groups of young adult drinkers in New Zealand. They examined the language males and females used to talk about women, men, and drinking. Each group was from 3-5 people, including females and males ranging in age from 20-29, who were interviewed as part of a social outing. Because the groups of participants already knew each other, the researchers thought it would give a rich account of how their beliefs were formed and acted upon in unique cultural and social situations. They found that there were four main discourses in the conversation—a discourse of vulnerability, a discourse of equality, a double standards discourse, and one of control and responsibility. The discourse of equality emerged in conversations between small friendship groups as they dialogued about how young women drinking was more acceptable and that women drank to be one of the guys. Both

of the discourses of vulnerability and double standards of behavior indicated that women were aware that drinking comes with a price; that is, the stress relief and enjoyment experienced in drinking with friends in a public place sometimes put females at risk of being preyed upon by other males who were drinking heavily. Finally, the control and responsibility discourse focused on the vague line that divided acceptable, classy drinking in a social setting from females who drank too much and became unattractive, messy, and embarrassing. Each of the small groups had unique personalities in which this vague line was defined a bit differently; thus, the message to female drinkers became muddled.

In the third qualitative study, MacNeela and Bredin (2010) sought to explore female students' perceptions of alcohol and health-related harms in Ireland, since trends from global studies indicated no differences in the prevalence of drinking between young males and females in that country. The authors interviewed 20 Irish college students aged 19-22 who all identified as regular binge drinkers and were part of an existing friendship network. The researchers focused on drinking within the social context of gender and how health and potential harms from excessive drinking were viewed by college women.

MacNeela and Bredin used a combination of focus groups and individual interviews which were analyzed for themes in the data, finding four main sets of beliefs and expectations expressed by the participants. The first theme was freedom and regulation, which represented a balancing act between enjoying one's independence and keeping each other in check and avoiding excess. The participants "held powerful expectations for unconstrained, intense experiences" (MacNeela & Bredin, 2010, p. 287) as a part of university life, and drinking fostered confidence, fun, and a sense of

fearlessness. However, the group acknowledged that this was only possible because they were “cocooned” in a form of group protection. Ironically, this same group identified a line of acceptable behaviors and unacceptable behaviors for females that, if crossed, would yield embarrassment.

In another theme, MacNeela and Bredin (2010) described the social expectation that college females would go out drinking and initiate sexual encounters with males. The females admitted they would not engage in this type of forward behavior when sober, so alcohol provided a way to avoid being perceived negatively and owning up to what they wanted. This gendered type of role created internal strain as well as conflict among the participants in determining what was acceptable, describing whether alcohol was viewed as an excuse or a face-saving tactic when one found herself in an embarrassing sexual situation.

The next theme involved the participants’ experience with alcohol as a mood-altering substance that changed the way each person felt when she reached intoxication. The flipside, however, was managing hangovers, blackouts, and physical illnesses. The last theme reflected a high threshold for what high risk drinking entailed and a judgmental stance concerning women who were “messy problem drinkers” (MacNeela & Bredin, 2010, p. 289). The bottom line tended to be anyone who ruined the fun was worthy of scorn. The authors concluded that peer groups were of ultimate importance when considering the meaning and context of college female drinking and how to reduce alcohol-related harms.

The remainder of the qualitative studies summarized here were conducted in the United States in the past decade, and subsequently, the findings may be more transferable to college females in this country. Linowski (2004), a substance abuse prevention expert and health promotion professional at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, conducted her dissertation research on the meaning of drinking in college women's lives. She met with a focus group consisting of 16 leaders from various sororities and then conducted individual interviews with an additional 19 college females at another university. Situated in the northeastern United States, she used a phenomenological feminist approach and queried what drinking meant in the lives of these women, considering the relational context and the role alcohol played in these relationships. She framed the results within the Relational Cultural Model, pointing to the connection with others as integral to college women's drinking.

Her research yielded rich data, describing five major themes of how alcohol functions in the lives of college women that fits within the relational cultural framework of caretaking, storytelling, bonding, coping with pain, and disconnection from self. The first three themes were viewed as positive by the participants with examples highlighted as follows: caretaking behaviors included staying with a friend when she was sick from drinking too much; storytelling included gathering the morning after drinking to re-create and dramatize the events from the night before; bonding meant getting to know the females with whom you were drinking, sharing laughs, and feeling closer after sharing experiences. The last two themes emphasized the darker side of heavy drinking—coping with the pain of a breakup by escaping through getting drunk, and negotiating the dual

sides of one's identity in which the college females felt torn between living up to differing expectations for their behavior.

In a study published in 2005, Young et al. investigated the phrase “drinking like a guy” in terms of how this concept resonated with college females. They sampled 42 undergraduate college females from the Midwestern U.S., and unlike other studies, the researchers conducted different focus groups based on differing levels of drinking within their sample. This enabled the team to observe personas of each group and allowed the participants' experiences to be normalized within each respective framework. For example, the highest risk drinkers could engage in discussion about their habits without alienating the low risk drinkers and vice versa. Each voice could be heard and they could later be compared and gathered as a collective to contribute to emerging profiles for each risk level. Young and her colleagues (2005) learned that when these college females drank they seemed to achieve an increase in social status and attractiveness from a heteronormative perspective with male peers as evidenced by the males' positive comments and invitations to socialize with them in the future. Interestingly, the participants adamantly made the distinction that they did not drink to be *like* a guy, they drank to be liked by a guy.

Smith (2007) used a grounded theory approach in her dissertation study designed to explore college women's alcohol use and to determine students' perceptions of drinking events and contexts. Like Linowski (2004), the authors' participants were from the northeastern United States and were members of a sorority. Both of these researchers focused on white, traditional-aged college women affiliated with Greek Life because

research has indicated that these traits of subgroups are correlated with higher risk compared to other college females (Wechsler et al., 2002). Smith (2007) interviewed ten undergraduate females and used open, axial, and selective coding to analyze the themes.

What emerged was later developed into a conceptual model and was published with her dissertation chair (Smith & Berger, 2010). The model was called the 3R: Relational Ritual Reinforcement model, a framework for how participants experienced drinking. Relationally, they outlined motives for engaging in risky drinking that the participants reported, such as having fun and meeting people, as well as escaping from a bad mood or a relationship breakup (Smith & Berger, 2010). The description of drinking as a Ritualized drinking performance within peer groups was pivotal. Participants described repeated patterns of gathering at someone's residence, drinking for a couple of hours while they got ready, laughing and joking as they became more intoxicated, and then venturing out to parties in groups, already stumbling around together. Despite the potential negative consequences, the college females woke up the next morning, rehashed the previous evening, and repeated the same ritual the next night or weekend with the same schedule and intent. The Reinforcement part of the model acknowledged that the drinking experience served as a way to bond and relive relational connection, concluding "This collective euphoric recall provides the fuel to re-initiate and maintain the cycle of high-risk drinking" (Smith, 2007, p. 99). Like other studies of its kind, the college females described experiencing negative consequences, but those were dealt with more privately and quietly and did not deter them from engaging in further high-risk drinking. The authors concluded that women's experiences and voices need to be central to

developing focused programs and interventions for change in their drinking patterns to occur.

Russett (2008), a substance abuse program manager at The College of William and Mary, researched college women's high risk drinking within a gendered setting. Utilizing a phenomenological approach based in feminist theory, she focused on more general questions of how the participants' drinking experiences shaped their perceptions of drinking. Her participants were 25 sorority women who were current drinkers, first interviewed in three focus groups based on membership in three sororities. Two weeks later Russett followed up with 6 individuals, 2 sophomores, 2 juniors, and 2 seniors, who agreed to be interviewed in an effort to elaborate on the information, check for saturation, and probe more deeply. What emerged were four themes: (a) descriptions of the campus drinking culture, (b) conceptions of binge drinking, (c) acknowledgement that drinking occurs in a male dominated environment, and (d) struggles of women to fit into a man's world.

Females expressed that they had little power and were marginalized in social settings, so drinking was one way to join the dominant group and thus be affiliated with the power base. Additionally, sororities were not allowed by their national organization's rules to have parties and to drink in their houses, and this campus social culture was heavily centered on fraternity life. As a result, any weekend socializing took place in the male territory of fraternity houses. One of the aspects of the campus culture is the timing of heavy drinking, namely at the beginning of the semester, on breaks such as fall break or holidays, and at the end of the semester. This coincides with the values of working

hard while classes are in full swing and playing hard as soon as there is space to breathe and academic expectations lessen. This seems analogous to Linowski's (2004) good girl/bad girl duality in which college women attempt to strike a balance between internalized parts of her identity. College females wanted to be perceived as smart and well put together, but also wanted to be able to take advantage of all of the social outlets available to their male counterparts without being judged.

Leiva (2007) conducted a qualitative study for her doctoral dissertation with juniors and senior college females looking back at their first year experiences with alcohol and what they learned. The participants were mostly white, middle class and from Florida, all were aged 22-23 years old, and they belonged to a variety of organizations. Because this researcher specifically recruited students who had attended the institution since their freshmen year, she asked them to compare their drinking experiences from their freshman year to their current social and drinking habits. The design and focus group questions revolved around reflecting back on situations in which they no longer participated. Leiva (2007) reported that some of the college females described power plays in which they drank to compete in "collecting guys" with whom they hooked up in order to gain status within their female social circles. The pressures of juggling friendships, social lives, romantic relationships, work, and academics were all concerns voiced by the college females that contributed to using alcohol to de-stress. All of her participants referenced the process of maturation that occurred as they progressed in their college experience, essentially saying they drank more the first two years of college than later in college. See Table 1 for themes from the qualitative studies.

Table 1. Themes from Qualitative Studies of College Females and Drinking Experiences

	Bonding/ Relational connection/ Belonging	Caretaking & Protective factors	Identity Duality	Asserting & Gaining power/ Status/equality Social influence	Coping with stress or conflict	Storytelling	Expressing Sexuality	Freedom, fun	Acceptance of/ resignation to experience of consequences
Leiva, 2007*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Linowski, 2004*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Lyons and Willott, 2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
MacNeela and Bredin, 2010	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Russett, 2008*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, especially with males	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
M. Smith, 2010*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sheehan and Ridge, 2001	Yes							Yes	Yes
Shinebourne and Smith, 2009	Yes		Yes		yes	yes		Yes	
Young, McCabe, Morales, Boyd, and D'Arcy, 2005*	Yes			Yes, especially in terms of attractiveness			yes	Yes	

*denotes United States college women

Common Themes from Qualitative Studies

In many of these qualitative studies regarding college females' perceptions and experiences of drinking, similar themes emerged. Though participants may have articulated them slightly differently, many of the overall topics seemed to have been shared by groups across cultures. The next discussion will address how the themes mirrored one another and how were they different based on each group's culture.

Bonding

One of the prominent themes in previous research of college females' drinking experiences is that drinking plays a role in forming close bonds among them. Participants in several studies stated they drank to feel closer to the other girls, for the purpose of meeting and getting to know people, and as the primary social activity. Alcohol was also referred to as liquid courage and a social lubricant numerous times, giving more typically reserved or constrained females the confidence to participate in a range of activities. Examples of these behaviors that the participants felt were alcohol-induced were dancing, getting up on stage, playing drinking games, and hooking up with a partner. Other bonding experiences that were fostered as part of the drinking ritual were nursing each other through hangovers and being sick together the next day. One additional role that was mentioned that is important for college females who drink together was being a drinking teacher (Linowski, 2004). A drinking teacher is a kind of mentor who shows a younger more inexperienced drinker "how it is done so you don't lose control and make a fool of yourself" (p. 103). Akin to the role of a big sister in a sorority, she shares

protective strategies and tricks to maintaining a good buzz, and helps her friend develop street savvy.

Caretaking

This theme signified how college females take care of and nurture each other when alcohol-related consequences are experienced. Examples included holding someone's hair back when they got sick, helping her get back to her room, noting when a friend has had too much to drink, and cutting her off from alcohol or dragging her away from a guy who seemed predatory. Most of these instances seemed to be preventing something negative from happening to a female friend, but its occurrence depended on someone else being sober enough to realize the danger existed and to intervene. College women even had a term for this protective strategy; they took the concept of designated driver to another level and have often designated a "sober sister" to watch out for her friends while out at a party. Caretaking also occurs after the fact, when someone has been injured, gotten sick, or needs attention following a relationship rupture. Some expressed appreciation of the true friend who nurtured them and stayed with them to make sure they were okay. Caretaking and bonding were viewed as positive experiences of drinking in the lives of college females and represented the more traditional social roles females have played.

Social Status or Power

The concept of social power or status related to women's drinking emerged in most of the qualitative studies in the last decade (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Russet, 2008; Young et al., 2005). Power as found in this literature refers

to a continuum of experiences ranging from having a lack of power (Russett, 2008), trying to obtain power, the discourse of inequality between females and males (Lyons & Willott, 2008), drinking to increase in social status (Young et al., 2005), exercising ‘girl power,’ (Leiva, 2007), and equating drinking with attractiveness to males. Lyons and Willott (2008) framed young women today as “empowered pleasure-seeking social beings” (p. 709) who did not necessarily fit the mold of traditionally-held feminine traits any longer. Linowski (2004) also found, in listening to her participants, that it was desirable to be “one of the guys” by competing in co-ed drinking games and holding your liquor. Young and her colleagues (2005) built their study “Drinking like a Guy” on phrases that acknowledged the emulation of male drinking behavior that college women undertook to belong and be accepted.

Fun, Freedom, Rebellion

Being able to cut loose, experiment, and play were common themes to which college females gave voice (Leiva, 2007; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; Russett, 2008; Sheehan & Ridge, 2001). In MacNeela and Bredin’s (2010) qualitative study in Ireland with teenage female students, the equivalent to junior and seniors in high school, the females talked about the freedom they experienced with unbridled behavior balanced with the group peer regulation—keeping each other in check. Another interesting evolution of the drinking culture for college females is female empowerment—drinking in all-female groups. When the pressure to perform for college males and the desire to attract sexual attention is removed, college females drinking together may serve a different purpose. In this context, female participants described rebelling against

stereotypical expectations for them to be serious academics and, instead, allowed them to experiment with their wild side. Since frequent binge drinking for females in single sex universities has increased significantly (Wechsler et al., 2002), this phenomenon is especially important to watch in the future.

Coping with Stress and Conflict

Several of the college females were aware that they did not always drink for positive and social reasons. They identified stress relief, escape, and wanting to forget as useful times for drinking. Others said good friends helped them get over ruptured relationships by taking them out to a party. This theme was prominent in Linowski's (2004) dissertation results, which she framed as in keeping with RCT. When females feel disconnected they drink to numb the pain. More severe examples of drinking to cope with pain emerged when college females shared instances of sexual assault, rape, intimate partner violence, being cheated on, and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004, Russett, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005). College female sorority members specifically named the stress of balancing their academic load as a reason to blow off steam (Russett, 2008); the mantra of "work hard, play hard" seemed to fit here. Regarding gender role conflict, some females stated that drinking gave women permission to "act out, to be loud, and to express anger" (Russett, 2008, p. 138), all behaviors they felt their traditional gender roles would not allow.

Perceptions of Sexuality and Drinking

Mixed messages to college females abound about whom they should be, how they should act, what society expects of them, and what it means to be female. Russett (2008)

mentioned the indignation her college female participants expressed regarding the double standard present in social situations, such as males treating women like objects trying to get them drunk. Women admitted judging other women harshly when it came to how they dressed and how “sloppy” they got when consuming alcohol. Lyons and Willott (2008) described the double standard discourse from their research as women having to be on guard at all times because they are vulnerable to attack. In almost every qualitative study in the last decade, the young women acknowledged the different standards for males as unfair. Interestingly, part of college female drinking behaviors illustrated an effort to fight back to achieve what males have, and thus, resulted in emulating what males do. Additionally, females reported feeling sexier when they drank and, from participant comments, sexuality seemed to be conflated with ability to drink. Drinking has been associated with being attractive to males (Young et al., 2005), yet college females are aware that engaging in high-risk drinking is a bind that may lead to sending unintentional sexual mixed signals. Consequently, many of these studies shine light on the frequent sexual assault and rape that occurs in the lives of college females as a regular experience of high-risk drinking (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Russett, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005).

Theme of Protective Strategies

Because of the protective strategies females use with one another, such as going out in groups or with buddies, looking out for one another, and providing support when a member of the group experiences harm (Leiva, 2007; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010), there is a sense of security that develops in same sex college females’ drinking groups that may

be ignored at the females' own peril. This qualitative theme confirms other researchers' findings that women tend to use more protective strategies than males when drinking and that protective behavioral strategies mediate the effect of drinking motives on alcohol use among heavy drinking college students. The use of protective strategies also lessens the likelihood of experiencing alcohol related consequences (Benton et al., 2004; LaBrie, Lac, Kenney, & Mirza, 2010). As a result, the sense of safety allows college females to take more risks when drinking because they depend on each other and know someone is watching out for them. This dichotomy between safety and vulnerability is related to the vulnerability discourse that surfaced in Lyon and Willott's (2008) New Zealand friendship group. Because close-knit peer groups are viewed as a safety net and an opportunity to try new behaviors rather than a hindrance or deterrent to risky behaviors, there is a need to further explore the function of this protective theme.

Accepting Consequences as Part of the Picture

One of the most disturbing perceptions that arose in many of the stories told by college females across studies, countries, and regions of the United States was the nonchalant manner in which alcohol-related consequences were articulated. Young females who chose to drink talked very matter-of-factly while sharing personal experiences of physical, social, and psychological consequences. Most of the participants had experienced some level of trauma and/or physical illness or injury, but rarely did these women see this occurrence as a turning point or a moment of transformation. Rather, the participants often verbalized that getting violently ill, waking up next to someone she did not know, or being assaulted was part of being a female in today's

world, almost stopping short of saying life goes on. This learned helplessness and resignation to a lesser lifestyle begs the question of how females are making sense of what the world is telling them to expect and necessitates deeper probing of gender identity for college females.

Limitations of Current Qualitative Research

Because these qualitative studies are more recent and more in depth, one might think they would provide a wealth of information upon which another study could be built. However, as a collective these studies have three broad categories of limitations: methodology and design, lack of a theoretical foundation, and population sample. First, each of the above mentioned studies was based on a different qualitative methodology and framework, thus making it difficult to determine if findings are transferable. Just a sampling of the widespread methodology, Linowski (2004) used a phenomenological approach with individual interviews and focus groups, Lyons and Willott (2008) used discourse analysis with friendship groups to determine how young people are talking about alcohol use, and Smith and Berger (2010) purposively sampled traditionally-aged white drinkers and explored meanings using a grounded theory approach.

Though each of these researchers cited methodological limitations such as small population, ranging from 10-42, and non-random sampling, the design they have used is exactly what feminist theory and research methodology call for in order to capture the lived experiences of college women in a more in-depth fashion. What is missing in the design is the theoretical underpinning for why a particular design was chosen. Neither Sheehan and Ridge (2001) nor MacNeela and Bredin (2010) identified a theoretical basis,

and Young and her colleagues (2005) failed to describe a theoretical basis. Leiva (2007) acknowledged the role of feminist standpoint in her bias, but she did not fully explain feminist theory holistically. Only two, Linowski (2004) and Russett (2008), framed their research questions using RCT and feminist phenomenology. This choice is relevant because feminist researchers aim to highlight the forgotten voices of the subjugated minority whose experience needs to be heard for its uniqueness. As convenient and efficient as it may appear to neatly pigeonhole humans for statistical purposes, phenomenologically speaking, people cannot be reduced to a category or a stereotype. To understand one's lived experience of an event or moment, a researcher must sometimes be exposed to the details of one instance or one group of people. Therefore, the above rationale fits best with the questions being explored in this proposal of unearthing the perception of college females regarding drinking and gender identity.

Lastly, regarding the population that was sampled in these qualitative studies, none were conducted in the southern region of the United States, which is pertinent because there may be different perceptions and expectations regarding gender identity in regions across the United States. This dissertation study was the first qualitative study to probe what it means to be a college woman in light of drinking choices that was conducted in a region that stereotypically has more traditional gender identity perceptions. For these reasons, this study addressed the issues of dated instrumentation as well as transferability gaps across regions of the United States, and explicitly probed college women about how they think of themselves as women in a drinking context. The researcher adopted a feminist interpretative phenomenological methodology within a

different region of the country that incorporated a more relevant and recent scale measuring gender identity.

Feminist Theory

Though there is no one feminist theory that encapsulates all of the core beliefs of feminists, feminist theorists share some common assumptions about how roles, expectations, knowledge, and dynamics are defined and acquired in our culture and society. Feminist theorists (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986; Hawkesworth, 1986; Hesse-Biber, 2007) acknowledge power differentials and hierarchies and trace their perpetuation to the production of knowledge by the (male) dominant group. Feminist theorists see their focus as unearthing, changing, and adding to the pool of knowledge that currently exists by tapping into marginalized and subjugated groups whose voices have been left out or buried throughout history. To use a feminist viewpoint is merely to ask what is being left out. To this end, there are three components that are significant to feminist theorists: the recommended practice is to (a) obtain women's experiences, (b) connect the analysis of experiences to the broader social institutions, and (c) create transformative, emancipatory social change that improves the lives of the oppressed group. Women's experience is valued and inclusive, and the differences are appreciated and sought out.

There are three types of feminist epistemology which describe how knowledge is obtained: (a) the positivist/scientific empiricism position, (b) standpoint epistemology, and (c) postmodern feminism. Feminist epistemology (Hawkesworth, 1986) asserts that knowledge is socially constructed and since women and other oppressed groups hold positions in the social structure and lifestyle, we legitimately contribute to that

knowledge. Haraway (1988) called this new crucial positionality of feminism “situated knowledge” or feminist objectivity. Positionality means that we each have a limited location and a partial perspective that makes up our specific particular lens through which we see the world and its parts. Haraway (1988) contends that one cannot possibly know all of the parts and each scholar must acknowledge the bias that she brings to knowledge.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Standpoint epistemologists (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986) concentrate on the role of context when discussing a specific group or population. First, it is about locating the new information in an embodied, specific, marginalized group—the people in the group are the producers of knowledge. Proponents of Standpoint Epistemology purport that the location of the person or group in social, political, and racial locations informs what that group knows. Then it considers the community context in which the collective experience can be unified, and argues that there are some things that can be known about particular groups. The lived experience is co-constructed and therefore cannot be free of bias. However, this partial perspective falls short of providing a complete picture and, therefore, researchers must guard against essentialism or overgeneralization.

Post-modern Feminism

Post-modern feminist researchers are located on the opposite end of the feminist scientific continuum from positivism, and reject essentialism. Post-modern feminist researchers embrace relativism and are skeptical of any form of universalism that claims to know “Truth.” They reject Truth with a capital “T” in favor of many truths that come from unique, partial, and situated experiences. Knowledge is constructed through various

social and cultural artifacts—media, language, and texts, and the lines between object and subject are blurred and always changing. As a result, the existence of multiple sources of knowledge can produce fractured identities that can be a barrier to feminist solidarity and can further divide theorists on how to produce meaningful change.

Since the aim of positivism and empiricism is to quantify and generalize, and the feminist theoretical orientation centers on unearthing the unique voice and lived experience of a group whose voice has not yet been heard, there exists an inherent tension about what can be known at a given time. The population of current female college students in the United States may be situated in white Western privilege and may have not yet bought into the idea that gender inequality is alive. Thus, the time may be ripe for exploration with continued phenomenological research, and through this process, the feminist researcher's perspective of making the unconscious conscious may be brought to fruition.

Phenomenology and Feminist Practice

In the practice of counseling, the importance of the individual's story is valued and the experience of that unique reality is the center of the therapeutic process. In order for validation, connection, and change to occur, the experience does not have to be generalized or universalized to count. In fact, it is the process of giving voice to the silenced or making the invisible visible that brings to the surface those experiences that have been left out. The feminist perspective that focuses on telling the stories of difference aligns well with phenomenology. In Joan Scott's *The Evidence of Experience* (1991), she questioned whether or not an individual's account can be part of the

knowledge base or whether there is more legitimacy in being part of larger group. Certainly, individuals can find support and empowerment through sharing common stories and experiences. In fact, discovering that one's experience is shared can be therapeutic and emotionally validating, especially in the field of counseling. The healing properties of universality are evidenced by the popularity of self-help support groups, 12-step groups, and group therapy. However, if someone shares an individual narrative or experience that somehow differs or is exceptional or distinctive, their experience is equally as authentic and legitimate, according to the feminist perspective.

Phenomenology and feminist perspectives recognize power differentials and inequalities in the research process (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Oakley, 1981; van Manen, 1990). Power and control must be collaborative and shared—from assessment to goal setting to implementation and evaluation. This process—whether clinical or in a research framework—must be mutual and based on respect. A feminist counselor or researcher also takes into consideration not only each individual aspect of one's identity but the intersectionality of race, class, gender, social status, and sexuality that may have multiplicative effects on her lived experience. At any given moment, a person can be situated in privilege and oppression, which is determined by the relative nature of her identities in a given context (Haraway, 1988).

The feminist critique of science is based on the realization that there is a gap or an unexplainable part of one's experience that is not quite covered by existing traditional empirical scientific theory (Namenwirth, 1986). What was once accepted as the whole picture is now acknowledged to be missing vital parts and in need of further development

to encompass other cultures, races, roles, and classes. Because of the way dominant knowledge has been accepted, feminists have long had problems with how science has been conducted—the politics involved, the arrogance that some researchers exhibit in believing they can remain impartial, the assumption that women are not capable of rational science, and the audacity to believe that one theory or explanation fits all people. Any science that blindly maintains the status quo, perpetuates or promotes disparities, and pretends to be apolitical is criticized by feminists for being dishonest and patriarchal (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986; Namewirth, 1986).

Thus, we have to re-think what we know about men's drinking and start from scratch with how we approach women's drinking. By applying to women theories and measures that were formed for men by men, we are reproducing the hegemonic structures in science that have existed in social and political contexts. Acker and colleagues (1983) agreed that for feminist research methods to have integrity, research designs need to reflect the complexity of how women experience things and not try to fit them into neat, dichotomous categories. Phenomenology is about understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing it—in this case, understanding college female drinking from interacting with college females in a deeper way. It is also essential to recognize the power differentials between those who are the researchers and those who are the researched, and avoid appropriating meaning for a group rather than allowing it to arise from an organic process. This perspective lends itself well to phenomenological methods of interviewing and focus groups with college females in which the researcher

interacts and gets to observe the culturally and socially constructed collective knowledge-making as it happens within the context of the social group.

Relational Cultural Theory

The RCT model was first conceptualized by Jean Baker Miller (1976) and the Stone Center at Wellesley, and then built upon by Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey (1991) and Covington and Surrey (1997). RCT was a response to the developmental models that emerged in the late 1960s in which healthy development was marked by independence, separation, and autonomy. Miller (1976) felt that this was a particularly male manner of relating and that this developmental framework was limiting and not as applicable to women. They believed women's behavior and motivations centered on connection and relationships and the maintenance of those tasks. Several researchers and practitioners have tried to build the bridge between RCT and the development of health behaviors, such as substance abuse, in women's lives. As Linowski (2004) espoused in her dissertation, how to connect, who to connect with, how to repair connections, and coping with ruptures in relationships are all seen as motivations for women's substance abuse. Whereas scholars concluded that some men tend to drink heavily to assert power and dominance to uphold masculine ideals, researchers have recently applied theories to female drinking that are relationship oriented and contribute to meeting the needs of belonging and acceptance (Covington & Surrey, 1997; Linowski, 2004; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010; Young et al., 2005). There is a growing body of qualitative evidence of women gaining acceptance and being looked upon favorably if they mimic masculine drinking behaviors (Lyons &

Willott, 2008; Young et al., 2005). Covington and Surrey (1997) elaborated on Miller's premise, adding that substance use meets different needs for women than it does for men. They suggested that, for women, the desire for power is also aligned with mutual connection: "Mutual empowerment describes a process of relational interaction where each person grows in psychological strength or power. This has been described as 'power-with-others', as distinguished from 'power-over' others" (Covington & Surrey, 1997, p. 338).

The relational cultural model acknowledges the complicated relationship between sexuality and substance abuse as well, and proponents of RCT (Covington, Burke, Keaton, & Norcott, 2008; Covington & Surrey, 1997) recommended addressing these interactions in intervention and treatment programs. The literature on women and substance abuse frequently includes a measure of sexuality, experiences of sexual violence, sexually-related expectancies for drinking, and a history of sexual trauma. Bailly and her colleagues (1991) looked at the need for power in the context of drinking and concluded that females may drink as a way to avoid domination and express assertiveness.

Carr and Szymanski (2010) found a significant relationship between alcohol consumption as a response to sexual objectification. Similarly, Zucker and Landry (2007) found that there is an association between when a female has experienced sexism and her subsequent drinking and smoking behaviors, and it is mediated by the distress the experience of sexism caused for the female. This finding seems to support the link between coping with stress or distress as a motivation for college women's drinking.

Similarly, Lyons and Willott (2008) identify a vulnerability discourse that recognized the inherent sexual double standard and danger that a woman may face when she drinks heavily. In addition, Mishra (2010) theorizes that “girl power” is a new aggressive form of female dominance intended to be an effort to prove their strength and end exploitation at someone else’s hands.

Using Feminist Research Methodology in Research

The feminist approach to research is to incorporate knowledge from a marginalized subgroup into the larger body of scientific knowledge (Acker et al., 1983). Feminist researchers seek to explore and gather this knowledge through observing, interviewing, and collaborating, which means they emphasize the lived experience within the context of their culture, sub group, and everyday lives. Feminist interviewing tends to rely on phenomenology and interpretive inquiry. Interviews, focus groups, and interactions between small groups of college women may help illuminate the process of meaning making and the content of the socially-constructed messages that women receive, interpret, and act upon. Thus, the particular messages gleaned from a group must be relevant to the particular group or culture to be effective at changing that group’s perceptions.

One cannot do feminist research half way. Oakley (1981) emphasizes that to be successful at this process, every aspect of research must originate from the feminist framework, from the questions explored to the instruments chosen to measure variables, and from the way data are collected and interpreted, to the implications for social change initiatives. Feminist researchers need to be intentional in how they use and share power in

the researcher-participant relationship, how accurate their observations and understanding of their participants message are, and how they navigate interviewing, and they must show integrity in how and where this new knowledge is disseminated (Oakley, 1981).

Phenomenology as Research Design

Phenomenology (Husserl, 1913/1983; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) is about understanding a phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing it: in this case, understanding college women's drinking from interacting with college women in a deeper way. It is also essential to recognize the power differentials between those who are the researchers and those who are the researched, and avoid appropriating meaning for a group rather than allowing it to arise from an organic process. This perspective lends itself well to phenomenological methods of interviewing and focus groups with college females in which the researcher interacts and gets to observe the culturally- and socially-constructed collective knowledge-making as it happens within the context of the social group.

Phenomenology is also a sound fit for qualitative focus groups because it allows for themes to emerge organically from open-ended questions. This methodology is a logical match with feminist practice and media analysis because the importance of the individual's story is valued and the experience of that unique reality is the center of the meaning-making process (Scott, 1991). In order for validation, connection, and change to occur, the experience does not have to be generalized or universalized to count. In fact, it is the process of giving voice to the silenced or making the invisible visible that brings to the surface those experiences that have been left out (Hawkesworth, 1986). This feminist

perspective that focuses on telling the stories of difference aligns well with phenomenology. This methodology seeks to capture lived experience, does not seek to find truth with a capital “T,” but acknowledges the experience of a particular group of people as their situated truth relevant to their positionality.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Specifically, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) will be employed to analyze the focus group data in this study because it allows for deeper analysis than thematic analysis alone and affords the opportunity to interpret the lived experience of participants with rich detail and depth. Smith (1996) explained that IPA was originally developed in the United Kingdom and used in health psychology, building on symbolic interactionism which focused on how meanings are constructed, not just personally and individually, but also in a social context. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), the aim of IPA is to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 53). Thus, there is a two-stage interpretive process, the first being the participant making sense of her world and the second being the researcher making sense of the participant’s responses. In employing IPA, researchers tend to use small samples, semi-structured interviews, and homogeneous samples since representativeness is futile in a small group of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The aim is not to find meaning that can be generalized to all college students, but that themes and perceptions may be transferable to groups similar in culture to the participants.

Conclusion

Individual behavior cannot be studied in a vacuum without considering the myriad of social messages, expectations, pressures, and models that collectively shape it. Conceptions of gender have shifted substantially in the last 20 years for college females, and this developmental age is a time for identity exploration and social connection. Peer influence and media influence are the two most prominent lenses through which we can effectively view college women's drinking behaviors. Developmentally, peer social approval and peer acceptance of behavior is of utmost importance to adolescents and college students. Studying only one aspect of this would only give us a partial picture, rendering it inaccurate and incomplete, and subsequently, unlikely to produce the intended social change of decreasing high risk drinking in college females. Therefore, this dissertation provides an outline of a comprehensive qualitative phenomenological study employing focus groups and interviews of traditionally-aged college females to explore gender identity and the experience of being a college female drinker in today's campus culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

An introduction to the topic and the purpose of the proposed study has been outlined in Chapter I. A comprehensive review of relevant literature was discussed and critiqued in the previous chapter, outlining the gap in research that this study will address and how this study will contribute to existing literature on college female drinking and gender identity. In this chapter, the methodology for this study is described in detail, beginning with the research questions, the procedures, the design, and the data analysis approach. The pilot study, its results, and modifications to the main study also are reported.

Research Questions

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and stories of college female drinkers in order to gain a fuller picture of how they think about drinking, how they conceive of themselves as females, and whether there is a connection between the two. The main research question is concerned with how perceptions of gender influence drinking decisions for college females. Secondly, the author hopes to gain insights into whether college females change how they think about themselves when they engage in risky drinking behaviors. With the administration of the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000) during the interview, an additional research question

is whether college female students who score similarly on gender self-acceptance and gender self-definition share similar perceptions about drinking and gender identity than college females. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of drinking as a college woman?
2. How do college women think of themselves as women?
3. How do these experiences and perceptions influence a college woman's choice to drink?

Procedures

Setting

The study was conducted at a mid-sized public university in the southeast United States with an enrollment of 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The university is located near the downtown area of the third largest city in the state. Students come from 48 states and 82 countries, with a 27% minority enrollment. According to statistics from the university's Health and Wellness Center, 14% of the students identify as gay or bisexual, which is the highest proportion of the 16 schools in this state's higher education system. There are 87 graduate programs, 19 fraternities and sororities, and 17 athletics teams that compete in NCAA Division 1. It is significant that there is no football team at this university, as a major risk factor and correlate of high risk drinking has been shown to be associated with athletes and having a large athletic program (Wechsler et al., 2002). The focus groups and interviews took place in a secure and confidential counseling clinic in an academic building on campus.

Population

The goal was to recruit between 8-12 traditionally-aged college females, ideally in at least two focus groups of 3-5 participants each. This aligns with recommendations for participant sample sizes in qualitative methodologies such as Phenomenology and Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) in which detailed descriptions are gathered from a smaller purposeful population (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005; Smith and Osborn, 2008).) Specifically, Hill and her colleagues in CQR recommend 8-15 participants while Smith and Osborn (2008) argue for focusing on 5-6 participants if interviews are analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. One focus group was for those classified as High Risk drinkers and one for Low Risk drinkers. It was hoped that more participants would be recruited and interviewed as needed until no new information emerged from the participants' discussion. Inclusion criteria for participants include that students identify as female, are aged 18-24, identify as current drinkers, and are full time undergraduate students enrolled in courses. A current drinker is defined as having had an alcoholic drink in the last two weeks. Researchers (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2011; NIAAA, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002) have consistently found that traditionally-aged college students reported higher rates of drinking and more frequent high risk drinking episodes than non-traditionally aged students enrolled in college. For example, in the most recent *Monitoring the Future* report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), one of the findings is that heavy drinking rates peaked at age 24; "then there is a falloff at each subsequent age level above age 24, dropping to 18% by age 50" (as cited in Johnston et

al., 2011, p. 87). Because this particular developmental time frame is a partial social context for the phenomenon being investigated, the age range was intentionally narrowed (Johnston et al., 2002; NIAAA, 2002; Smith & Berger, 2010; Wechsler et al., 2002).

Recruitment

Due to the specific inclusion criteria regarding sex and age, college female students were recruited through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling methods are typical of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007) in which in-depth information is desired about a targeted group of people. Instructors for introductory counseling and communication courses were contacted for recruitment including CED 210 and 310 and CST 105. Each of these courses typically attracts ample females from all ages, majors, and years completed in college. The researcher visited the classes, explained the purpose and topic of the study, invited participation, and provided contact information for those interested in participation; recruitment included all IRB-required components. Students could then email the researcher to inquire further and to set up an interview time. The IRB and consent form were explained fully prior to the commencement of the interview. As an incentive for participation, pizza and nonalcoholic drinks were to be provided during the focus group sessions and each participant was to receive \$5 cash. Because the interview questions asked about drinking behaviors and the population could be underage, each participant was given a pseudonym and a waiver of documentation of signed consent (approved by the IRB). Thus, there is no written link between those admitting illegal behaviors and the data collected. After two weeks, a reminder email with the contact information of the researcher and the description of incentives was sent

to course instructors of classes that had been visited with a request to disseminate the information. As participants emailed the researcher, a list of potential participant contacts was created and kept in a locked file cabinet. Emails were deleted from the researcher's email account, and after the conclusion of the focus groups, the contact information was shredded. This process was followed until a minimum of 8 participants were interviewed and the responses to the topics ceased to provide any new information, indicating saturation.

Research Design and Theoretical Frame

This study is qualitative in nature as the research questions focus on gaining knowledge about a subject that has not been explored satisfactorily. Qualitative research designs are most appropriately employed to answer questions of emerging concern for which there has not been ample quantitative research or to build on newer areas in more depth (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Wood, 2011; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 2008; Hunt, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). These designs also allow findings to surface from participants' own experiences and language rather than studying specific constructs identified by the researcher. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of context, and particular methodologies can be employed to look at social contexts, meanings, and perceptions (Heppner et al., 2008). It is an iterative process that requires intense commitment from each research team member to listen to the text and synthesize the subtle underlying meanings to which participants give voice. Successive readings of the interview transcripts by members of the research team are required in an effort to glean meaning about an experience, event, or phenomenon.

Phenomenological Methodology

Because drinking takes place in a particular context of college life, and research indicates that this college culture is a unique developmental phenomenon, it is necessary to start from scratch in an effort to understand the complexities of college female drinking today. With the ubiquity of technology and social networking, coupled with the changing conceptions of gender equality and identity, college females today grew up in a different culture than any other developmental age group. Phenomenology is the most appropriate research methodology to cull meaning from these students about how they are experiencing drinking as a female. Phenomenology is listed as one of the five qualitative methods of inquiry by Creswell (2007), with the goal of phenomenology to understand the meaning and experience of a phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing it. It requires a researcher to immerse oneself in the participant's world and explore the context of how this phenomenon takes place, how it is viewed, and what significance it may have for the participant. Phenomenology, as described in Bogdan and Biklen (1998), has in common with other qualitative research methodologies that is it concerned with process, inductive in allowing information to emerge, and focused on meaning.

Several variations of phenomenology have been used in the social and behavioral sciences, stemming from philosophical phenomenology (Husserl, 1913/1983), transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and hermeneutical phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2007) distinguishes between hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology, describing the former as dedicated to interpreting

meaning from the participant and the latter as focusing on the actual description of the participants' experience. For the purposes of this study, description and meaning were synthesized into the essence and the context of how the college women make meaning of their drinking related to their identity as a woman.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to follow the experiences of the participants and gather crucial information deemed significant by those living the phenomenon. The benefits of semi-structured interviews include the opportunity to build rapport; the interviewer is "freer to probe areas of interest or concern to participant" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 58), and richer data are produced in contrast with structured interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 10-12 main questions with follow up questions as appropriate to explore content brought up by the participants. Focus groups were 80-90 minutes in length, individual interviews were 45-60 minutes in length, and all were video and audio recorded in the clinic.

Focus Groups

Because the social construction of the experiences and perceptions being examined is a key element in the meaning making of the women's social culture, the interviews were initially intended to be conducted as focus groups rather than individually. Essentially, the social construction and co-construction of meaning between the participants can occur during the process of the questions, thus allowing the researcher to observe firsthand how the participants make sense of being female and being a drinker in today's college culture (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). Focus groups are

more often associated with marketing research and are underutilized in counseling research, but Kress and Shoffner (2007) successfully make the case that this method and setting of collecting data is useful and appropriate for certain topics, including program development and exploratory research. Since exploring drinking from a college female perspective is embryonic territory and because the results could yield implications for prevention and intervention programming, focus groups are a prudent fit. However, due to scheduling difficulties, the practice in previous qualitative research of college women's drinking of collecting data in different interviewing formats to compare themes and depth of information gathered (Linowski, 2004; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010; Russet, 2008) was considered. To maximize the participants interviewed and the information gathered, as individual interviews could potentially yield different or more in-depth information than focus groups, it was decided to employ both methods. One High Risk and one Low Risk drinker were interviewed individually with the remainder of the participants being interviewed in focus groups. Therefore, a modification to the IRB was obtained to reflect this change.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this study was comprised of five parts: an online version of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), a brief demographic questionnaire, the semi-structured interview protocol questions, the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS), and the researcher as instrument.

Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)

The AUDIT (Saunders et al., 1993) is a well-known alcohol use screening tool developed in conjunction with the World Health Organization that has been used extensively with the college population. It is a 10-item self-reported questionnaire designed to measure the risk level of a person's alcohol use covering frequency, amount, consequences, and abuse criteria for alcohol. (See Appendix F). This test is commonly used for Alcohol Screening Day events on college campuses because of its ability to be scored and interpreted quickly and because it easily delineates low, moderate, or high risk users. Sample items include "How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?" Point values are from zero to four matching the following answer choices: (0 points) 1 or 2, (1 point) 3 or 4, (2 points) 5 or 6, (3 points) 7, 8, or 9, or (4 points) 10 or more. Another item measuring consequences is "How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?" with answer choices and scores as follows: (0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily. Possible total scores range from 0–40, with a general cutoff of high risk drinking being a score of 8 or higher. However, to account for biological and physiological differences for women who may be at risk for abuse and consequences with fewer drinks, previous researchers have advocated for using a lower cutoff score for women to increase sensitivity and accuracy (DeMartini & Carey, 2009; DeMartini & Carey, 2012; Olthuis, Zamboanga, Ham, & Van Tyne, 2011). Therefore, a score of 7 or higher was used to indicate high risk drinking for the college women.

A version of the AUDIT from the World Health Organization manual by Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, and Monteiro (2001) was adapted by the researcher for confidential use online. When a potential participant contacted the researcher, she was sent a link to the online AUDIT with instructions to log on with her assigned pseudonym. After completing the AUDIT, the researcher scored each participant's AUDIT and determined whether the person would be assigned to the low risk focus group (0-6) or the high risk focus group (7+).

Demographic Questionnaire

First, the demographic questionnaire enabled the researcher to collect basic descriptive information such as age; year in school; race; ethnicity; affiliation with any organizations such as athletic teams, sororities, or other student clubs with shared social cultures; and current drinking patterns. (See Appendix E). This contextual information allows interpretation of results to acknowledge the intersections of the females' identities and the positions from which they are experiencing the phenomenon in question. Collecting demographic information also aids in identifying potential patterns of similar themes among college females who may share small group cultures. Drinking patterns include questions on the frequency with which the participant drinks and the amount she consumes in a typical sitting.

Interview Protocol

Next, the semi-structured interview protocol (found in Appendix H) started with broad rapport-building areas such as "Describe your social life here at college," and "What are some ways you have fun? What are some ways that you deal with stress?"

Then the focus shifted to questions about the last time the participant drank alcohol and a description of her typical experiences with alcohol. Because gender identity is an individualized and often internalized process of thinking about femaleness, midway through the interview, the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000) was given in an effort to expand the conceptions of gender in a concrete manner (see Appendix G). After the administration of the Hoffman Gender Scale, the interview questions more specifically probed gender perceptions such as “What was it like to take this gender scale?” and “What is it like to be a female in today’s world?” In the latter half of the focus group, interview questions focused on differences between how females drink and behave around males and what experiences they may have related to feelings of equality in social situations. For example, “Tell me about a time when you felt you were equal to males in a social situation,” and comparatively, “. . . and when you felt unequal to or less than males.” Due to time constraints, the set of questions about media portrayals of women drinking and follow up prompts were omitted and unable to be explored.

Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS)

This study was designed to explore how college females think of themselves as females and how they describe themselves as drinkers. In the previous chapter, the literature review revealed evidence that notions of gender identity may have changed significantly for this current generation of college females, and females may no longer feel confined by previous categorizations of what it means to be a female. To date, the instrumentation used to measure gender constructs had not adequately captured the complexity of how gender identity is developed or framed. Because there have been few

explicit forums in which to discuss femaleness in contemporary terms, the Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000) was introduced during the interview protocol. The objective of having participants read through and answer the questions was to act as a catalyst for unearthing latent gendered perceptions and to foster reflection on each individual's meaning of gender. Permission from the author to use the HGS was given and can be found in Appendix I.

The Hoffman Gender Scale was constructed in an effort to update language to match current social constructions of gender identity. The most widely used gender scales for women, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) measured gender identity as trait-based or personality-based. Specifically, the BSRI named four categories as feminine, masculine, androgynous, and undifferentiated while the PAQ labels gendered identity traits such as instrumentality and independence as masculine, while traits of expressiveness and nurturing were labeled as feminine. It seems that even as researchers were creating assessments to measure aspects of gender, they were continuously rebuilding and reframing the items themselves in an effort to establish validity. However, labeling gender traits or roles as masculine or feminine essentially perpetuated gender stereotypes, and gender measures have been redefined each decade. In fact, Spence and Hahn (1997) acknowledged the limitations of the PAQ and BSRI in that they measured gender role orientation rather than gender identity. Since gender roles have changed dramatically as outlined in Chapter II, Hoffman (1996) built on the ideas of Lewin and Tragos (1987) and Spence (1984), contending that scholars move away from traits to

allow individuals to define gender for themselves. She desired to encapsulate the subjective feelings of femaleness as a way to “honor the individual perspective” (Hoffman et al., 2000, p. 478). Thus Hoffman proposed a model of gender identity as part of gender self-concept, and further suggested that gender identity could be categorized as gender self-confidence. She defined gender self-confidence as “the intensity of an individuals’ belief that s/he meets his or her personal standards for femininity or masculinity” (p. 68). There has been a shift in the last 30 years in feminist and gender studies to conceptualizing gender as how one perceives herself or himself as a male or female, rather than essentializing one’s personality traits or adhering to a sex role category. Hoffman and her colleagues (2000) created the only gender scale in the twenty-first century that attempts to further define one’s gender self confidence in this way that could be located.

The Hoffman Gender Scale (Hoffman et al., 2000), has a parallel version for males and females, each with 14 items that help make up gender self-confidence. The HGS consists of two 7-item subscales, one for gender *self-definition* and one for gender *self-acceptance*. Gender self-acceptance is defined as how comfortable a female is with her gender. An example of an item in this category is “My sense of myself as a female is positive.” Gender self-definition measures how important being a female is to someone’s identity as evidenced by the item asking “Being a female is a critical part of how I view myself.” The respective reliability coefficients for each of the female subscales are strong at .90 and .88.

After the initial piloting, modifications were made and the revised scale was normed on 371 college undergraduates in the last ten years. Factor analysis indicated that there was indeed a two-factor structure for the HGS. With a loading cutoff of .33, the items formed two distinct subscales, Gender Self-Definition (GSD) and Gender Self-Acceptance (GSA). Together these two factors accounted for 62% of the variance. Construct and discriminant validity were tested by comparing participants' answers on the HGS to the BSRI, and results indicated there was no relationship between the four BSRI categories and the HGS scores. Correlations between the HGS gender self-definition score and the BSRI Masculine scale was $-.07$ while the HGS self-definition score and the BSRI Feminine score was $-.03$. The HGS self-acceptance score and the BSRI masculine scale was $-.16$. Items #1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 14 measure GSD while #2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 13 measure GSA. Additionally, a MANOVA revealed no significant differences in any of the mean scores of the HGS and BSRI. Hoffman and her colleagues (2005) maintain that "each female must be allowed the latitude to determine what her femininity (femaleness) means to her" (p. 67). The HGS can be found in Appendix G.

Researcher as Instrument

Part of qualitative research, and phenomenology in particular, is the acknowledgment that researchers bring their own bias into the research process in how the questions are asked, what probes are used, and what material they tend to highlight. Likewise, those who incorporate feminist research methodologies espouse the imperative of reflexivity, or self-awareness (Creswell, 2007; Hunt, 2011). Devault and Gross (2007) articulated this well, stating "feminists must maintain a reflexive awareness that research

relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and liens of power, but, rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance” (p. 181). Thus, my role as the interviewer brings an expectation that I minimize power differentials and take care not to impose my position in order to gain the most authentic perspectives of the participants. As a white middle class educated female, I have to own my positionality and realize my cultural worldview. It is essential that I remain aware of my own responses to questions as well as the meaning I ascribe to what is being said in the focus group. Therefore, I kept a journal of my thoughts, feelings, and reactions following each portion of this research project. At the end of the data collection process, I reviewed these entries and asked an external reviewer to read my journal entries to determine if the researcher’s bias played a role in the follow up questions during the focus groups or in the themes described. The research team also served as a checks and balances system to determine if bias played a role in interpretation of the themes and meanings that emerged in our narrative.

Data Collection

The focus groups were recorded with audio and video equipment. The content of these recordings were transcribed verbatim and the demographic questionnaires were matched with participants in each focus group to create profiles of each respondent. This provides some contextual basis for perceptions that may stem from identities, positions, and intersectionality of each female participant. All interviews were transcribed and then read by a team of researchers made up of the researcher, a faculty member, and another graduate student. For this qualitative research project, a phenomenological approach was

employed during the focus group interviews to explore how the participants experience being a drinker within a college culture and how they think of themselves as being a female. Phenomenology is a sound fit for qualitative focus groups because it allows for themes to emerge organically with open-ended questions. This methodology is also a sensible fit with feminist practice because the importance of the individual's story is valued and the experience of that unique reality is the center of the meaning making process (Scott, 1991). In order for validation, connection, and change to occur, the experience does not have to be generalized or universalized to count. In fact, it is the process of giving voice to the silenced or making the invisible visible that brings to the surface those experiences that have been left out (Haraway, 1988; Hawkesworth, 1986). This feminist perspective that focuses on telling the stories of difference aligns well with phenomenology. This methodology captures lived experience, does not seek to find truth with a capital "T," but acknowledges the experience of a particular group of people as their situated truth relevant to their positionality.

Feminist Interviewing Techniques

One of feminism's central tenets is that a woman's perspective has been ignored, silenced, or its impact has been minimized in the construction of knowledge (Devault & Gross, 2007). Devault and Gross (2007) also emphasize that feminist interviewing involves considering what is being left out, what is not being said, and listening for the context. Feminists do not think in terms of generalizing themes to all females, but rather, feminists use the term *transferable* to talk about what may apply to another similarly situated group or subgroup. This situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) is based on each

person's position in society such as age, sex, class, race, and sexual orientation. As a researcher, I have a position and a situated knowledge and must take care not to impose my bias on the participants' experiences. It is essential for feminist interviewing and feminist interpretive analysis to avoid interpreting or making assumptions about participants based on our own lens, and instead to ground the interpretation in the words and meanings of the participants themselves. One of the basic tenets of feminist theory and research methodology is the assumption that there are voices of the non-dominant paradigm that have been buried, subjugated, and silenced, and have generally not been considered in the historical, social, and scientific worlds (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

The feminist approach is to unearth this knowledge and incorporate it into the larger body of scientific knowledge. Collecting this knowledge includes observing, interviewing, and collaborating, which means emphasizing the lived experience within the context of the participants' culture, sub group, and everyday lives. Feminist interviewing tends to rely on phenomenology and interpretive inquiry because it affords the opportunity to retrieve the story beneath the statistics and explore more in-depth. Facilitating interviews, focus groups, and interactions between small groups of college women may help illuminate the process and content of the socially-constructed messages that women receive, interpret, and act upon regarding drinking choices. Additionally, the content and meaning-making must be relevant to the particular group or culture to be effective at changing perceptions of that group. Oakley (1981) emphasizes that to be successful at the process of feminist research, every aspect of research must originate from the feminist framework, from the questions explored to the instruments chosen to

measure variables, and from the way data are collected and interpreted, to the implications for social change initiatives. Feminist researchers need to be intentional in how they use and share power in the researcher-participant relationship, how accurate their observations and understanding of their participants message are, how they navigate interviewing, and they must show integrity in how and where this new knowledge is disseminated (Oakley, 1981). From a feminist lens, if we do not engage in a critical analysis of what these dynamics and biases mean we can inadvertently perpetuate or reproduce stereotypical notions of gender identity. Therefore, research team members who are coding the themes and transcripts must be trained in feminist interviewing and analysis and these biases must be taken into account.

Interpretive Inquiry

The goals of interpretive inquiry as a feminist research methodology are to understand a particular phenomenon and illuminate meaning. Angen (2000) indicates that the validity of this mode of inquiry can be described as fidelity to the phenomena, and she outlines two kinds of validity, ethical and substantive. Ethical validity requires that research be useful, practical, generative, and transformative, while substantive implies one must “do justice to the complexity” of the topic (p. 390) and requires reflexivity. Tesch (1987) added that themes in interpretive inquiry do not just emerge without researcher bias, but instead must have three capacities: sense making, order making, and recognition-producing abilities to be considered relevant. Smith (1992) pointed out that in interpretive inquiry, independent reality and human behavior can never be context free. Therefore, data are never free from interpretation. He asserts that for something to have

validity it must have value through social agreement and common understanding. The interpretation process acknowledges the researcher's role in gaining access to the participants' world and the subjective lens through which the researcher is trying to understand the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and then read by a team of researchers made up of the researcher, a faculty member, and another graduate student. There are four steps common in phenomenological research according to Hays and Wood (2011): (a) bracket assumptions, (b) identify non repetitive and invariant meaning units, (c) cluster meaning units and create depth and texture, and (d) create a structural description that interprets meaning. Creswell (2007) added that in analyzing the data collected in a phenomenological study, it would be helpful to categorize the descriptions first by "what" the participant experienced, called the textual description, and then "how" the experience happened, referred to as the structural description. The composite description then marries the two, placing the entire phenomenon in context. He notes that validity and reliability in phenomenology can be assessed by an ongoing member checking process coupled with self-reflexivity to determine if the interviewer's account matched the participants' descriptions of what they said they experienced (Creswell, 2007). Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, and Hendry (2011) suggest "reflection, team discussion, and method triangulation to achieve validity" (p. 23). In this study proposal, a more specific type of phenomenological analysis was used.

Several steps were taken to enhance trustworthiness of the data analysis process and content. First, the author kept journals of responses and notable dynamics after conducting each focus group which were later reviewed along with transcripts and themes for potential biases in interpretations. Second, the research team members participated in a bracketing exercise prior to analyzing and interpreting the transcripts not only for their own self-awareness about biases regarding college women's drinking and gender identity but to hold each other accountable throughout the interpretation process. Lastly, an external auditor was employed to review the resulting journal entries, the transcripts, and the themes to determine if the essence of the participants' experiences and perceptions were reflected in the results. The external auditor found that the themes clearly were reflected in the participants' responses and language and that the research team was not biased in their interpretations of the women's experiences and perceptions.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Specifically, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996) was employed to analyze the focus group data because it allowed for deeper analysis than thematic analysis alone and afforded the opportunity to interpret the lived experience of participants with rich detail and depth. Smith (1996) explains that IPA was originally developed in the United Kingdom and used in health psychology. The approach builds upon symbolic interactionism which is focused on how meanings are constructed, not just personally and individually, but in a social context. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), the aim of IPA is to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 53). Thus, there is a two-stage interpretive process, the

first being the participant making sense of her world and the second being the researcher making sense of the participants' responses. IPA researchers refer to this as a double hermeneutic.

In employing IPA, researchers tend to use semi-structured interviews with small samples that are homogeneous, since representativeness is futile in a small group of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The aim is not to find meaning that can be generalized to all college students, but instead identify themes and perceptions that may be transferable to groups similar in culture of the participants. Smith and Osborn (2008) outlined steps for analyzing the data (transcripts), not as a prescriptive formula but as guidelines for a fluid process. First, members of the research team engage in multiple readings of the transcripts to become familiar with the dialogue. Then meaning units are derived by a process in which each team member individually documents comments, use of language, or discrepancies from sections of the transcript.

One suggestion to be utilized is that when members of the research team read the transcripts of the participants' interviews, each time a statement changes direction a slash is put in the text. The next step is documenting emerging themes and connecting those themes into clusters or meaning units. Later, these clusters or meaning units will be compared to other research team members' clusters, and a master list or table of themes will be "ordered coherently" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 72). It is important that each theme is threaded back to an exemplifying quote from the participant that illustrates its origin. The last stage is to transform the themes and quotes into a narrative account that includes an interpretation by the authors of what emerged and a connection back to the

literature. In the write up, researchers must be careful to distinguish the participant's own words from the interpretations of the research team.

IPA has been used in the psychology and counseling domains to investigate depression (Rhodes & Smith, 2010), trauma experiences of youth (Paton, Crouch, & Camic, 2009), and with addiction (Shinebourne & Smith, 2009). Shinebourne and Smith (2009) employed IPA in a case study of an alcoholic woman who experienced identity issues as a result of her addiction. They were interested in hearing how the 31-year-old woman experienced her sense of self and how her drinking altered her self-concept. The study involved the woman's description of struggling with dual identities of who she was when sober and who she became when intoxicated. Characteristic of IPA, the researchers relied heavily on the use of metaphors to interpret her experiences and used quotes from the participant that exemplified those metaphors. This study exemplifies the appropriate application of IPA in creating a rich understanding of what a participant experienced related to her drinking and what motivated her addiction.

A critique of IPA found in health research (Pringle et al., 2011) illuminated its usefulness across data collection methods like focus groups interviews, narrative accounts, and dairies, noting that the combination may allow more freedom and creativity. IPA may be particularly suited for health care research in which beliefs and expectations may be "outside the perceptual field" of providers (Pringle et al., 2011, p. 22). Since the scope of this project addressing female gender identity as a means to view drinking decisions is essentially untapped and because there is an unclear picture of the

needs of college women regarding alcohol abuse, employing IPA could help to clarify what types of programming would be more effective with college females.

Pilot Study

For the pilot study, IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix A for consent form) and a recruitment email was sent to all instructors of CST 105, a basic communication course that typically attracts a range of students. Since IRB approval was given the last week of classes in the fall semester, the recruitment took place in the last two days of classes prior to final exams and occurred in six sections of the course. For each class, fliers were handed out to all female students and a brief 3-4 minute explanation of the study's topic area, the risk and benefits, the incentives, confidentiality, and the estimated time commitment was read. (See Appendix B and Appendix C for the flier and script, respectively). Instructions were given to email the researcher if interested.

Two respondents emailed the researcher and were willing to meet during final exam week for a focus group. The two participants were 20 years old, white, neither belonged to an athletic team or a sorority, and both identified as current drinkers. The two college females were given the demographic questionnaire, interviewed using the pilot interview protocol (see Appendix D), and given the Hoffman Gender Scale. The focus group was not recorded and the instrumentation was not collected. Afterwards, the two participants were asked for feedback about the process of being asked the interview questions and asked for suggestions for greater clarity and feasibility.

Results

The first participant described herself as social butterfly and a “partyer,” and answered on her drinking questions that she typically consumed four drinks in a sitting and had consumed alcohol 13 days in the past two weeks. She later clarified that she and her housemates typically had wine with dinner and drank 1-2 drinks each night. This participant was a political science major who described herself as a planner and knew her legal rights when it came to alcohol citations. She presented as extremely gregarious, independent, confident, and talkative. She and her group of friends usually rotated who hosted the parties each week and they felt safe within their small group. She contrasted this with stories from her freshman and sophomore years in which she would go out to clubs and bars and feel vulnerable to males hitting on her and groping her.

The second participant was also a junior in college, was 20 years old, and was a music major. Though she said that she too drank four drinks in a typical sitting, she reported that she only drank 1-2 days in the past two weeks. She presented as more shy and reserved and often listened intently to the other participant’s drinking stories, responding with phrases of incredulity such as “wow” or “that’s never happened to me!” The second participant described feeling independent and powerful as a female when she played her instrument, which she classified as a typically masculine. She was most confident in this realm because she knew she was a superior player and proved that a female could master something usually not attempted by females.

Though the two females differed in personality, they shared similar reactions to the questions, conveyed parallel experiences with alcohol and gender, and gave similar

feedback about parts of the process. Reactions to the questions, responses to the Hoffman scale, and recruitment were discussed, and modifications were suggested by the females to improve the data collection methods.

Modifications Based on the Pilot Study

The pilot study participants were very informative and helpful in suggesting ways for this research project and process to be clearer and yield more accurate outcomes. They both endorsed helping other college females as the main reason they chose to participate. Since they knew each other from a common class, I asked if it was a hindrance or a help to be asked these potentially revealing questions in a group setting with someone they knew. Both wholeheartedly agreed that their level of comfort was better because they knew one another and suggested that in future focus groups small groups of friends be interviewed together. When asked about the incentive offered for participating in the pilot study, both females said the pizza was “awesome” and the cash amount was adequate. Both respondents said that if the amount was increased people would participate just for the money and the answers would not be as “real.” Interestingly, this demonstrated a concern for the accuracy of the data being collected and an investment on the part of the college females in the integrity of the study.

The pilot participants suggested that the wording of some of the questions could be clarified and even made more explicit in their application to drinking. For instance, they suggested narrowing the scope of one question that asked “What are the differences between hanging out with your female friends and hanging out with your male friends” by adding the phrase “when you are drinking” at the end. Likewise, regarding the next

questions about times when they felt equal/unequal to males, the two suggested that I add the qualifier “in social situations” or “in drinking situations” to further guide the responses.

Lastly, the two college students said they were initially drawn to the project because they thought it was about drinking, and they wanted to help educate females about the dangers of drinking in risky situations. Subsequently, they were “thrown off” when we switched gears to the questions about being female. They both acknowledged that the consent form had an adequate description of the study naming both topic areas, but the description on the flier was not as detailed. They suggested putting this exact description from the consent form on the recruitment flier so it is clearer that the study is about drinking and being a female.

In a phone conversation with a researcher who conducted qualitative focus groups with college females about drinking and gender issues (A. Young, personal communication, September 28, 2011), I asked what she would change about her process or what questions she might add. She said she encountered some of the same issues as my pilot participants in being uncertain how to describe thoughts and feelings about being a female, and she likened this query to asking a fish to describe water. Certainly, we are steeped in cultural expectations that we absorb throughout our lives and it may be difficult to articulate how we make sense of these gendered messages. For the full study, I added a question that asks participants to describe the ideal female (A. Young, personal communication, September 28, 2011) as an alternate way to uncover participants’

perceptions of gender identity and to tie this to a motivation for subsequent behavior choices.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

This qualitative research project was conducted to explore the experiences and perceptions of college women's drinking and their gender identity, and whether these experiences and perceptions influence drinking choices. Through a combination of focus groups and interviews, traditionally aged college women who identified as current drinkers engaged in a dialogue with the researcher about their drinking patterns, experiences, social lives, and how they thought of themselves as college women today. In this chapter, characteristics of the participants will be described and themes and highlights of the focus groups and interviews will be presented. Examples of participant quotes will be shared that exemplify themes and subthemes and a narrative account of the research team's interpretation will synthesize the collective responses.

Participant Characteristics

All participants for this study were recruited from classes during Spring 2012 from either Communication Studies 105 courses or Counseling and Educational Development 210 or 310 courses at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Initially, nine college women contacted the researcher by email after receiving a flyer and some preliminary material during a recruitment visit to her course. Each potential participant was assigned a pseudonym and asked to complete an online confidential

survey of alcohol behaviors with that pseudonym verifying eligibility. Based on the score of that survey, 4 women were assigned to the low risk focus group and 5 women were assigned to the high risk focus group. Angela, Brianna, Emily, Frances, and Grace were participants with scores of 7 or higher, placing them in the high risk focus group. Casey, Donna, Holly, and Jane scored a 6 or below, placing them in the low risk category. At the beginning of each focus group, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire providing age, year in school, race/ethnicity, and affiliation with any student organizations or teams. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 21 with a mean of 19.56 ($SD = 1.01$). Race/ethnicity consisted of 6 Caucasian, 2 African American, and 1 who identified as part American Indian. There were 3 first-year students, 2 second-year students, 2 third-year students, and 2 graduating seniors. Only one was part of a sorority and no participants reported being a member of an athletic team (see Table 2). In previous qualitative research investigating college women's drinking, a mix of focus groups and individual interviews was employed (Linowski, 2004; MacNeela & Bredin, 2010, Russett, 2008) as individual interviews could yield more in depth information than focus groups. One person from the high risk group, Emily, and one person from the low risk group, Casey, were interviewed individually, and because there were thematic elements that were distinct from the focus groups themes, the results are reported accordingly.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	AUDIT score (7+ high risk)	HGS Score		Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Year in college	Other variables of interest
		Self- Acceptance	Self- Definition				
Angela	7 (High)	5.86	6	21	Caucasian	4th year	Sorority, parents divorced
Brianna	9 (High)	5.43	6	18	Caucasian	1st year	Mom divorced
Casey	4	4.57	3.14	20	Caucasian	3rd year	Still lives with parents
Donna	3	5.29	4.29	19	Caucasian	2nd year	Theatre major
Emily	11 (High)	6.00	5.00	19	Part American Indian	1st year	Pre-nursing major
Francis	13 (High)	5.86	5.14	20	African American	3rd year	Dad away in military
Grace	7 (High)	4.14	4.71	19	Caucasian	1st year	Strict Baptist upbringing
Holly	5	5.43	4.29	21	Caucasian	4th year	Psychology major
Jane	4	5.57	4.14	19	African American	2nd year	Youngest child

AUDIT

The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Saunders et al., 1993) was used to assess drinking risk level and to determine to which focus group the participant would be assigned. The AUDIT is a 10-question survey with a score ranging from 0-40 measuring alcohol use frequency, amount, high risk drinking habits, and various consequences experienced as a result of alcohol use. Typically a cutoff score of 8

or higher has been used to indicate that the subject has a pattern of risky alcohol use, but since women's bodies metabolize alcohol differently and they can experience impairment and intoxication effects at lower amounts, several researchers (DeMartini & Carey, 2009; Martens et al., 2007; Sugarman, Demartini, & Carey, 2009) have made a case to use a cutoff score of 7. For this reason, and for the purposes of this study, a participant who scored a 0-6 on the AUDIT was assigned to the low risk focus group and a participant who scored a 7 or higher on the AUDIT was assigned to the high risk focus group. AUDIT scores of participants ranged from 3 to 13, with an overall mean of 7, a mean of 4 in the low risk group and a mean of 9.4 in the high risk group (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	Age		AUDIT		HGS	
	Range	<i>M</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	Self-Acceptance	Self-Definition
Overall (<i>n</i> = 9)	18-21	19.56 (SD=1.01)	3-13	7 (SD= 3.43)	Mean 5.35 (SD=.62)	Mean 4.75 (SD=.92)
Low risk drinkers (<i>n</i> = 4)	19-21	20.00	3-5	4	5.23	3.97
High risk drinkers (<i>n</i> = 5)	18-21	19.40	7-13	9.4	5.46	5.37
Low risk focus group (<i>n</i> = 3)	19-21	19.67	3-5	4	5.43	4.24
High risk focus group (<i>n</i> = 4)	18-21	19.50	7-13	9	5.32	5.46

Table 3 (cont.)

	Age		AUDIT		HGS	
	Range	<i>M</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	Self-Acceptance	Self-Definition
Individual High Risk (<i>n</i> = 1)	19	—	11	—	6.00	5.00
Individual Low Risk (<i>n</i> = 1)	20	—	4	—	4.57	3.14

Hoffman Gender Scale

The Hoffman Gender Scale (HGS; Hoffman et al., 2000), has a parallel version for males and females, each with 14 items that help make up gender self-confidence. The HGS female version consists of two 7-item subscales, one for gender *self-definition* and one for gender *self-acceptance*. Gender self-acceptance (GSA) is defined as how comfortable a female is with her gender. An example of an item in this category is “My sense of myself as a female is positive.” Gender self-definition (GSD) measures how important being a female is to someone’s identity as evidenced by the item “Being a female is a critical part of how I view myself.” Items are scored from 1-6 on a Likert scale with a “1” corresponding to strongly disagree with a statement and a “6” corresponding to strongly agree with this statement. Therefore, the higher the scores, the higher the levels of GSD or GSA. Items #1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 14 measure GSD while items #2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 13 measure GSA. This instrument was given in paper form during the middle of the interview protocol to act as a catalyst for the college women to

consider how they think of themselves as women. Follow up questions were then asked of the participants. The participants' score on GSD ranged from 3.14 to 6.00 with mean of 4.75 ($SD = .92$) and GSA ranged from 4.14 to 6.00 with a mean of 5.35 ($SD = .62$).

Research Questions

RQ1 What are the experiences and perceptions of drinking as a college woman?

RQ2 How do college women think of themselves as women?

RQ3 How do these experiences and perceptions influence a college woman's choice to drink?

Overall Summary of Findings

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The doctoral researcher transcribed each of the four interviews, two focus groups and two individual interviews, to become more intimately familiar with the material. Then, a research team consisting of the doctoral researcher, a master's student, and a faculty member met on eight occasions to analyze the transcriptions of the focus group and individual interviews. All were sufficiently familiar with IPA through reading seminal literature, critiques, and examples of IPA applications. At the first meeting, a review of the IPA guidelines was discussed, and a bracketing exercise was completed, first orally and additionally by email to highlight biases, experiences, and perceptions related to the research topic in an effort to enhance trustworthiness of the data analysis. Each research team member read a transcript multiple times, first making notes in the left margin of words, phrases, questions, or comments that were notable, and then in iterative readings more notes and potential themes were noted in the right margin. The team read

through the comments together, identifying the essence of what the participants experienced and discussing possible clusters of themes. At the next meeting, themes were again reviewed, discussed, and consolidated until the team felt the list reflected the meaning of the participants' words. The themes and transcripts, as well as journal entries made by the researcher following each of the focus groups were then reviewed by an external auditor for accuracy and trustworthiness. This process was repeated for each focus group or interview, and each table of themes preceded the narrative section corresponding to that interview.

High Risk Focus Group Themes

The high risk focus group was made up of four college women aged 18 to 21, Angela, Brianna, Frances, and Grace, one of whom was African American and three who were Caucasian. There was a balance of class years with one first year, one second year, one third year, and one graduating senior. As a group their HGS score for GSA was 5.32, placing them slightly below the overall mean, and their GSD score was 5.46, placing them well above the overall mean. Overall the participants were talkative, lively, and appeared comfortable sharing their experiences. After making introductions and orienting them to the interview process, they began to describe their drinking experiences and perceptions. During the focus group, they often added to each other's stories with similar or contrasting experiences. Major themes identified by the research team were divided into three broad areas: experiences and perceptions of drinking, descriptions of gender identity defined as how the women think of themselves as college women, and how these experiences and perceptions influenced their drinking choices (see Table 4).

Table 4. High Risk Focus Group Themes

Experiences and Perceptions of Drinking	Gender Identity	Influence of Experiences on Drinking Choices
Function of alcohol	Strong female identity	Context and amounts of drinking
Alcohol use changes over time	Traditional femininity	Differences between men and women's drinking
Shared culture of bad experiences	Expecting to have it all	
Safety considerations	Lack of male role models	Safety considerations
Role of attention		

Drinking

Five main themes were identified for the first category of drinking experiences and perceptions. These included the function of alcohol, the use of alcohol changing over time, the shared culture of bad experiences, safety considerations, and the role of attention in drinking.

Theme 1: Function of alcohol

Drinking was considered by the group as a fun and positive experience and a necessary part of one's social life as a college student. Most of the women had been drinking since high school and their early teens, so it was not a new experience. The social aspect of drinking was significant for the participants as they described using alcohol to meet people, to loosen inhibitions, and to gain social confidence. Angela summarized why college women drink:

Especially coming to college, it's like, you don't know a lot of people, this is how you have to be sociable and not very many people are that secure with themselves coming in at 18 years old and being like, yeah, hey, I'm this great person, get to

know me without being drunk. You know what I mean? And so, I think, at least, I could, I still know people like that now that as seniors that still need that alcohol to meet new people. But I feel like that crazy age and time in your life, it's absolutely necessary for many women to use alcohol just to, like, loosen some of the inhibitions. Not necessarily to get hammered, but just to feel like, oooh, I can go into this random party and just start introducing myself to people whereas sober you'd just kinda like be there in the corner not saying anything to each other. (lines 1134-1144)

In fact, attending a party while sober was a very rare occurrence, as the group viewed the sole purpose of parties was to drink and meet people. From the participants' perspective, a college student needed to have a specific reason not to be drinking at a gathering, such as acting as the designated driver or having a test the next day.

Another component mentioned often by the group members was drinking to relieve stress. The women compartmentalized their week's tasks and responsibilities, saying weekdays were for academics, but the weekends were for drinking and socializing. Francis explained that, at her worst, she drank a lot more heavily to escape:

My spring semester of last year it was just, I felt like everything was going down the drain . . . I was smoking and drinking every weekend, um, that was the way I just kinda coped with everything. Not having it on my mind. (166-168)

One participant added that drinking was her only fun outlet, and the consensus was that they preferred to drink in small groups at friends' homes rather than clubs or bars because it was more fun to drink with people they knew. As a bonus, the private locale removed the issue of those underage not being served.

The irony discussed among the group members was that the allure of how fun it is supposed to be to drink often did not match the actual experience, and the women

repeatedly stated it was not as fun as they anticipated. Grace described this phenomenon as follows:

You think—Oh my gosh, I've had all this alcohol—Four Loko, oh! It's so much fun! But it's **NOT** so much fun. It happens every single time and you think, I'm never doing this again. And . . . I have two more in my fridge! (199-201)

This pattern of repeatedly drinking to excess out of positive expectation, even though past experience negated it, seemed to be considered an inevitable part of the women's college life.

Theme 2: Use of alcohol changes over time

All four members of the high risk drinking focus group described drinking in college as a developmental process that changed over time. In fact, the maturation process was evident in the contrasts between amounts, frequency, and motivations of the oldest and youngest members of the group. Differences between drinking excessively at the beginning of college and drinking much more moderately later in your academic career emerged in the dialogue repeatedly. As described by Brianna, 18, and Grace, 19, when college women are 18 or 19 they “drink because it's there” and they “drink as much as you can because you don't know when you will get it again.” The 18 and 19 year olds said they don't have just one drink; instead they aim to drink enough to feel intoxicated. A typical night of drinking for the younger two high risk group members was 4-6 drinks. Contrastingly, the older two women say they are often too busy with jobs, internships, and classes to drink and they have to plan for it in their schedules. Angela, the oldest, said

she usually had one or two drinks now with friends, but she relayed stories of her “heyday” and “yesteryear” in which she often drank to get drunk:

I’m a senior, so my social life has changed a lot over my 4 years. Um, now I am incredibly busy. But on the weekends, or like a Friday night, I am more likely to go to a bar, umm, maybe like once a weekend or every other week, um, but definitely in years’ past I have gone out like, in the weekdays, during the weeknights, things like that. But in no way is that possible now so . . . *(laughs)* I’m just too tired. (51-56)

She said she is just too exhausted now to spend much time drinking. All four agreed that drinking is a learning process, with the Angela, the senior among them, describing her “college self-discovery days,” as she experimented with amounts and learned what she could handle. The younger women often tried to monitor and moderate their drinking but were unsuccessful. Brianna, a first year college woman, admitted she is still learning what works and does not work for her to avoid consequences and to have a positive drinking experience:

So in the morning I’m usually kind of just feel like, maybe I shouldn’t have drank that much or I know when I drink that much I say stupid things and it’s taken me several months to finally put that to use and to finally be like, maybe I shouldn’t drink every weekend or maybe when I do drink, I shouldn’t drink vodka. Maybe I should drink something else ‘cause vodka gets me to that point. Um, so it’s definitely taken me several months to realize from negative experiences what to do because I don’t want to stop drinking, cause I do enjoy it even though it does have consequences. (384-391)

The assumption voiced was that when one gets older, one is satisfied with a single drink and that the motivation for drinking is pleasure. All of them made comments such as “when I drink, I drink,” implying the message that they had to make it count. The group

discussed the phenomenon of turning 21 and alcohol losing its appeal or thrill.

Subsequently, this marked the point when drinking decreased and was monitored more closely by the college women.

Theme 3: Shared culture of bad experiences

Despite the self-reported differences in drinking amounts and frequency among the high risk focus group members, they were quick to validate each other's experiences and say they had each "been there." In fact, telling stories of a bad drinking night built camaraderie and served as common ground on which the otherwise strangers felt connected to one another. For example, Grace shared her most recent drinking experience in which she found a gas station near campus that sold her alcohol and she bought and drank Four Loko, a popular and potent energy drink that is 12% alcohol by volume and has been banned from several campus and communities by virtue of its powerfully intoxicating and mood altering properties. As she relayed her tale, the rest of the group members collectively groaned on her behalf, simultaneously indicating compassion, understanding, and wincing in anticipation of how her evening probably turned out. Each took turns sharing bad drinking experiences and fears of how they must have looked to others, yet alternately making each other feel better by statements such as "you think everyone will remember but they don't because they are as drunk as you are." They compared negative consequences such as blacking out, having a hangover, missing work, getting into fights and arguments, drunk texting friends and family, and being so emotional that they were self-conscious.

One particular rallying point in the high risk focus group was during the description and fascination with the concept “that girl.” The group members defined “that girl” as the one person at the party who was out of control, stumbling around, embarrassing herself and who has to be taken care of by others and eventually removed from the scene. They judged and watched that girl, but then each admitted to being “that girl” at least once in her college drinking career. What initially seemed like embarrassment or concern for making a negative impression or potentially ruining an image evolved into a sort of rite of passage and pride about having been “that girl.” Overall, the women acknowledged that there are and can be negative consequences and serious effects from drinking too much, and they were willing to put up with these rare and minor consequences to gain the positive social benefits of drinking.

Theme 4: Safety considerations

Closely related to the willingness to tolerate negative consequences was the matter of fact manner in which the college women acknowledged that, to avoid severe consequences, a woman must always be aware of safety considerations when drinking. Ample time in the focus group was spent listening to the women name the universal rules of basic alcohol education and health promotion that they had accumulated over the years. Included in these guidelines were first and foremost, never taking a drink from someone they did not know due to the danger of being drugged or “roofied”:

I went to a party . . . I kinda stopped drinking because I realized I didn’t know that many people there. And what kinda made me stop that was that I found a roofie in my drink from a guy that I had just met, you know, just talking and um, kinda hanging out, and I went into the bathroom and he had just gave me a drink and I was like—do you really think I’m gonna drink this? But I took it and went to the

bathroom and poured it out and there was, um, a pill in there. So that really opened my eyes. (965-971)

The women were adamant that there is a difference between drinking around people you don't know and the appropriate context in which a college woman allowed herself to get drunk. In the former situation, one needs to always be aware of her surroundings, go out with friends, and have her antenna up for potential danger. But in a smaller, more comfortable context in which she knows the people in the group, they each stated they feel safer drinking more heavily. The attitude conveyed was that when guys drink, they push limits and become dangerous, so women need to beware. The nonchalant approach of the participants to this inherent danger marked a sort of resignation to accepting the reality of those men who prey on intoxicated and impaired women. Additionally, this resignation spoke to the stereotypical college reality often present in media depictions of the college culture. These women are guarded when they need to be and tend to let loose when they perceive that the setting is more intimate and familiar, and, therefore, assumed to be safe.

Theme 5: Role of attention

The last theme that surfaced in the experiences and perceptions of drinking was the role that attention played when the women were drinking. Attention is described as the acknowledgement that the women were being watched, either by men, women, peers, or from strangers out in public at bars and clubs. Sometimes the women conveyed that they liked the attention they were receiving in drinking situations. It was nice to be noticed when they dressed up and went out. However, at other times, being seen as drunk

and out of control was embarrassing and caused the women to feel regret or worry about how they were being viewed. The women were aware of getting positive attention, especially when they were drinking around men, but there was a line that was often crossed unintentionally. They were able to share both positive and negative experiences associated with drinking and felt conflicted, if only briefly, when they said “we’re never going to do that again, but we do anyway,” though there may be a price to pay the next day when, as Grace stated:

the next morning, you walk down the hall and people are like “hee-ey” and you’re like “I hate you” and stuff like that. Like on Sunday people in my dorm were like “he-ey, how was *your* night?” Then it was embarrassing. (430-432)

These experiences are told with a smile on her face, making one wonder whether the good-natured ribbing by peers is the college women’s ticket in to the fun crowd. Angela’s description of the desire to keep up the image of being a classy, fabulous woman was juxtaposed with anecdotes about becoming “that girl” and getting reinforcement from the attention, saying:

I am very conscious of how much I drink because I don’t want to lose that, like, class factor. I don’t want to be seen as *that girl*. Um, so, in my mind’s eye a woman is, you know, put together, classy, fabulous, this, that, and the other, so and when she has too much alcohol in her system she loses all of that. (1044-1048)

Brianna then added:

I try to not to drink too much because I don’t want to ruin an image of these people don’t know me. It’s not about a reputation, it’s about I don’t want to make a bad impression as a female. (1073-1074)

She also expressed guilt and regret about behaving badly even if no one else remembered how she acted because she knows and had a personal standard for herself, yet said on several occasions that she liked drinking and did not want to stop.

The last major subtheme present in the role of attention was the recognition that college women were scrutinized more heavily when they are drinking than college men are. The women talked about being judged and being held accountable to different standards of behavior by men and by women in public and private settings. Men are not pointed at when they're drunk as women are, and women are "supposed to look classy with it". Brianna explained "that's part of the consequence of drinking as a female."

Gender Identity

The second broad area in which themes were clustered centered on how the women thought of themselves as women and what it means to be a college woman. Four themes discussed are strong positive female identity, traditional femininity, expecting to have it all, and lack of male role models.

Theme 1: Strong female identity

All of the participants in the high risk focus group endorsed taking pride in being a woman and feeling very positively about themselves as women (629-630, 691). They were energized by the topic and offered several descriptors such as women are educated, strong, providers, and that women take care of things:

A woman in general just represents strength and I feel like the college-the education just boosts that even more you know. When I think of a woman, I think of, you know, taking care of kids, and sort of providing. (792-795)

Another added her bias very enthusiastically,

It just amazes me that we've lived in a world that has been run by males for so long when I just think CLEARLY women think with a straighter head and less with their genitalia and, while we are emotional, we are—tend to think through things more instated of being so hotheaded and cocky that, you know, it's all about defending you honor and blah blah blah. I just—umh. I love my boyfriend and all the men in my life but I just think women are much tougher. [*laughs*] (618-623)

Digging a little deeper, it became evident that most of the women in this group grew up with strong positive female role models. Three of the four participants were raised by their mothers, two from early divorces and one whose father was in the military and was often absent (706-707, 720-721). They described their mothers as strong, influential, and able to overcome adversity, resulting in the belief that women are more mature, more complete, and more in tune with themselves than men are (692-696).

Theme 2: Traditional femininity

An interesting paradox that surfaced about how these women thought of their gender was that on the surface, they appeared as powerful, confident feminists. However, they each spent time sharing how one of their favorite parts of being a woman was related to their feminine appearance and the fun entailed in keeping up this image: “I love being a female and getting my nails done, my hair done, may makeup, my clothes, shoes, heels, bags, just everything that comes with, you now, being a female” (637-638). Another described the fun of transforming herself from a regular person by putting on her “hot girls disguise”:

Curling your hair, putting your lashes on, getting your nails done, going to the tanning salon. It's just nice to see yourself when you wake up in the morning and you look like crap, and then when you get your hot girls disguise on and you're like, *yeah!* [*group laughter*] (647-652)

Clearly, valuing appearance and feeling feminine was important to the women in the high risk drinking group and expressing this is a vital part of the experience of being a woman. There were two different motivations for this, however, among the group. Grace attributed this to her strict religious upbringing in which she was not allowed to express herself but had to conform to a narrow gender role. Subsequently, she relished her newfound freedom and experimented partly out of rebellion:

I like to look pretty. Um, like I said, I grew up in a very Baptist home. I wasn't allowed to dance . . . I wasn't allowed to do SO many things. And now that I can do those things, it's so much fun! Leaning to curl my hair was fun, bleaching the crap out of my hair was FUN! (667-672)

For Francis, her connection between being a woman and her attractive appearance was learned generationally, handed down from her grandmother to her mother to her as the following excerpt illustrated:

I guess just growing up and looking at my mom and my mom was the type to get her nails done or her hair done and, it was funny because I know when I was a child I know I used to see people stare at my mom and I said, "Mom, I want people to stare at me like they stare at you!" . . . And so I mean, my grandmother, she is the exact same way as my mother. You wouldn't even think – my mom, you wouldn't even think she was my mom; my grandmother you would probably think was my mom. (711-719)

The group members laughed often and were aware of the possible contradictions that they voiced during this part of the interview. Giving a nod to how media influenced their world, Brianna emphatically explained,

it's funny . . . I think everybody would agree that it's not like we *have* to do that stuff. It's just, it's what our world is used to, it's what we're used to growing up and we enjoy it. I think there are plenty of females that don't like dressing up and, like, all of that stuff. And they choose to do that and we're not saying all this stuff because we *have* to, but I think we're all saying it because we *like* to. (659-663)

Theme 3: Expecting to have it all

As a college woman, the high risk drinkers think balance is very important and even ideal. Balance was defined in college as maintaining a social life, a job, and simultaneously keeping up their grades. Looking to the future, balance meant they want it all and hope to do it all, juggling a career, academics, fun social life, traveling, and maybe later, having kids. However, none of the women in the high risk focus group mentioned the role of a partner or husband at all in these future plans. It is unclear if this omission was due to an assumption of having a partner or if this was a conscious or unconscious decision. Francis' description exemplified the women's vision:

After I graduate . . . like I want to be able to get out and travel, and go places so bad. And like, I love traveling, like I love seeing parts of, places, and I think that comes along with my dad being in the military and me going, you know, living a few other places, and so I understand totally about what you're saying about getting an education and getting a career and making money and then maybe a few years later down the line and after I'm stable and I have a job and I'm ready to actually devote my time to a child then that's when I'll be ready. (869-875)

Because they believe women could and should be able to do it all, the unintended effect of being pulled in different directions culminated in feeling stress when this balance was not being achieved. Ironically, one of the ways the women described dealing with this stress and level of expectation was to drink, thereby temporarily escaping the expectations.

Theme 4: Lack of male role models

Most of the women in this group not only endorsed having strong positive female role models, but also had a distinct lack of male role models in their lives. Two women described their parents divorcing in early childhood, leaving their mother to raise her and her siblings, while a third participant explained that because her father was in the military he was often physically and emotionally absent. As a result, her mother took care of everything around the house and dad rarely did any household management or parenting and could not be relied upon or trusted. The relationships with their fathers were either nonexistent or tenuous, leaving a negative effect as Angela described:

My dad was addicted to drugs, had all kinds of crazy problems, and I think that RUINED me for a long time . . . I didn't trust men. . . . My Dad was soooooo unpredictable and so detrimental to our family that he ruined my image of men for a long time. My dad and I are in a better place today, but I still just see him in that light and it took a really long time to get to the point where I could trust men.
(724-736)

Additionally, men were described as being unavailable and that the college women preferred seeking help and advice from their mothers for everything. The overall effect for some of these women was that their perceptions of gender identity shifted in college. Their experiences and observations of their parents shaped how they felt about

women and men in general, and the gendered messages about how women should behave were reconsidered and renegotiated. Grace shared that even though she appreciated that her parents loved her, now that she could make decisions on her own she has changed how she thinks and has realized how toxic her family was:

I was never really allowed to take more masculine sports. Um, I learned how to do my hair, I went to Cotillion, I, uh, my mom told me I'm going to college for my M-R-S degree—which is Mrs., if you don't get the joke. I was very taught in this Baptist womanhood—I couldn't dance, there were certain ways, my mom told me I was not allowed to cry in front of men, that's not what women do. Um, and that caused lots of problems . . . but that's not my personal decision—that's how I was *raised* . . . I never realized how toxic it was until, like, I branched out. They taught me what they thought was right, there's nothing wrong with that, but it's just one of those things that like, it's not me. So . . . it's not me. (748-764, 774-776)

More evidence of this shift in gender identity was that when her experiences with her father left her feeling that men could not be trusted, one of the women entered into a four-year relationship with another woman. She described this time in her life as not knowing who she was or what she wanted. Though many of them are currently in heterosexual relationships, the idea of marriage to them was confusing, scary, and certainly far into the future.

How Experiences and Perceptions Influence Drinking

The last broad area in which the college women shared their responses addressed how their experiences of drinking and gender influenced their choices to drink. Themes included how the context and amounts of drinking changed, the differences between drinking with men and with women, and safety considerations. The women agreed that safety is always a consideration for women because guys tended to push limits when they

drank and, therefore, can become dangerous. There was a perception of inherent risk involved for women when they are drinking around men. For example, one difference between drinking with their female friends and drinking with groups of men was that, in the women's collective experience, men almost always play drinking games and the implied purpose is to get drunk as quickly as possible:

Like whenever I see guys drink I always see that they're trying to push the limits, you know, trying to be, like, masculine . . . (then, in a deeper voice) I'm having beer and pizza and I'm watching football. Let's see how much I can drink! And for girls, I just see that it's like, (in a lighter voice) oh my gosh this is so much fun, let's do this together. It's more like a free environment when you're with women, than when you're the only girl or part of being in the minority as a girl with a group of males because, I don't know, for myself, I don't drink as much when I'm with males because even if I know someone there, even if my roommate is there, even if [boyfriend's name] there—guys are *guys* and I've seen it myself, like, my friend, well not my friend but my friend's friend visited [school] and she got drunk at a party and it was all—well, mainly guys and 4 of us girls and—she got *raped*. Like just because that's how guys are. Well, that's not how guys are—but that's how *some* guys are when they are trying to drink and they are trying to push limits. (938-949)

There was a distinction made in how the women responded based on whether they knew the men well in the social group or not. The men were viewed as competitive and often encouraged women on to drink more than they intended or would drink normally, and the women, if they know the men, felt compelled to keep up. One person illustrated the mixed messages she gets about being the cool girlfriend and college woman:

When I'm drinking and it's mostly my boyfriends and his friends, who are also my friends, like I trust them completely and it's a small group and everything, I actually tend, I would think, to drink *more* because since they can drink more they're like Yeah! blah blah blah! Drinking games! Like, I'm like alright cool, I want to impress them. And so I'm gonna be like, yeah, I can do it! I would cuss

more, I would be like, much more, not flirty necessarily, but you know, that outward . . . um . . . yeah, that kind of personality. (979-988)

Another participant described how she reacted to this type of drinking challenge by her male friends:

I'm a very competitive type of person, and I don't want to feel like anybody's beating me and um, so will try to consume more, you know. Not be the first one to tap out and say, yeah, I'm done. Yeah, I know that may be the only aspect that man might be better than me! [Lots of laughter] with alcohol! Anything else, I can get you! So . . . I try to do what I can to stay in it! [laughs] as long as I can! (1032-1040)

However, all of the women acknowledged the limitations biologically and physiologically of being a woman and trying to drink the quantities that their male counterparts do. They wanted to be equal and competitive but not at the expense of losing control. They exhibited a practical sense of when they had crossed the line and how to monitor their drinking as they matured:

like I *know* my levels and I *know* how much I can drink, and that's when I was like, yeah, you got it, so you knew you were gonna have it in the first place so, yes, I feel, yes, it does play a big role I how much I drink and consume. The image that I want others to see or remember about me. So like I said I really don't get like, pissy drunk or stumbling all over the place. (1052-1056)

They acknowledged wanting to keep up, but at some point they gave up and reconsidered whether it was worth it to emulate the reckless drinking behavior of the men.

Low Risk Focus Group Themes

There were three participants in the low risk focus group, Holly, 21, Jane, 19, and Donna, 19. One was African American and two identified as Caucasian, and their

academic standing consisted of two second year students and one graduating senior. Similar to the high risk focus group, the themes are categorized into three broad areas according to the research questions: experiences and perceptions of drinking, how the women think of themselves as women, and the influence of those experiences and perceptions on the women's choice to drink. As a group, their HGS score for GSA was 5.43, placing them slightly above the overall mean, and their GSD score was 4.24, placing them below the overall mean. This group overall was more reflective, more quiet, and required more prompts to elicit information. The group members took longer to warm up, appeared more introverted, and often giggled at each other's stories indicating a collective self-consciousness about sharing. They tended not to have begun drinking until after starting college and only drank once every couple of weeks.

Table 5. Low Risk Focus Group Themes

Experiences and Perceptions of Drinking	Gender Identity	Influence of Experiences on Drinking Choices
Important to be in control	Self-concept	Resisting the college stereotype
Drinking has a social component	Presence of male role models	Differences in drinking environments
Watching others drink for entertainment	Messages about women	Making a drinking experience positive
Coping Skills		

Drinking

There were four main themes identified that pertained to the low risk drinkers' experiences and perceptions of drinking. They included the importance of control, the

social component of drinking, the entertainment from women watching others, and the use of coping skills other than drinking.

Theme 1: Important to be in control

From the moment alcohol was mentioned in the low risk focus group, the participants made it clear that they were not beholden to drinking as a habit or expectation. The word control was associated with alcohol multiple times in the interview with one participant summarizing, “I think the biggest part of drinking is control and knowing your limits and try not to go overboard and end up in a dangerous situation” (947-948). They depicted a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, stating that they can easily choose not to drink or to have only one drink in a social setting. In fact, the group members admitted they don’t really like the taste of alcohol and preferred sweet liquor drinks rather than beer as expressed in this interchange:

HOLLY: I can’t drink beer. I don’t know about ya’ll but I don’t think it is an acquired taste at all! I think it’s awful, so gross.

JANE: Nasty! I don’t like the smell of it either.

HOLLY: Yeah! Usually it’s funny, the less I can taste the alcohol, the better. The more fruity it is . . . or even if it’s like a dark rum that you mix with cola or something . . . that’s how I prefer it. (134-139)

They also shared knowing what they can handle when they drink and knowing their personal limits, especially when there is something at stake, like an important test the next day that could be affected. They exhibited multidimensional decision making skills in whether to drink, considering factors such as how much they had eaten and who was

around them. For example, Donna said she won't drink if she is the designated driver, and Jane illustrated taking into account her commitments the following day:

I guess if like it's a night where I know I have something absolutely important that next day that I can't miss and it's at a time where I'll probably need to sleep, then I probably won't drink or maybe stop like after *one* drink of something. I won't drink to the point where I'll have trouble getting up the next morning. (287-289)

She also described an intense fear of getting sick which prevented her from drinking too much, and not liking it when she is unaware of her surroundings, saying "once I feel a buzz, I'll stop" (756). Another reason to avoid drinking was based in practicality; the higher your tolerance, the more money one would have to spend on alcohol. Lastly, the women were aware of their image and how they were being perceived in drinking situations and did not want to leave a bad impression. Holly shared:

I'm really conscious when I go into a public place. Especially because, I mean, I'll go into [local place] and I am just—if I order a drink, I make sure just to keep it to one. Just so that if one of my professors are there or graduate students are there that they don't get the wrong impression. That I don't really go drinking with anybody who has that kind of, um, guess like, *authority*, or something I don't really know how to describe it. It's tricky. (795-800)

The low risk drinkers also depicted the ability to learn vicariously through others' mistakes and bad drinking experiences. Although they did experiment and occasionally overdo it with alcohol, they typically did not have to learn firsthand—the hard way—with excessive drinking and negative consequences. Donna explained,

I've helped friends when they're throwing up, you know, and like, take care of them, but I think that's the reason I just don't wanna go that far. Like, the hangovers, like, I've never had to experience that. (154-156)

Because these women are much more intentional and discriminating with their drinking choices, they rarely experienced consequences from their drinking. It was more important to them to exercise control and moderation than to engage in risky behaviors, and they subsequently viewed drinking as a generally positive experience. At one point in the interview, they even shared useful tips on how to fool their friends who were pressuring them to drink and avoid taking shots. Jane described the following scenario:

My guy friends, they like to take shots. And me not so much. So it's like everybody else says, 'let's take a shot, come on, come on' so I'll finally be like, okay, and we're like all be standing there and on the count of 3 and 1, 2, 3 everyone takes a shot and I'm just still standing there holding mine and be like, 'oh wait—I missed it!' [others laugh] And after that it's like I don't want to be the only one who takes my shot so everybody else ends up taking another one with me so that I won't be alone. (767-773)

Donna then suggested, "Yeah, well you should just do half, like, of it, and put the rest in a drink or something. Slowly." [grin]

Theme 2: Drinking has a social component

Despite the low key approach to college drinking, the low risk drinkers were content with their social experiences and acknowledged that drinking can be fun and a good time. The exchange between Donna and Holly demonstrated this:

DONNA: I just wanna have a good time, you know?

HOLLY: Not like you *NEED* to get drunk, but it's just one of those like, well—

DONNA: Right! I just wanna have a good time, I just wanna be happy.

HOLLY: Yeah, exactly, it's a strange feeling. It's not like a dependence type of thing, it's like letting go of everything in that week and having fun in the moment. (104-109)

In another exchange similar to the High Risk group, the Low Risk group described drinking as part of the social bonding of the college experience and the time in one's life to enjoy drinking:

JANE: It's like, it really is, drinking is a part of the college experience, you know. You're away from home, you can do whatever you want, there's a part of you that, like—it's all around you, you know? To not drink is kinda like the odd man out. So you know, it's kinda *there* and it's like, I don't know . . . I feel like, we all come in as freshmen with this idea of what our freedom is gonna be and . . . if you don't drink it's not as fun. Like, you don't have as many memories as you would cause . . . trying to be sober with a bunch of drunk people is not always fun. So I'm like, it's kind of . . . awkward.

DONNA: You're just more social that way, you know. For sure.

JANE: You meet new people, it's a bonding activity

HOLLY: . . . in college, it's more, I feel like, how you said, it's just a social bonding thing. (833-846)

They were also vulnerable to peer influence, not in an actively pressured way but in a more opportunistic context. Reasons to drink included choosing to drink simply if others are drinking or someone brings it to a party. They all agreed that drinking is conducive to socializing:

It kinda makes it, like, a little easier, makes everything more easygoing and everybody's more social. If you're just walking around talking to random people. I guess at a party and everybody were sober, somebody'd be like who are you,

why are you in my face, but you know, if everybody's drunk, nobody cares we're just gonna have a nice little conversation until somebody walks off. (725-726)

In this sense, drinking was described as a rite of passage, with Jane emphasizing later that trying alcohol was something she had to do, even though she was terrified of the outcome:

the first time I ever drank and I was so scared, like, they had to, like, force it on me. Like, I was *terrified*, I was like 'you don't understand, I am going to be drunk, I'm going to be on the floor, I'm, like, going to die!' And they were like, 'it's not that serious, just drink it.' (809-812)

However, their choices to drink were tempered by how they felt following a rare bad experience of overdoing it. For them, telling bad drinking stories was embarrassing and they were quick to talk about how they learned from their mistakes and were careful not to repeat them. There was no merit in sharing war stories or being out of control. The most serious consequences they had experienced were "drunk dialing" mom, being seen by others as foolish, and not feeling well at work the next day.

The last component of the social aspect of drinking is the context in which the low risk women chose to drink. They preferred to drink in small groups of familiar people and were most comfortable drinking with friends. They talked about enjoying girls' nights in small numbers and drinking with their departmental colleagues. They did share experiences of going out to clubs occasionally and had differing views on their utility. One stated that clubs can be exciting, flattering, and "random fun" if done on their own terms with a group of street-savvy women, using words like "strength," "confidence," and "power" (596-601) to describe how it made her feel. Another felt

uncomfortable being the object of leering men when she was alone, but going out with a group of males offered more protection.

Theme 3: Watching others drink for entertainment

The third theme culled from the low risk women's drinking experiences was that part of their fun was watching others drink for their own entertainment. Depending on the setting and how much those being observed had consumed, the women thought it was funny to follow the antics of the chosen "drunk chick." Indeed, this became the center of conversation among their group of friends for the evening. As the level of consumption rose, drinking was referred to by group members as "crazy," "random," and as "foolishness" (180), and the tone of judgment increased. Interestingly, the drinkers they usually watched for entertainment were women rather than men. Men somehow were expected to behave badly, perpetuating a 'boys will be boys' attitude, while drunk college women made spectacles out of themselves, matching the high risk group's term, "that girl." Several scenarios were described when the women would be out with a group of friends collectively amused by "that girl," the woman who had lost control and was behaving outrageously in a public place:

We went to a club, there was this one drunk girl. And she was the entertainment for the night 'cause um, where we were, there was this level you could sit down and then another level with maybe three stairs and then the dance floor. She tried to jump over the banister instead of taking the stairs. Ohhh . . . you know she made it, her landing was a little shaky. And um, then she would walk up to these random guys and start dancing for about five seconds, and then she would just fall on the floor and just lay there. And whoever she was just dancing with would just walk away—they didn't even help her up. And then she would lay on the floor for a little bit and then get up and go dance with someone else. (671-672)

However, their amusement was mitigated by a derision stemming from expectations of females that were being violated. They expected women “to carry ourselves in a certain way” (661) and assumed something bad, like a breakup, had been the catalyst for such unattractive behavior. They agreed that no one wanted to be the object of such scrutiny, saying “I don’t wanna be that girl . . . she aint’ doin’ nothing, she’s just messin’ up her life. Yeah, I don’t wanna be that girl” (822-823). They made a point to express that women should be held accountable for their actions even when intoxicated and not use alcohol as a scapegoat for their actions. It was clear that each of the low risk women were careful not to allow themselves to become “that girl.”

Theme 4: Coping

The participants in the low risk focus group talked about coping skills in healthier ways other than drinking. They reported using strategies for stress such as exercising, playing guitar, playing board games with friends, and writing poetry and songs. One described calling her mother when she was feeling stressed out and another talked about venting to friends as being therapeutic. The oldest group member did admit to occasionally relieving stress as a freshman by drinking after a bad week, signaling a developmental pattern to drinking, but reported she had not done that in years.

Gender Identity

The second broad area in which themes were organized and interpreted focused on how the women thought of themselves as women, growing up and currently within the college culture. Three focal points of self-concept, male role models, and messages about women are highlighted.

Theme 1: Self concept

The college women in the low risk focus group described themselves as tomboys and not very feminine by traditional societal standards. They each acknowledged they were not “girly” girls and that they don’t have a desire to be:

Well, I was actually a tomboy growing up. I hated to do girly stuff. I didn’t like to wear dresses, I hated the color pink, yellow, anything that was typically considered girly. So when I was growing up I was pushed really hard because I grew up with my brothers, my uncles and all my cousins were boys and I wanted to learn football and basketball and play um, video games. And my mom was like, ‘you know you can’t do that, you have to be careful, don’t hurt yourself.’ So I think it’s like, it kinda made me like tougher? (361-368)

Though they see themselves as women, it is not prominent in how they define their identity. Rather, they described traits such as being strong, mature, and independent, “putting my mark, like, equal as men” (324). Ironically, they were not concerned as much with appearance now but wondered whether their choices may limit their social circles; they said they might have to change their manners and appearance to be more “datable” or attractive later. Holly relayed how her more masculine habits, learned because of her preferred male acquaintances, were viewed as others as unattractive and Jane seconded this:

HOLLY: I was told a lot freshman year that a lot of people didn’t think they could approach me because maybe I cursed too much and or I had really nasty jokes or I did certain things because it’s like a *guy*, you’re around guys all the *time!*

JANE: You pick up their bad habits but when we do it, it’s like . . . kinda shocking to others.

HOLLY: Yeah! It seems like you’re I guess, unfeminine in a certain way, like you’re too much like a guy and makes you un-datable or makes you kinda less

attractive in that way. Um, yeah, it's kinda weird how that works. [laughs] (373-380)

Jane added another example of how her wardrobe considerations for the future made her feel her tomboyish days were numbered:

You know, I feel like I'm getting older and maybe it **is** time to look a little more feminine and stuff. I can't wear sweatpants forever so I have to figure it out soon . . . [laughs] . . . or within the next 2 years 'cause I'm wearing sweatpants to class. (392-395)

This perception indicated the internal conflict that the women faced between expressing themselves in the way they preferred and changing or transforming to match a more traditional gendered appearance and behavior for the purpose of eventually partnering in a heterosexual context.

Another aspect of their collective identity was that each of the women in the low risk group demonstrated confidence in her convictions regarding drinking. They were not as easily swayed by others, whether it was Donna's choices to stay sober rather than drinking and driving ("I don't mess with that") (268) or Holly's response to being pressured to take liquor shots ("I cannot and I won't do it if I am with people that I don't really know all too well or I'm in a public setting. I **will not** take shots!") (642-643). This represented another paradox, in that the women were more steadfast in their choices about drinking but were more self-conscious and willing to reconsider how they express their gender identity.

Theme 2: Presence of male role models

The women in the low risk group generally had more exposure to male influences in their lives and talked about these experiences during the interview. They reported experiencing more trusting and egalitarian relationships with men and having many male friends. One said, as a result of bullying from girls in school, “I tend to put more trust in men . . . rather than women, ‘cause I just think they are terrible friends to have” (368-369). The women portrayed themselves as equals educationally and socially speaking, and they did not initially voice differences between the sexes or endorse stereotypically gendered behaviors. One feature of the family upbringing of the low risk women was that they had more positive male role models in their lives. They illustrated meaningful relationships with their fathers, as when Jane described getting special protected treatment by her father as a girl, and they expressed a desire to be like their older brothers and cousins. Donna stated that she was pulled in two opposite directions since she was the middle of several siblings and often felt lost:

I have 2 older brothers that I just really look up to. So growing up I just wanted to be just like them. But then . . . I also have three younger sisters so when they came along, I was always—my sister was more feminine than me and I was the oldest sister, so I kinda felt like one of the boys but also one of the girls. . . . Well, I mean, in such a big family you sorta get lost in the middle anyway. So . . . [laughs at herself] That sounds so *sad!* But, I kinda don’t feel like a part of either, you know? (406-415)

Contrastingly, they did not mention their mothers or their maternal relationships except when their mothers were pushing them to wear more feminine clothes as a child.

Likewise, the only specific mention of having female friends in their social circles was

when Holly acknowledged that as a senior in her major, she realized she was surrounded by more females and she was intentionally seeking out time with them:

It just so happens that this year that I have had a lot more female friends, so I designate one day out of the week where's it's like, I can just hang out with them rather than the usual boys that are around. (451-454)

Intentionally socializing with other women was clearly a novel thing for Holly, and she expressed curiosity about how it would work out. Jane mostly referred to hanging out with “the guys,” often with her brother being included in that group, and Donna referred vaguely to her theatre friends, in no way distinguishing their sex or indicating its importance to her.

Theme 3: Messages about women

The last area in which the experiences and perceptions of gender identity was centered demonstrated the messages about women that the participants received and internalized. Some of these messages were direct, while others were more covert, and the expectations originated from multiple sources like parents, peers, and the media. Growing up, the mothers pushed them to dress in a more feminine fashion, and they were aware somehow that how they carried themselves was not acceptable. However, the women could not always decipher how they were expected to behave, as the messages were often contradictory. Jane explained that she was surrounded by male relatives and her sex was brought to her attention in confusing ways:

maybe because I hang around so many guys it *does* get brought to my attention so much that I'm a girl. 'Cause it's like . . . Sometimes I feel like I have the personality of a guy or something but then when my emotions start to show in

certain situations my brother might be like ‘stop being so *girly!*’ [laughs] Or I try to do things that they do and they’re like ‘you can’t, you’re a girl.’ And my room is pink and zebra, everything is pink. And my brother is like, that’s so *gay!* And I’m like, I’m a girl—how is that gay? He was like, ‘Ugh!’ So I think it gets brought to my attention a lot more. (328-335)

As a result, she was taught that certain things about being a “girl” were okay and others, like being emotional and decorating with pink, were not only gendered as female but were clearly contemptible. She also received instructions as to when it was okay to talk to a guy and when she had to wait for him to approach her. The messages the women heard differed slightly by family, as one’s father had very different rules for raising girls than for raising boys, while the other two experienced more gender neutral upbringing focused on individual merit. Jane felt like it was an advantage to be a female in her family because she got away with more, was punished less, and her brother was expected to be more independent than she was. However, this was not necessarily shared among the other members, as they felt they were fairly independent financially and educationally and had earned their privileges with hard work.

All of the low risk women agreed that they received contradictory messages at home and in school about being feminine. As illustrated earlier, adopting their male friends’ bad habits like cursing and telling nasty jokes was frowned upon and made them unapproachable by female friends. This pull to be two types of people at once was echoed by the other group members, especially in the heterosexual dating arena. They perceived that men wanted a fantasy, “Guys want a girl who can like, play video games, who can be cool, be one of the guys all the time, but still they’re supposed to be feminine on the outside” (386-387). Essentially, this fantasy woman depicted an ideal woman as laidback

and low maintenance in her personality, but managing to be sexy and attractive in an effortless way. Donna articulated this distinction well, “Cause you can act like a *dude*, but you know you gotta *look* like a girl” (399).

Lastly, the women had cultivated a notion that women were supposed to uphold a certain standard, especially in public, and that femininity equaled maturity. Women were expected to be in control and accountable for their actions in a way that did not often apply to their male counterparts:

Yeah, I can honestly say I’ll be the first person to point if a girl’s on the floor and she can’t get up. We’ll laugh at her cause she just got to that level. Guys not so much, and you’re just like, he’s just sloppy. (666-668)

There was no real explanation of this double standard or awareness of its origins, and further exploration of how these beliefs develop is warranted. Overall the low risk group members seemed concerned with image, impressions, self-control, and accountability. Going out in public brought the possibility of running into an authority figure, so being respectable and drinking very moderately was of utmost importance. Because the low risk women rarely, if ever, allowed themselves to be out of control in a drinking situation, they voiced very little empathy for those who did engage in these behaviors:

I guess something that I’ve noticed that really irritates me is when girls say, um, when you ask them ‘what did you do at this party’ and they say ‘oh I just did all this crazy stuff, I regret it but I had no *control*.’ That really irritates me. Because you, you **do** have **absolute** control over everything and when they try to use it as an excuse for things . . . just, uh, I don’t know how to describe it. It just really irks me.

How Experiences and Perceptions Influence Drinking

The last broad area about which the low risk focus group responded was how their experiences and perceptions and drinking and of being a college woman interface with one another and influence drinking choices. Several themes became apparent including resisting the stereotype of college women, seeing differences in drinking environments between men and women and in public and private spaces, and considering how to make drinking a positive experience by being smart and staying safe.

Theme 1: Resisting the college stereotype

It was very important to the Low Risk group to resist perpetuating the stereotype of the typical college woman and, therefore, to avoid engaging in risky drinking behaviors. They described the ideal college woman as someone who has a healthy social life and academics, someone who worked hard as opposed to a woman who concentrated on “foolishness.” Holly added,

I would say it’s just someone who could *balance* everything really well. Or they could really do well in all her courses but also partake in the college experience and be involved in the community and, um . . . trying to help others. (521-523)

This desire to counter the negative impression of college women stemmed from the perception that college women have earned a collective bad reputation—that women are expected to be manipulators and to behave badly. The women saw this as a direct result of young women branching out in the dating world, and its impact sat unfairly on the shoulders of those who did not deserve it. Jane offered an example that illustrated her point:

I think it's just because more so today we don't have the best reputation anymore . . . I feel like when I was in middle school and high school the guys were the players and they could do anything they wanted to, but as I started to get older those rules start to switch and you know, it's the girls dating a bunch of guys, and now it's like, oooh, girls can't be trusted, they're so conniving, and all that stuff, so . . . yeah, it's like there are starting to be more women who are cheating and just stuff like that. Basically one goes down, we *all* go down. (481-499)

This frustration could be related to the belief mentioned previously that the low risk drinkers had little tolerance for women using alcohol as an excuse or a “scapegoat” for bad behavior that they regretted.

Theme 2: Difference in drinking environments

The next theme addressed the differences between male and female drinking environments and public and private drinking environments. The consensus was that guys typically drink more, faster, and are more intent on getting drunk, as evidenced by the “blackout party” one of their male friends was throwing, whose sole purpose was to drink until they could no longer remember:

I don't think females—I mean, we like our cutesy martinis you know. We could be out just sipping on a nice drink but I think guys are more there to, like, booze it 'til you lose it! Um, I went to a ‘get out or black out party’, and that was um, that was exactly what the mindset was-get out or black out. (651-655)

The mere mention of this type of planned activity by men to get completely obliterated elicited disbelief, sighs, and head shakes from the other low risk drinking women, essentially communicating condemnation of such juvenile behavior and further separating them from the typical media-soaked image of college students.

Additionally, the low risk women commented on how guys would constantly monitor their drinking, asking for a “status report” on how many they had consumed, and implying that the women should be drinking more. This represented the idea of keeping up with the males, and the women shared several strategies to get around this direct confrontation including lying, sipping the same drink slowly, and ignoring them. It was clear that the women in the low risk category were not compelled to drink as much as their male counterparts, acknowledging that it was unthinkable and dangerous. They felt equal in other ways, like possessing knowledge about types of alcohol and being able to talk about it intelligently, and just the act of participating in the same drinking activities regardless of amount:

Maybe I am more equal when I *know* more about a drink? . . . I have random knowledge about beer even though I don't drink it. So we can have like a conversation about, like, what does it mix well with or how is this beer brewed or something like that? Not so much like *drinking* as much as them, but having the same kind of *knowledge* I guess as them. If they're like really big into wine then we can talk about that. . . . But I never *tried* to keep up—I know I can't. I'm itty bitty. I would *die*! [laughs] I would just get alcohol poisoning so, [laughs] I just don't even want to *go* there. (742-749)

Another difference emphasized by the participants illustrated how they feel about public places vs. smaller more private settings for drinking. The women agreed that the sex of the friendship group alone was not the only consideration when it came to drinking choices, but that being familiar with the group and trusting them accounted much more for whether or not the women felt comfortable drinking. The larger a group became, the less their familiarity with the members and the less chance they would drink. In a club

setting the legal drinking age was prohibitive, and the group member of age used this as an opportunity to try a new drink and learn more about what she liked.

Theme 3: Making the most of the college social experience

The last theme surfaced as words of wisdom from the group about how to gain the most positive experience from the drinking and social scene in college. First, drinking excessively does not have to be the centerpiece of the night and, practically speaking, is very expensive to maintain. Dancing and meeting new people is fun in its own right and can be an empowering confidence boost, as Donna espoused:

But I feel like the strength you find is the people you go with. Like if it's a ladies night and you go with a bunch of girls and you go through all these men but, in the end, it's like you know we're women, we had fun, and we behaved ourselves and now were leaving. So it's kind of a cool experience in that situation. (596-601)

Secondly, if they do choose to drink, safety is key. The women offered a list of universal rules that they had learned, very similar to the high risk women's guidelines. Examples are the typical information offered in an alcohol education class: Never put your cup down and leave it or accept a drink from a stranger, be aware of her surroundings because not everyone has her best interest at heart, don't go out alone, have a buddy system and stay with her group:

For me it's to stay with your girls. Like stay with your group [others say 'yeah, uh huh'] and if you notice there's someone you can't see in a crowd then, like, you go look for them. Never go to the bathroom alone. (625)

In conclusion, the Low Risk women were characterized by a grounded practicality that suggested the college social scene was both enjoyable and, although sometimes irritating to navigate, was manageable with some careful planning.

Individual Interview—High Risk

Due to scheduling difficulties, one of the women in the high risk group was unable to attend the focus group and agreed to be interviewed individually. Emily was a 19-year-old first year pre-nursing major who identified as American Indian/Native American. She lived with her boyfriend and came from a large family of eight siblings. She was extremely conscientious about her education, her grades, and her responsibilities in life. Her HGS score for GSA was 6, placing her above the group mean and above both focus groups with the highest score of all the participants. Her GSD score was 5, which was above the group mean but slightly lower than the high risk focus group. See Table 6 for the individual interview high risk themes.

Table 6. Individual Interview High Risk Themes

Experiences and Perceptions of Drinking	Gender Identity	Influence of Experiences on Drinking Choices
Weighing risks and benefits	Self-Concept	Identity change when alcohol is present
Vacillating between control/ lack of control	Traditional gender roles	Men are in control of drinking situations
Moderating, managing to achieve balance	Desire to be taken seriously	Contradictions
Role of stress		
Safety in community of women		

Corresponding to the focus groups, there were three broad areas in which the themes from her interview were interpreted: experiences and perceptions of drinking, descriptions of gender identity defined as how she thinks of herself as a college woman, and how these experiences and perceptions influence her drinking choices (see Table 6).

Drinking

Five themes related to the participant's experiences and perceptions of drinking were evident: weighing the risk and benefits of drinking, vacillating between control and lack of control, describing efforts at managing and moderating her drinking, the role that stress played in her drinking, and the safety and community of women friends.

Theme 1: Weighing risks and benefits

For Emily, much of the conversation about alcohol and its use was peppered with contemplating whether it was worth it to drink in certain contexts, at certain times, and with specific groups. She seemed to be preoccupied with gauging the utility of drinking, thus being in a state of internal conflict for the duration of the interview. She was conscious of what she was risking or could lose by making the choices to drink at the wrong time or by drinking excessively, but she constantly weighed the pros and cons of the experience. For her, drinking was an activity that required a lot of mental energy to negotiate positively:

But it's like, everything in my life is, like, [changes to serious tone] *serious* and it needs to be contained. Like I have a great boyfriend, I'm going to a great school, I have a great apartment, like, I have a wonderful job . . . you know, it's just like, drinking can really influence me losing these things. Like I could be really ugly to [boyfriends' name] and if he gets sick of that, I could lose my job if I'm not doing my job. And, you know, if I'm making bad grades I won't get into my major. Like, that is my entire life so it really has to be moderated the best I can. It's just

learning to deal with not getting to drink all the time, or just a little bit. Cause it's now that I don't drink all the time, even if I drink a *little* bit, I have a buzz. And then I can't, like, focus on things and I did this so I could focus more so now I can't, like, drink at all. Or I'd have to like, start all the way over and it's just—it is not that worth it to me. (260-270)

Besides the possibility of losing her job if she showed up hung-over, jeopardizing her grades, and damaging her relationships, she also had to consider the dangers of drinking and driving even more than the average college woman because she paid for her own car and would be stuck without transportation to her job if she wrecked it.

Emily also painted a dark and sinister picture of the clubbing scene for college women, calling the men there “hawks” and expecting to be groped and preyed upon if she went. She expressed feelings of danger and discomfort being at clubs, regardless of whether she was consuming alcohol, and only attended when she was “dragged” there by friends to dance. Emily did not like the attention she received there nor did she think the assumptions men made about women's sexual intentions were fair. Subsequently, this led to her conclusion that going to a club was not worth it to her. When asked why she or her friends continued to go, she seemed resigned to the perception that that's where everyone goes and there was nothing else to do.

The risks and benefits comparison also was applied to high school drinking vs. college drinking. She stated that it was riskier to drink in college than it was in high school and elaborated to give examples about how cops give out tickets because they know college students will be in certain public places, whereas in high school everyone drank at home. Her options about where to drink were limited in college because getting caught could have more serious effects on her, and it produced stress for her just thinking

about it. She even mentioned researching the financial and educational impact of getting a DUI, acknowledging that a legal problem could keep her from getting into her chosen field.

Despite all of the potential hazards of drinking, Emily portrayed drinking as “drinking is kinda like a central thing with anyone I’ve been around, that’s what we do” (293-294), and something she generally enjoys with her friends and boyfriend. There were positive social benefits to drinking to unwind, to relax, connect with friends, and playing drinking games for fun, and her friends were more likely to come over if alcohol was present:

They’re usually positive. Like, it’s really nice to get together with my friends and just, like, have a few drinks and, like, catch up with each other. It’s like, we’re all really busy and we’re all really stressed out and um, so, it’s hard to find people who just wanna hang out and like, *not* drink. So it’s kinda like, heeyy—Me and my boyfriend, we like, invite a lot of people just to come over and they only way they’re gonna come over is if we’re, like, having a HUGE party.

She reported consuming 3-6 drinks on average one or two times a week, said she liked the feeling of being buzzed, and intended to continue her lifestyle as long as she could contain her grades and keep her job. The benefits, though less numerous, were given more weight than the risks.

Theme 2: Vacillating between control/lack of control

Given the myriad of risks described above and about which Emily was well versed and her choice to continue drinking, when she drank she often referred to attempts to limit herself. Using words like contain, careful, and control, it was vital for her to regulate herself and keep herself in check. Ironically, the volume of effort she expended

on this endeavor did not always match the outcome. She often found herself at the opposite end of the continuum and characterized drinking too much as something that sneaked up on her when she didn't plan to drink that much and then it "just happened." She was constantly pulled in different directions such as when she knew she had work to do and planned to go and drink very little and by the end of the night she found she had overdone it:

If I'm like, well oh, I don't have work the next day—cause I also, like, work, and I'll be like let's go over to so and so's house where they're having friends over and then we'll go and I'll be, like, yeah you know, I'm just gonna have a *few* drinks and that *never* happens because I don't get to go out much and so it's kinda like, all at once and I'm all excited that we're hanging out and the next thing you know I'm like sick! And I'm just like, oh my god *what* have I done? [laughs] I've ruined everything, I had things to do today and so, and now I'm hung-over. (52-59)

Though she verbalized both a need to contain herself and an expectation of perfection when it came to grades, she struggled with a lack of control and illustrated an all or nothing pattern of alcohol consumption, vacillating from abstinence when she had too many responsibilities or assignments to often being unable to stop drinking once she started. She explained that this was due, in part, to the fact that she used to drink more often but had less in a sitting, and now she felt like she so rarely had time to go out that when she did get the chance, she made up for lost time and drank too much at once:

we're all, like, talking and socializing and you don't realize how much you're drinking and then since—I guess it's also being in college and I'm not used to—I moderate a lot of my drinking so I still drink like I used to drink all the time and so it's like, I can't do that. And I haven't quite met a middle yet. (62-66)

Though she recognized this pattern of building up and then blowing out, she had not mastered how to contain it and had found no middle ground. In fact, sometimes her impulsive “itch” got the best of her, as she pointed out:

Sometimes I get this, like, an itch, like I wanna go out and DO something. I’m just like, I’m so tired of *not* doing anything. And I’ll just be like, I wanna go out and I don’t care who we go out with—I’ll call everyone in my phone book. (282-284)

Theme 3: Moderate, monitor, manage to achieve balance

Emily always considered the optimal factors for a positive drinking experience before going out and attempted to be responsible. She experimented with ways to manage her alcohol intake and moderate her behavior and her choices, but the successful solution seemed to elude her. In one example she shared, she brought wine to a party rather than beer or liquor so she would not drink as much, but relayed how she ended up playing drinking games and losing control:

we don’t usually play drinking games with wine. It’s just—everyone else was drinking beer or something and I was like, well you know, I brought wine so I wouldn’t drink as much and I *drank the whole bottle* and I was like, okay, that did not work. (105-108)

Drinking was an activity to be carefully monitored so that she could achieve a balanced outcome and not jeopardize her academic success or relationships. Part of her motivation in this effort was because she paid for college herself and had invested a great deal of time and money in her studies. She spent ample time planning ahead to avoid consequences, such as drinking when her work load decreased rather than in the middle

of the semester, and arranging for a designated driver, such as her boyfriend, so she would not have the stress of driving home and being intoxicated. Her planning even included managing others' drinking, making transportation arrangements for her friends to get home as well, often volunteering to pick them up and take them home after a party. She described the ideal circumstances when she thought it would be okay to go out and drink as one in which her plans the next day did not include working, she was with people she knew who understood her commitments, she drank a type of alcohol that did was not too sweet and, subsequently, not go down too easily, and she had a safe ride home.

Two other areas in which drinking experiences could be managed to get a positive outcome were the timing of drinking and recognizing the kind of mood she was in to avoid confrontation. She defined the timing of drinking as to be optimal when she arrived late to a party so she would not be drinking as long:

. . . like timing, when I get there can make it negative. Like if I get there at the very beginning we're all like, gonna end up drinking more. And it's like, well, you know, let's wait and let them do their thing and everything for about three hours and *then* we'll go, and me and my boyfriend will split a 6-pack we can leave. And we had a good night and we didn't get in a fight, we got home—we get to sleep in OUR bed, like, things like that. (191-196)

Emily also showed awareness about how much more emotionally raw she was when she was drinking, getting irritated more easily and becoming someone who was “riled up” and “sensitive.” She reported that she and her boyfriend have learned how to not take the other person's comments so seriously when they are drinking, saying ““she's just been

drinking’, you know, like she’s not trying to be hateful” (212). They looked out for each other and intervened when the other one was reaching emotional overload.

Theme 4: The role of stress

The three previous themes all seem to be linked to an overarching cycle for Emily: the vicious cycle of the role of stress in her drinking experiences and choices. She expected a lot from herself and talked about drinking to relieve the pressure she felt to succeed. In turn, this drinking caused more stress for her by putting her behind in her work. She took her responsibilities very seriously and wanted to perform well but she would “lose a day” after heavy drinking that she could not afford. For instance, she was anxious about numerous aspects of her life—her grades, her job, and paying for her school and her car:

I worked hard enough to be able to get this job and I’m ruining—if she would come in and see how hung-over I was and stuff like that, I would be, like, in so much trouble. So that’s just like, it’s a lot of risk with it, like, it would stress me out even more, which makes me drink more by the time I get to drink, and things like that. I don’t wanna do anything that will mess that up . . . like, my major’s serious, and not many people get into it, and like, it’s just like, everything I do has to be, like, planned out and I’ll say—this is no joke—don’t you sit here and tell me that my B is okay because you’re gonna give me a nervous breakdown right now. (247-259)

As a result, she knew it was a slippery slope to begin drinking when she felt overwhelmed and it would only be a short term solution:

I try not to drink often when I have a lot to do cause it actually makes me *more* stressed out cause, cause, like, I can’t be hung over and like, I’ve got things to do and stuff like that. But at the same time, because I know that I’m so stressed out I know that if I start drinking I’m just gonna keep drinking cause I’m like, oh, I’m *so* stressed out! (43-49)

For Emily, she was caught in a Catch 22—the perception that alcohol was the cause of and a temporary solution to her problems.

Theme 5: Safety within small community of women

The last theme in which Emily described her drinking experiences highlighted her preferred context of drinking in groups of women with whom she felt connected. She tended to have more positive drinking experiences with women in general and expressed that she would rather drink with women from her academic major because they understood the importance of balance:

Like, if I'm hanging out with my friends from home, and they don't have as much responsibility as I do. So then it becomes a negative experience because they don't have anything to do the next day so really wanna drink very heavily and, but usually if I just hang out with my girlfriends from my nursing program they have just as much responsibility as I do and they only wanna drink just to be social.
(182-187)

This safety and comfort level she felt with groups of women was in contrast to describing drinking experiences with her friends back home who had fewer responsibilities than she did, did not attend college, and could not understand the pressures she felt to do well. Because those friends were more carefree, they influenced her to drink more and stay out later.

Gender Identity

The second broad area in which the interview themes were organized focused on gender identity, defined as how Emily thought of herself both growing up and currently in the context of being a college woman. Three themes surfaced in her responses: her

self-concept, traditional gender roles, including messages she received and sent about being a woman, and her desire to be taken seriously as a woman.

Theme 1: Self concept

Emily identified with being a woman in a positive way and described life as a college woman as being “fun” and “not as . . . restrained.” She found freedom and independence in dressing the way she wanted, was aware of her appearance, and liked to express herself in traditionally feminine ways. She mentioned the fun of dressing up and relating to other women to whom fashion was important. Interestingly, she saw herself as very much in solidarity with other college woman, describing them as “the same” as her and wanting, collectively, similar things in life:

Like, we’re all just like, we all collectively, we, like, dress the same and we all—we like to have, like, we dress nice and it’s more, like feminine, and stuff. We wear dresses and heels and stuff like that. So we could really—I could stop and ask any girl like, hey! I really like your shoes, like where’d you get that? And they’re like, Oh my God, you like my shoes? Yeah! Would love to tell you where I got them. Just like, very—we’re very, like, collective. I could really talk to anybody about anything that’s just, like, baseline girl, you know? . . . we can all just, like, identify with each other. We’re here to go to school. (372-385)

Linguistically, she also uses the term “girl” more often than female or woman, both in referring to herself and to other college women, which could indicate her developmental stage of being caught between adolescent and adult worlds and expectations.

Though it was unclear how much this affected her own expectations, Emily gave examples of other peoples’ perceptions of college women as “less serious” and, therefore, they don’t expect her to succeed academically. She clearly made education a priority for

herself and was determined to have a future career despite how friends “back home” perceived her:

I have to, like, **be on point** with everything and people don't really expect that. They're like, Emily, you've grown up a lot and I'm like yeah, well, you know, I kind of had to. Like, it was a choice, I could've stayed at home it's just, going off to college. I want to be like independent and take care of myself and do things like that. (647-651)

Emily thought of herself as a woman with goals who was going to be somebody and advance in the world, but she faced doubts from those around her.

Theme 2: Traditional gender roles

Emily's upbringing was very traditionally female in the sense that she was expected to be a caretaker for her younger siblings, was taught domestic chores, and was not expected to find employment outside her home. These roles were stated as a given, not explicitly outlined by her parents or grandparents.

so I wasn't exactly, like, *told* about what a woman is supposed to do. It was just kind of like, my grandma has six kids, my mom has six kids, like, my dad has—which some of them are with my mom but he has five kids total. You know, I have like, eight brothers and sisters and just like a big family. And I've always been—had responsibility to help take care of my brothers and sisters, like it wasn't, you know *asked* or anything. This is what you do—you take care of your brothers and sisters. You need to help clean the house, you know. It was never, when are you gonna get a job? You know, it was like you help clean up something? Can you do this for your brother or just stuff like that. Very domestic, you know . . . because I was just one of the girls. (321-333)

She did not necessarily reject this role or express disagreement with it but rather reported it neutrally as how it was and said she had not given it much thought before now. She was also taught, primarily by her mother, to be careful with her appearance as a female.

Specifically, she was not supposed to dress flashy or do things that might cause her to get attention and she had to always be aware of how others perceived her. As soon as she began developing breasts, her mother warned her about wearing bikini bathing suits:

. . . my mom was like, you don't need that attention, you're not supposed to, like, show yourself like that, and like, get this attention from people that like, you may not want their attention but they're gonna give it to you anyways. (346-348)

A component of the traditional gender role expectations for Emily was the messages she received about how women are viewed and should behave and what their appearance conveyed to others. When she went out in public, she expressed that she had to “dress nice” and “be presentable” because she knew people would be looking at her. However, she illustrated the mixed messages she received because she knew she could not dress too nice when she was out with a guy because it would send the message to others that she was available and not really serious about her companion. Somehow Emily received the messages that it was a woman's responsibility to control the attention she received from others, especially from men. This meant she had to plan for and alter the way she dressed in anticipation that she would get unwanted attention:

Well I guess how I display myself as a female I can't control who gives me attention so I need to, like, try to *not* get as much as possible, you know, and then like, in my own way, and do whatever I need to do to select people who I want the attention from. Like, not getting attention from, like, *everybody* . . . you know, with how I dress, I guess. (357-361)

These messages about what it meant to be a woman and how appearance and behavior factored into this also were widespread from her peers in high school. She felt labeled

and judged by other women in high school who did not know her well and rejected the rampant gossip around her based solely on rumors and ill-informed perceptions. She felt any woman who was not conforming to the traditionally feminine group norm was labeled unfairly as a “slut” or other derogatory category.

Theme 3: Desire to be taken seriously

There was a distinct feeling that Emily expressed in various forms repeatedly throughout the interview that presented itself in both social and academics domains. Emily had a desire to be taken more seriously than she was and seemed to want to gain respect from those around her. Socially among her friends and in the more public social scenes, she often experienced feeling unheard and powerless. Sometimes this manifested in the peer pressure of her friends’ drinking gatherings when they wanted her to make choices that she reluctantly went along with. Examples ranged from simple desires, like Emily preferring to play board games instead of drinking games but being resigned to drinking because that’s what everyone else wanted.

Another example occurred when she returned home to visit with her former high school friends. They usually influenced her to drink more heavily and stay out later because they had fewer responsibilities and less to lose than Emily. She was susceptible to her peers’ expectations because she used to be more like them and, even though she had matured and changed, they expected her to be the same as high school. A more serious instance of feeling powerless and unheard was depicted in the clubs when she was at the mercy of the male predators who were groping her and she wanted them to stop:

people just walk by and just, like, *grope* you and like, FULL on, like no shame. Like, I just grabbed your boobs and you're like, 'Whoaaa, like, excuse you!' And they're just like 'Why are you upset?' And I'll be like, 'cause you just groped me! What are you, like, not even'—like, some guys will do, like, the walk and grab, that's what they like to do, but other people are like, FULL ON, like, all over you, and you're like, okay you have to *stop* and they wanna get *mad* like when you ask them to stop they're very like, *hostile*, you know. I just can't deal with that. There's too many people, it's not regulated enough, like people are just in there. Like I feel in *danger*. I don't even know why . . . it gets, like, wall-to-wall packed I'll be like, can people see me, and like, protect me? Can you *see* me? But once it gets like, packed around, like, 12 or so, and you're at elbows with people. It's NOT fun at all, like, you don't know who's touching you, you don't know who that person is, like, everyone's trying to buy you drinks, and it's *weird*. (448-463)

Though she didn't like the experience she felt like she could not control it or change it.

Her statement summarized her resignation to the club scene reality: "You sign up for a lot when you go."

Likewise, in the academic realm, she took her program seriously and desired to be seen as a serious student. She was working hard to get into a selective program and knew she had to maintain her grades. It was evident that she took pride in her accomplishments and wanted others to respect her as a student as well as a college woman:

being a woman there's a lot of negative things that are expected for us to do. Like maybe not be as successful or just come here and get a degree and, like, design this to not be taken as seriously. Like I have plenty of people that ask me what my degree is and they're like, oh, nursing? Oh, that's cute. You know? You're a girl, you know, so of course you're gonna be a nurse. You know, stuff like that. It's one of the hardest programs to get into at my university. (682-688)

She felt unheard and unrecognized for being able to get into a selective program because others perceived the field as traditionally feminine. Emily admitted that she rebelled in high school but now she was ready to work hard and "take college more seriously," and

she prioritized her studies and her job. It is noteworthy that this concentration on school did not come naturally or easily to her, as she portrayed with various stories in which she periodically abstained from drinking until she could no longer stand it and then she drank heavily and regretted the impact it might have on her academics.

How Experiences and Perceptions Influence Drinking

The final area in which the participant's responses were organized focused on how her experiences and perceptions of drinking and of herself as a college woman influence her drinking choices. The analysis yielded three main themes describing identity changes when alcohol is present, men being in control of drinking situations, and the contradictions inherent in what she wants for herself as opposed to the reality of her experiences.

Theme 1: Identity change when alcohol is present

Emily described several examples of times when drinking alcohol impacted not only how she thought of herself but how others perceived her and what assumptions they made about who she is and what she represents. This concept was applied to intimate relationships with her boyfriend as well as globally in public drinking scenes. For example, in more familiar relationships, she described how she can get more sensitive and become mean and irritable when she and her boyfriend are drinking and she does not feel like her usual responsible, conscientious self. She had some awareness about this and stated, "why don't you just take me home! Just pick me up and put me in the car and take me home 'cause I am ridiculous!!" (224-226). This identity change also pertained to how

others perceived her in public places such as clubs or bars. She linked assumptions about women's sexuality when they are drinking based on how a woman was dressed, stating:

if you go out to the bar or to the club, they let women in for free , you know, so you ARE what's making the bar, like, you are important . . . or I have to figure out, do I wanna wear that dress cause then everyone's gonna think, like, that maybe I'm not serious with my boyfriend and they're gonna *grope* me and try to buy me drinks and hit on me. (433-440)

Emily stated this notion of implied, inherent sexuality matter-of-factly, that a man could tell what her intentions were and what her sexual availability was solely on what kind of dress she wore. Additionally, the way a woman dressed in a place that serves alcohol could even be a sign of a woman's commitment level to the partner accompanying her: dress nice but not *too* sexy. Subsequently, she knew she had to be very careful not to make the wrong apparel choice and send the wrong message.

A more global aspect of how other's perceptions of her influenced her drinking is when she acknowledged the stereotype of a college woman perpetuated by society. She thought others expected her to be reckless and behave badly, so she felt the responsibility to look out for herself. Her experience was that others were relentlessly trying to get her drunk, even when she made it clear it was not her intention:

It makes me, like, really be careful with how I drink because people expect me to be easier, and for me to be more reckless and things like that, because I am a college woman and that's just how I'm expected to be, like, oh, you know, she's finally cutting loose. It's like, Emily's gonna start drinking and you know, I have to be a lot more careful, like, who I surround myself with and things like that and just really make sure that I'm safe. And just be like well, you know, they expect this from me and I don't even know if they're like waiting for me to get, like, drunk because they just expect me to. And even if I didn't plan on drinking that much, it's like, 'oh, well, you know, hey! like, let me give you a drink, you know,

let me do something.’ And that can be whether I’m at, like, my friend’s house or if we go to the bar or something. It’ll just be, like, let me buy you a drink, let me get you something. Like No, you know, I’m fine, I don’t want anything to drink. Come on, let me buy you a drink. You know, I really don’t, you know, I’m fine. Thank you. (607-619)

Emily’s take on these dynamics produced another internal conflict. She expressed frustration with this nuisance, contextualizing this reality of negotiating male attention as part being a “college girl,” and she then later illustrated empathy for the other (male) perspective, saying that could understand how men could misread signs that a woman may inadvertently give:

being a college girl you’re associated with—you wanna experience all these new things so plenty of guys are gonna look at you and hope that they are that next experience. You know, so you really can’t get that frustrated with these people cause that’s like, how you portrayed yourself. (714-716)

Theme 2: Men are in control in drinking situations

The next theme that explained the participant’s connections between experiences of drinking and experiences of gender identity was that men tended to be the ones in control in drinking situations. When describing the differences between women drinking together and co-ed drinking situations, Emily described that men are more likely to initiate drinking games, and when they do play games the men are more focused on winning and are more competitive.

. . . if there’s boys and girls there, it’s BEER. I mean, beer is there. And we play a lot—guys like to play a lot more games. They like to be, like, competitive with each other, so we’ll end up drinking more just because we’re playing so many games. Like I play games with like, the girls too, but we get sidetracked, and then

we're just like, talking and stuff like that. So it's not like—but it's constantly like (deepens her voice) Who's up next? who's playing? Like, let's play! (554-560)

Plus, she said men like when the women join in the competition, and they get “sparked” when you beat them. They were more attracted and interested in women who could keep up, so it was reinforcing to women who wanted that attention from men in a hetero-normative environment. Likewise, it was fun for Emily to beat them and prove them wrong:

Ummmm, well, so I'm actually really good at some of the games. So it's definitely fun to like, play with them because they get riled up. . . . I'm like, no, I've actually played enough of these and most of the time, I'm not even half as drunk as you are, so I always, like, even it out and it's really fun to see that in that kind of drinking situation. (565-570)

Emily perceived that even her guy friends whom she had known for a while were only interested in talking with her at parties long enough to check in and see if she was still with her boyfriend. Once they found out they were still together and happy, the male friends would disappear. She expressed frustration, though, that the men had the power to exclude her or pursue her at their discretion. In describing social situations that did not involve drinking games, the guys were not interested in talking to women and would “bro together,” meaning that they would only talk to other guys and exclude women from the conversation, especially in what she considered stereotypically masculine domains like sports teams. As a result, the men controlled the attention they gave, and the women learned to participate in drinking games if they wanted the attention.

In larger and more public contexts, men generally were depicted as always on the prowl and always pursuing women, and a nuisance which she was forced to tolerate.

Emily described them as predators not to be trusted, and cautioned women to be on guard:

You don't wanna meet these people! They're like HAWKS! They came to this club to like, get you, like, you know, take you home. They don't wanna like, let you meet all their friends. They're not like, 'hey you seem really nice, let's hang out, let's go to this party that I know.' You know—whatever. They're like 'hey-you're pretty. Like, let's go back to my place.' They don't play. They're like, Hey! You danced with me for like 30 seconds, so she likes me . . . she's a woman, she's here. She came here for a particular reason. . . . and it's not like you have a chance to like, explain yourself. Course it's not like anyone cares. (498-508)

Emily's angst towards, confusion about, and aggravation with men was palpable, and she found solace in her longtime relationship with her boyfriend. She referred to her relationship as “amazing” and “happy” and its familiarity was a source of relief and comfort to her in social circles.

Theme 3: Contradictions

The last theme concerning how drinking and gender identity influence each other was the idea of contradictions present in what Emily stated she wanted for herself and what often happened in reality. She spoke about all of the expectations she had for college, including the freedom to befriend who she wanted without the judgment of high school and freedom to stay up late, go to clubs, and socialize. However, the rude awakening for her was that clubs were dangerous and degrading, and staying up late didn't help her persist in school and succeed. All these things she thought would be great in college she found disappointing, and she and her friends had to learn the hard way:

it's like, you finally go and do it and it's not that great and you've been looking so forward to it. And even though you don't like it, you still go. And like, why do you put yourself through that? Like, that's awful. (484-487)

She posed this question to herself referring to the social drinking scene and, when probed, she then answered it by shrugging her shoulders and saying that's where college women have to go to socialize and meet new people. Her attitude displayed a helplessness and resignation that she was stuck.

Emily also exhibited and illustrated contradictions about gender roles and expectations. She liked to express her femininity and be girly, playing the part of the stereotypical woman who likes to shop, wear dresses and heels, and swap fashion tips with other women. Simultaneously, she was also trying to be somebody, go to college, get a degree, and be successful all the while with an air of proving to those around her she is more than just her appearance. She felt the pressure to perform in certain ways as a woman but seemed to be questioning those expectations and going against the grain in her own quiet way.

One contradiction active in Emily's lifestyle about which she seemed least aware was the difference between how she wanted to be perceived academically and the drinking choices that negated that intended image. As stated previously, she wanted to be independent and taken seriously as a student, and though she was encouraged to go to college she perceived that she was not expected to actually stay and graduate:

Yeah, while you're here they think it's great, but I don't feel like people ever think I'm gonna finish. Even when I talk to my friends and stuff like that, it's almost like they think I'm cute that I'm in college. That I think that I'm gonna

finish. Like college is hard. Yeah, tell me about it. I *go*, like go to college, I *know*. (702-706)

However, she sabotaged her own desire to appear studious by continuing to engage in a pattern of all-or-nothing drinking, lack of control, and failed moderation. These ongoing choices essentially portrayed a more typical college party girl persona that was opposite from her intentions. At the end of the interview, she began to verbalize this realization:

. . . having a negative connotation so when you're drinking you're just like, feeding into these things. That people . . . even though people can say, like, they're not against women, you make decisions or you think things in particular that—the underlying things like, oh, they're a girl. Like, I guess being aware that what you're doing really does reflect on you and how people are going to treat you. (689-694)

Individual Interview—Low Risk

The ninth participant in the study was a low risk drinker who was interviewed individually due to scheduling conflicts with the focus group time. “Casey” was a 20-year-old Caucasian third year student who lived at home with her parents. She was an English major and reported being in a relationship with an older boyfriend who had a military background. Her HGS score on GSA was 4.57, below the overall group mean, and GSD was 3.14, not only placing her below the group mean but scoring the lowest of all of the participants. Casey often responded with shrugs and “I don’t know” to the questions initially, sometimes scoffing in a sarcastic way at what she may have considered a ridiculous concept. However, with further probes and in the latter half of the interview, she would go back and add to her previous answers. The three broad areas in which the themes are organized, mirroring the other focus groups and interview, are her

experiences and perceptions of drinking, how she thinks of herself as a woman, and how these experiences and perceptions influence her choice to drink.

Table 7. Individual Interview Low Risk Themes

Experiences and Perceptions of Drinking	Gender Identity	Influence of Experiences on Drinking Choices
Social aspect of drinking	Neutral self-concept	The world is dangerous
Fear of alcohol	Male role models	Men who drink are to be feared
Personal confidence as protection	Expectations of woman	

Drinking

Three themes related to Casey's experience and perceptions of drinking included how she viewed alcohol as primarily a social experience, her fears of what could happen when alcohol was present, and how her personal confidence as a protective factor against drinking.

Theme 1: Social factors of drinking

Casey's overall attitude towards the subject of alcohol and drinking indicated that she viewed alcohol as a "normal thing," a social phenomenon, and part of having a good time. As an example of how alcohol fits into the life of a college student, she shared a picture that her father painted for her of his being in England in which the students sat around drinking casually while they worked on their academics:

It's positive. Yeah, I would just consider that, like, part of having a good time. Like my dad has always taught me that it is more of a social thing rather than just to obliterate yourself. Like more just like spending time with people. Like in England, he said people—students would be just be in the library and be drinking a beer and studying like all the time, that's just what they do, it's just a normal thing. (44-48)

She viewed drinking as no “big deal” and something to be handled in a low key, laidback manner. Casey made a point to say she never had more than two drinks and had never felt the urge to get “shitfaced.” Her nonchalant tone and slow reflections punctuated her take it or leave it attitude, and she said the only time she drank was when she was with her boyfriend. Even then, the two of them only drink if alcohol happens to be in the house:

. . . I don't know, I don't really feel like I, I don't make the conscious decision, like, Oh my god I need a drink. Like it's more like, my boyfriend will be like, hey you wanna drink tonight? And I'll be like, yeah, okay. Like it's not like, man I wanna have some alcohol right now. . . . Yeah, like if he doesn't have it we don't go out and get it, we just like, ok, whatever. Then we just drink soda or something. (78-93)

The only time she reported having been drunk, in fact, was when her boyfriend made a mixed drink with more vodka than usual and she inadvertently drank it too fast. As a result, she did not like the feeling of being drunk and quickly added that she was aware that “sounded crazy” because it was atypical for a college student. She continued to say the stereotype of a college partier does not fit for her “with parties every night and getting drunk.” Her family taught her to approach drinking sensibly and carefully with very practical tips, which included balancing eating and drinking and making sure to have water. Her experiences of drinking occurred also with her father in public venues like

coffee bars and lunch places, where she described the atmosphere as calm and respectable:

Well, I do drink with my dad sometimes, yeah. We actually, uh,—there's a place that we go . . . and we actually just hang out there. I'll usually get lunch and like, bring it to the—it's like a coffee place/bar. And so we drink a little there. . . . I guess being out now, like, with my dad at the coffee bar—it's kind of a different place, though, because it's not just a bar. It's more of like a really, uh, a nice calming place I guess and even like at night it doesn't get, like, rowdy or anything. It's more of like a social thing. Like my dad has always taught me that it's more of just like, to drink among friends. (96-99, 302-306)

Ironically, much of her exposure to alcohol was in the form of stories relayed by others who had had drinking escapades rather than from her own familiarity with consumption.

Theme 2: Fear of alcohol

The next aspect of drinking that Casey described shed more light on her limited personal encounters with alcohol in social scenes. She admitted that she had never been to a college party and did not go clubbing out of fear of what could happen there. In this part of the interview, she used the words “scared” and scary” repeatedly:

in 3 years here I've never been to a college party. It's kinda sad. [sigh] I don't know, I just don't wanna be stuck in a situation, like stuck in certain situations, if you know what I mean. Like, drinking too much, guys taking advantage of me. Like I mean, I would take my boyfriend but before I was going out with him, like I would be scared. (112-118)

When asked to explore further, she illustrated the effect the media had on her perceptions by stating “yeah, cause crazy stuff happens at college parties! Or so I've seen . . . on TV . . . I mean, I don't know if it actually happens cause I've never *been* there, but . . .” Her adoption of the media's portrayal of the stereotypical college student binge drinker as

reality in effect perpetuated the stereotype and impacted her behavior and belief that the world was a dangerous place.

To reinforce her fears, her only experience in a public place with alcohol had been negative. She shared a bad memory at a bar when she was 15 with a stranger she described as “scary” and “random”:

Um, I wasn't actually drinking then, because I wasn't, like, legal at that point. But there was one time when I went to a bar with my dad. Well it was actually a pool, a pool place, like, billiards and a bar and it was kinda scary cause I was just playing pool and this random drunk guy just came up and put his arm around me and was saying, like, “hey baby” and I was, like, get *off* me right now. I didn't like that . . . and I was affected. (295-302)

Casey described liking to be in control and clearly not enjoying the feeling of being drunk and out of control the one time she experienced it firsthand. She heeded the advice of many people in her life who drank excessively and had problems and, though she initially claimed they did not affect her, she realized they were still influencing her. One example was the lessons she learned from her sister who Casey said liked to drink a lot:

She really enjoys being drunk, and I guess for some people that's fine, but um, as long as you can handle the repercussions the next day. I mean, like hangovers and stuff. . . . None of my friends are really the clubbing type. My *sister* has gone out to a club but I didn't go with her. My sister is 27, she'll be 28. She's actually pregnant and she's having a boy in September—so, I mean, she's not drinking for a while. [laughs] Um, but she actually does kinda—before she was pregnant she went out *a lot*. . . . But she has not had an effect on me cause I was always I'm *not* gonna be like that. It's an example of what *not* to do. So I guess she's still technically teaching me. [laughs] (311-319)

Acknowledging this subtle influence, she added:

Right, and like I was at my best friend's 21st birthday party a while ago. And she was like, um, she was like totally like, *gone*, she was like laying down in the middle of the bar trying to go to sleep. I was like, *whoa!* Wow, I'm never drinking *that* much. (321-324)

The last influential person who tried to warn her of the danger associated with alcohol overuse was her father. Casey very much admired and related to her father, and he often told her about his college drinking days in a fraternity that led to negative consequences:

he told me he was in a frat when he was in college. And that he kinda, he dropped out, um, well, he either dropped out or flunked out. He *told* me he dropped out, but I don't know . . . um but he was in a frat and he said all they ever did was drink. He said he had multiple occasions when he was worshipping the porcelain god, as they would call it, so he said he didn't want me to end up like that, so . . . he was always saying that, if I'm ever at a party and I don't want to drive and don't wanna get one of my friends to drive, call him. He's like 'I don't care if it's three in the morning, call me! (104-111)

As a result of her fears, experiences, and vicarious learning about excessive drinking, Casey reported she did not drink much and did not drink often. When she did drink, she did so primarily with her boyfriend because she trusted him. Interestingly, because he was in the military and was used to drinking a lot, she peppered her conversation with fascination that he drank so much and drank faster than she could ever imagine doing. She used words like "amazed" and admitted she was a little intimidated by his drinking abilities.

Theme 3: Personal confidence

A consistent theme that surfaced throughout the interview with Casey is that she possessed a personal confidence about her drinking choices that appeared unshakeable. When asked about times in which she ever felt pressured to drink more or was unsuccessful setting a limit, she scoffed at the idea that someone would be so easily swayed. Though she had experienced feeling intoxicated on a couple of occasions, she attributed that to someone making a drink too strong, not her purposeful attempt to get drunk. She verbalized her practical approach to drinking here: “Every time I set out and say I’m gonna drink this slow, and so I *do* and so . . . I pretty much meet my goals every time” (349-350). Not only was she able to resist, but she stated that her friends typically set goals and stick to them as well. Her take-it-or-leave-it manner was displayed in this response:

Yeah, like I’ve never been to any um, place where I’ve seen somebody totally drunk and been like ‘yeah, that looks like an awesome time!’ Yeah, you know, unless I really can’t tell. Some people, some people kinda hide it really well, like, when they’re intoxicated so I guess I can’t tell sometimes. But really crazy and rowdy people, I’m like, yeah, I really don’t wanna be like that. I want to be, like, happy and content but not like, brain cells fried. (328-333)

Besides a boyfriend and a best friend, Casey did not talk much about having many friends or socializing often, but rather, joining groups was something that she hoped to do one day. She referred to the fact that she had never attended a college party as sad, but her ability to be independent also showed she was somehow unaffected by her peers. She seemed to be secure with who she was and was adamant that she was unwilling to drink more and change for anyone else:

so I don't, yeah, I don't feel like I have to drink a certain amount of drinks to, like, feel good about myself, I guess. Um, uh, I never really feel like I *have* to drink anything. Like, if I don't *want* to drink anything I'm *not* gonna drink anything. (440-442)

Gender Identity

The second broad area in which Casey's responses focused was how she thought of herself as a woman and as a college student. Themes included her self-concept, her role models, and expectations of women.

Theme 1: Neutral self-concept

When the HGS was introduced and she completed the brief questionnaire, she pointed out several items in which she shook her head and said that she didn't really think of herself as a woman first and foremost. It was difficult for her to decide how to answer the scale and she asked to take out the questionnaire and explain:

I would define myself in terms like nice, and caring, not like *I'm a girl*. That doesn't really—I feel like this doesn't really describe that much. Like 'being a female is a critical part of how I see myself,' I feel like that's kind of like the same thing. Like I don't really—I mean, I see myself as a—I'm *aware* that I'm a woman but, like, I don't think about it all the time. I don't register it in my brain like, I don't have to remind myself that *yes*, I'm a *girl!* (131-140)

Casey made it clear that did not think of herself as traditionally feminine—did not define herself in those terms and it was not a critical part of how she saw herself. When asked how she would describe herself, she used word like “nice” and “caring” and added concrete attributes such as eye color and skin color. She did not wear makeup or wear her hair in a specific style, and it was unclear from her affect if her beliefs and self-

expressions were an intentional rejection of femininity, a gender neutral stance, or general apathy concerning how she was perceived.

When Casey was asked about some of the direct and indirect messages she received growing up regarding what it meant to be female, she relayed stories of being told by her peers that she could not play certain games or wear certain types of clothes because she was a girl. She remembered thinking it was unfair and not liking or understanding the rules. In another instance, she went shopping with her mother as a child and wanted to buy particular shoes and clothes, but her mother said they were not for girls and did not allow Casey to get them.

I remember going shoe shopping with my mom and wanting to get guys' shoes and she was like, nope, these are *guy* shoes and you have to wear these cause they're *girl* shoes. . . . But I have guy shoes now cause some of the girl shoes don't fit me because I have big feet. But yeah, when I was younger, 'why do I have to wear these heels?' Not like *young* young, but like high school. . . . My mom is kinda religious so every time we went to church, I would have to dress up and look nice. I complained about that for a long time; walking around in heels tends to hurt. (188-198)

As a result, when she became an adult and could make decisions for herself about how she dressed, she chose men's shoes and comfortable clothes rather than styling herself for how she appeared to others.

Casey was reluctant to make gender distinctions or stereotypes and said phrases multiple times like "*I hate* saying this cause I feel like I'm just stereotyping more," even when she clearly had shared some differences in how she experienced men and women. It was almost as if she was apologizing for the reality because she did not believe gender should be dichotomous. She also was more isolated from the social realities of college

life as a woman because she lived with her parents and was not financially independent. Spending most of her time with her boyfriend and having never had a college roommate or lived in a setting in which some of these gendered distinctions were perhaps more pronounced, her sense of herself as an individual and as a woman seemed more diffused.

Theme 2: Role models

The next theme evident in how Casey viewed herself as a woman related to the influential relationships she had in her life and, essentially, who her role models were for how to conduct herself. It was significant that she had much more male influence in her life than female influence. She illustrated her drinking experiences with her father and said she was closer to him. Her father taught her how to drink responsibly and gave her tips:

My dad has told me countless times over and over again, you have to eat and then drink and then eat again. And then have some water with it too. He's always—he's like, giving me tips on how to drink, like, responsibly. Which is really helpful! [laughs] (99-102)

The other prominent relationship she mentioned throughout the interview was with her boyfriend. Casey generally talked about him in positive terms, saying he calmed her down when she was stressed, she trusted him, and appreciated that he did not expect her to drink as much as he did:

Yeah, so like he's like, 'you're never gonna be able to drink as much as I am, so please don't try if you don't want to.' I'm like ok! So he like, lays down that barrier right away so at least it relieves a little bit of the stress.

She made a point to distinguish her boyfriend who she trusted from other guys who are “scary.”

Counter to her descriptions of positive relationships with her father and her boyfriend, Casey’s responses suggested a lack of positive female role models to whom she could relate and from whom she could learn. She only briefly referenced ties with other women, including a passing nod to her unnamed best friend, her sister, and her mother. Incidentally, all of these women were engaging in behaviors or held opinions about which Casey did not agree or approve. For example, her mother did to allow her to buy clothes she thought were inappropriate for a “girl” and she vaguely implied her older sister had problems with drinking. As mentioned previously, Casey’s only other comments about her mother were that her mom was religious and expected her to dress up at church and look nice and that her mother was more uptight. Subsequently, that may be an indication of why she tended to “hang out” with her father more often.

Theme 3: Expectations of women

The last theme related to Casey’s gender identity was defined as expectations of women either held by others or by her. Casey identified stress about academic success as one of the few locations of gender distinctions. Not only did she feel stressed frequently but she stated “Stress is being part of a college woman.” This belief was due, in part, to her perception that women are expected to get good grades and perform better than men:

I feel like there are some stereotypes where women—where some *people*—not like everyone, that’s probably a big generalization—think women have to, like, get straight As all the time and that’s kinda *stressful* on us. Um, my mom is kind of like that cause, she, like, got straight As and I’m like, well I’m not you, mom! (248-252)

Again, her negative connotations about stress came from her mother's expectations, while practical advice about drinking came from dad. Another area in which Casey expressed gender differences was in how people were viewed when they drink. In describing groups of women out drinking, she said they can get annoying and offered that as a reason not to get drunk:

I don't like people getting drunk because—and some of them get annoying too which makes you not want to hang out with them anymore. Which is another reason I don't get drunk because I want people to like me, I guess, I don't know. Um, it's what college life is like for a woman. (210-213)

It is noteworthy that men who drank were described as scary and dangerous whereas women who drank were annoying.

Lastly, in a rare moment in which she was not as reserved or self-conscious, Casey displayed a subtle disapproving opinion about the way women dress and act around men in a “slutty” way, resulting in men “getting the wrong idea.” She voiced, “I just feel like a woman's body is . . . precious, and they should value it and not try to throw it away to some guy” (221-222). Her values did not align with the media's image of how a college woman should act, behave, or dress, and she seemed to pride herself on her individuality.

How Experiences and Perceptions Influence Drinking

The most prominent tone of Casey's interview was the concept that the world was dangerous and men who drank were to be feared. She cautioned that “women have to be more careful about where they go alone” because of “binge drinking,” implying that men are inherently dangerous when they consume alcohol. Her belief was accentuated by her

admission that she did not really ever drink with any men beside her boyfriend so her fear prohibited her from having her own real life co-ed drinking experiences. She continued in her thought process about the stereotype of college girls going out to clubs, saying guys look for drunk girls there and therefore, she cannot go out without someone making that assumption about her:

every time they go out they get *drunk*, every time they go clubbing they get *drunk*. And every time . . . so guys go to clubs specifically to pick up college women. Which is probably another reason why I haven't gone clubbing cause then I—yeah. Even though I don't know if I'd be drinking, even if I wasn't drunk I still wouldn't want to go because guys would expect me to, like, put out. (456–461)

Contrastingly, her expectation for herself was very pragmatic in that she perceived herself as a “light drinker” and therefore, didn't feel the need to drink much. She reasoned:

um, so thinking that I just don't drink as much as I guess I would if I was a heavy drinker. I don't have anything that I feel like I have to live up to, so I just set the standard kind of low. (436-440)

In conclusion, Casey depicted the ideal college woman using the term “perfect balance” often, referring to having an active social life and successful academics:

But *I* still feel stressed. It could also be the way you were brought up though. Like, I know one of my friends got a 95 and she was *so* upset about it because her parents were always pushing her to get A+A+A+, like, *every time*. And I kinda feel like people who are like that are more likely to just not *have* a social life because they are studying so hard and kinda be upset later in life because they don't have any friends. [laughs] But yeah, so I feel like studying too much is kind of a problem, so like the perfect balance of, like, academics and social life would be like the perfect college woman. (240, 281-283)

Summary

The findings of this qualitative study encompass four sets of themes based on 2 focus groups and 2 individual interviews of college aged women drinkers. Though there was some overlap and similarity between the focus groups and the individual interviews and the High Risk and Low Risk groups, there were distinct voices and experiences that emerged, each adding her piece of the puzzle of her lived experience of drinking and gender identity. Although this study was qualitative in nature, the division of the participants into two groups based on drinking risk level and the administration of the HGS created the possibility of analyzing the results in a limited quantitative analysis. Generally speaking, the sample size of nine participants is not large enough to detect significance or to garner a substantial effect size. I ran a *t*-test for independent samples to determine if the differences in HGS scores were due to chance (null hypothesis) or possibly were connected to drinking risk level (alternate hypothesis; see Table 8). The HGS has 2 subscales, one measuring GSA and one measuring GSD. On the *t*-test for GSA, there was no significant difference ($p = .594$) detected between the mean score of the High Risk group (5.46) and the mean score of the Low Risk group (5.23). However, on the GSD subscale, the *t*-test between the mean score for the High Risk group (5.37) and the mean of the Low Risk group (3.97) drinking risk level was significant ($F(1,7) = 13.113$, $p = .008$) with a relatively large effect size .65 and a power of .87. This finding adds support to the qualitative differences found in the themes from these two groups regarding how college women view gender identity, shining a spotlight on the

counseling, training, and programming implications for working with college women drinkers and laying the groundwork for future research.

Table 8. Independent Samples *t*-tests

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power
Gender Self-Acceptance	.558	7	.594	.043	.077
Gender Self-Definition	3.621	7	.008	.652	.872

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of drinking and gender identity, specifically what it means to be a college woman from the voice of college women who identified as drinkers. Secondly, the author hoped to explore the connection between these experiences and perceptions and the college women's drinking choices. Though there are similarities across all participants regarding their drinking experiences and their perceptions of gender identity, distinct differences between these experiences and perceptions were evident between high risk drinkers and low risk drinkers. In this chapter, these similarities and contrasts will be discussed in light of the previous research, implications for counselors and counselor educators will be highlighted, limitations of the study and its utility will be addressed, and areas for future research will be recommended.

Summary of Findings

Among the nine college drinkers who participated in this study, there were five women who were classified as High Risk drinkers based on a preliminary AUDIT score of 7 or greater and four Low Risk drinkers who scored 6 or below on the AUDIT. Their respective interviews yielded accounts of drinking experiences and perceptions of how they thought of themselves as women that formed both commonalities and significant

variations. Though there were some more widespread experiences of drinking shared by all of the women, a distinct association between drinking risk level and gender identity emerged that informed and influenced the women's drinking choices and indicates new directions for understanding college women's drinking.

Similarities between High and Low Risk Drinkers

Common themes surfaced between high risk group and low risk group participants regarding how they experienced drinking within the college context. Alcohol education, guidelines for staying safe, the social phenomenon of drinking in college, and differences between drinking with men and drinking with women were examples of how drinking was experienced across all participants. First, it is widely known that alcohol education efforts have been implemented earlier and more extensively and consistently with this generation of college students than previous generations (NIAAA, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002), and the general knowledge of these women bore that out. Both groups knew basic alcohol education concerning what affects Blood Alcohol Concentration, like height and weight, as well as general amounts of alcohol that males and females could consume that would produce intoxication. They knew to eat before drinking to lower impairment and knew that lack of sleep affected increased impairment rates. The women also were aware that mixing different types of alcohol could produce a negative outcome and should be avoided as well. Other protective strategies to promote health and safety that were part of the women's drinking consideration were to avoid taking shots, to sip drinks slowly, and to drink water along with alcohol. The prominence of these protective tactics mirrors conclusions from Benton and colleagues (2004) and

Leiva (2007) who found that college women tend to utilize several protective strategies when drinking.

Socially, there existed a universal set of safety guidelines that all of the women followed to avoid danger and negative consequences. These included staying with one's group, not going out alone, not accepting a drink from a "random guy," being on one's guard in public places, and having a buddy with whom they partnered to look after each other. The fact that the women could readily cite all of these alcohol education facts but still continued to drink and experience consequences points to a missing link between alcohol education programs and lowering high risk drinking. This is not new information, but lends further support to the NIAAA's (2002, 2007) Call to Action research report that education alone is a necessary but not sufficient element and must be supplemented by more comprehensive substance abuse interventions on college campuses to affect behaviors and outcomes and reduce drinking rates.

Next, the women agreed that drinking in college was a social phenomenon that was inevitably part of the college experience and was to be expected. They reported that alcohol was used to lower inhibitions and get to know people because they did not feel comfortable or secure approaching people sober to meet and talk with them. This explanation of college drinking as a rite of passage seemed to be rooted in the overall culture of college life that had been perpetuated by peers, family, and media messages and was similar to the themes found in other qualitative research on college women's experiences of drinking (Leiva, 2007; Linowski, 2004; Russett, 2008; Smith & Berger, 2010). Another area which the women described similarly was that drinking was a

developmental and maturational process that changed over time as one aged and acquired more responsibilities. When the women first came to college and drank, they did not know what they could handle and more often drank to excess, but as they learned more about themselves and drinking, their amounts and frequencies changed. The seniors in the groups both said they used to drink more but now drink to enjoy it and for pleasure, whereas the younger members of the groups drank because that was what someone was supposed to do in college. In both focus group interviews, the perception surfaced that drinking decreased after college students turned 21 and somehow lost its “taboo” appeal. Additionally, as academics got more demanding the women could not drink as often due to internships, working, and looming graduation requirements.

Another set of similar perceptions and experiences among the High Risk and Low Risk drinkers addressed drinking in the gender-specific context of being a college woman. All of the women voiced their preference to drink in safe small groups of people who were familiar to them, in part due to the added vulnerability and danger of being a woman in the college drinking culture. The larger the party and the more unknown the surroundings, the perception was that the less safe the women were. Furthermore, when the women drank in gatherings with men, the guys tended to play more drinking games and encouraged the women to drink more than they usually did. Taking shots and drinking more rapidly often accompanied co-ed drinking and, in comparison, drinking with women was less pressured and more focused on connection than competition. Interestingly, these high risk behaviors matched Leila’s (2007) and Russett’s (2008) findings in which women affiliated with Greek organizations participated in drinking to

get drunk. In this study, however, the emergence of similar themes provides evidence that high risk patterns are not solely the domain of Greeks or athletes but of general college student gatherings. Regardless of drinking risk level, the participants all illustrated mixed messages they received about being college women that created tension, such as being the cool girl who can keep up with the guys vs. avoiding being “that girl” and staying in control. They felt pressured to participate in drinking games to be perceived as attractive but were aware that a line could not be crossed or the women's image would be tainted. As one participant articulated, “you can act like a dude but you gotta look like a girl.”

Lastly, the women in this study voiced an awareness that, as college women, they were being watched, scrutinized, judged, and, stereotypically, were expected to act badly and fulfill some sort of media-created role of bad girl. This constant and inevitable inspection occurred by other men, by their peers, by each other, and by society as a whole. Possibly due to this intense scrutiny and exacerbated by the contradicting expectations for college women, all of the participants mentioned stress often in their respective lives as part of being a college woman. Coping with this stress seemed to be a constant battle for each of them and, ironically, drinking was culturally viewed as a temporary escape from this battle. In a description of the ideal college woman, the word “balance” surfaced repeatedly as the women struggled to achieve their goals. As they described it, balance referred to maintaining equal parts academics and social life as essential for a college woman, indicating that college women had to do it all: be educated, have a career, have a fun social life, work, and be responsible.

Contrasts between High and Low Risk Drinkers

There also were numerous differences between perceptions and experiences of drinking and gender identity by high risk drinkers compared to low risk drinkers. Regarding drinking in general, the participants who were in the high risk group felt like they would be missing out if they did not drink, whereas the low risk drinkers voiced a take-it-or-leave-it attitude with alcohol. The low risk drinkers were able to abstain arbitrarily but the high risk drinkers could not conceive of going to a party sober. High risk drinkers described constantly attempting to control or monitor their drinking but achieved little success, especially earlier in college. They reported situations in which they were unable to stop with just one or two drinks, even when they had recently experienced a negative consequence and said they would not repeat their drinking behavior. This impulsivity could be characterized by the popular Britney Spear's song "Oops! I did it again" (2000) and supported Smith and Berger's (2010) 3R Relational Ritual Reinforcement model of High Risk Drinking in which engaging in high risk drinking behaviors continued as part of a ritual. On the other end of the continuum, Low Risk drinkers displayed more sensible choices, actually controlled their drinking, and were much more intentional with their choices and plans. They exhibited a more comprehensive array of decision making abilities. Likewise, the High Risk drinking women seemed more susceptible to peers' influence to drink more than they had originally planned and to succumb to riskier behaviors while the Low Risk drinkers tended to outsmart those around them who encouraged them to drink more and pushed

them to take shots of alcohol. The low risk drinkers even shared tips on how to pretend to drink to ward off negative influences.

The last main difference between High Risk and Low Risk drinkers was how they experienced and perceived instances of excessive drinking among women. For the women in the high risk group, telling drinking stories built camaraderie and helped the women relate to one another. They laughed when sharing mistakes and reassured each other that they had all “been there.” Several previous qualitative researchers found similar patterns of storytelling and bonding as a function of young women’s drinking (Leiva, 2007, Linowski, 2004, MacNeela & Bredin, 2008; Russett, 2008, Smith & Berger, 2010). The women in this study even helped minimize the impact that drinking had on how others viewed them, assuming that everyone else was drunk and, therefore, that no one really remembered their escapades anyway. For the Low Risk drinkers in this study, a night of drinking to excess for them was an event met with shame and told with lowered voices and pained expressions. They used words like “embarrassing” and phrases such as they “learned their lesson.” There was no pride or merit in commiserating around bad experiences of drinking. Indeed, getting drunk for the low risk group was described as “uncomfortable,” “scary,” and “foolish.” Developing that concept a step further, the High Risk drinkers admitted to having been out of control, thus ensuring the widely known label of “that girl” and, though they feigned remorse, they treated becoming “that girl” like a predictable notch in the college woman’s belt. Essentially, the High Risk drinkers treated having this experience as something every woman did at least once in her college drinking career. The Low Risk drinkers treated “that girl” as a form of

entertainment when they go out and were alternately amused and dismayed that a woman would allow herself to lose control and thus mar her reputation. The Low Risk women explained that though they had never personally felt what it was like, they definitely remembered the High Risk drinkers they encounter in clubs, bars, and parties and learned from them what not to do. This memory is contrary to the hopes of the High Risk women, who tended to think their escapades were quickly forgotten by others.

Gender Identity

For the purposes of this study, Gender Identity has been defined as how the women think of themselves as women. The Hoffman Gender Scale was introduced as a catalyst during the focus groups and interviews to encourage the women to think about their gender identity. The scale has two subscales that measure Gender Self-Acceptance (GSA) and Gender Self Definition (GSD). Gender Self-Acceptance is defined as how comfortable a female is with her gender and Gender Self Definition measures how important being a female is to someone. Regarding the experiences and perceptions of how the women thought of themselves as college women, there were vast differences evident between the High Risk Drinkers and the Low Risk drinkers such as how they perceived men and women as being different, what being a college woman meant, and how important it was for them to identify as women.

The women in the High Risk group readily differentiated between males and females in terms of drinking styles, personality, and gendered expectations. For example, they strongly endorsed positive attributes of women as strong, educated, and capable and said they loved being women compared to “boys” who were less mature and more

“hotheaded.” The contradiction in this is that most of the high risk women were in relationships with boyfriends, and they apparently conceptualized two categories of guys—boyfriends and bad guys. In contrast, the Low Risk group had more exposure to male friends and influences and did not view men as less than women. It was evident they respected their fathers, brothers, and male friends and, overall, had positive relationships with them. As a result of this respect for men in general, the Low Risk drinkers were much more hesitant initially to respond to questions about differences between men and women, verbalizing that making these distinctions would be perpetuating stereotypes. In fact, occasionally they would begin articulating a difference between how men and women were expected to behave and then would stop and argue the other side, offering the caveat that they know women and men who behaved similarly. The Low Risk women’s perceptions of men also did not include getting hit on or preyed upon like the High Risk group described, and the Low Risk group collectively painted a picture of more natural and comfortable relationships with men.

Part of the most exceptional chasm between the how the High Risk group viewed themselves compared to the Low Risk group was that the high risk drinkers identified strongly with being female, all had strong positive female role models, and loved what it meant to them to be women. Quantitatively, they scored significantly higher on the HGS Gender Self Definition than the Low Risk group. Ironically, for a group of independent assertive women, their definition of being a woman put a premium on traditional feminine appearance and attractiveness to men. The energy in the room changed dramatically as the High Risk women described themselves as “girly,” endorsing habits

like shopping and tanning and describing the maintenance of having feminine hair, nails, clothes, and shoes. One participant deemed this the “hot girl’s disguise” and felt a sense of accomplishment after transforming herself into someone else when she went out. Ideologically, they mirrored feminist principles but socially and outwardly they could be viewed as stereotypically feminine. Aware of this paradox, they insisted that this behavior was what they chose and not a result of feeling pressured to conform to what society expected of them as women.

Diverging from this view of a college woman, the Low Risk group was aware of certain standards for outward feminine appearance but they were not as concerned with actual compliance with those rules. They gave several examples of others pressuring them to dress more “like a girl”, but they thought of themselves as tomboys and unfeminine. Participants talked about preferring to wear sweatpants, cursing, and telling dirty jokes. They did not see femaleness or femininity as a prominent part of their identity, which is supported by their lower scores on the HGS Gender Self Definition subscale. They generally accepted themselves as women and there was no significant difference in the mean Gender Self-Acceptance scores of the two risk levels. In fact, they tended to shy away from gender distinctions and described themselves by physical attributes like having brown hair and personality traits like being “nice” and “caring.” This finding is in contrast to previous studies by Piane and Safer (2008) and Peralta and colleagues (2010), who suggested that those women who drank more heavily endorsed more masculine traits and those who drank less were more traditionally feminine. The difference in these previous outcomes could be attributed to the way gender identity was

defined and measured, as previous studies utilized older trait-based and personality-based gender measures that, as mentioned in previous chapters, may be outdated. What was termed in previous studies as masculine traits may be what the High Risk drinkers in this study referred to as being a strong independent woman. This study measured gender identity with the Hoffman Gender Scale (Hoffman, et al.,2000) as Gender Self-Definition and Gender Self-Acceptance, representing a more fluid and individualized perspective.

Overall, the High Risk drinkers seemed to buy into a more stereotypical media image of what a college woman should look like and, according to films, commercials, and television portrayals, what a college woman should act like. Particularly, the assumption of sexuality and sexual availability that has been subsumed with the way women dress in public had an impact on the women's perceptions. They were aware of being leered at and were even groped on occasion, but this violation was systemic and, therefore, perceived as an inevitable part of what a woman had to endure if she wanted to go out. However, the Low Risk avoided stereotypical behavior and seemed to minimize their sexual appearance so people didn't get the wrong impression. The Low Risk group also voiced frustration that they were victims of a collective bad reputation of college women who exhibited outrageous behavior in public places. One participant shook her head, saying if "one goes down, we all go down."

The High Risk drinkers tried to fulfill an image of an ideal woman who has it all—be studious, be a good student, be social and involved, be attractive, take pride in one's appearance, and drinking to develop a rich and fulfilling social life. More investigation is imperative to more fully understand the complex ways in which gender

identity and drinking choices interface. The culture of gendered expectations certainly appears to play a role in influencing the high risk drinkers—the more they buy into the gendered distinctions, the more they feel the need to keep up and compete with the perceived male dominant group who controlled the social scene.

One of the High Risk drinkers who was interviewed individually exhibited characteristics similar to those that have been outlined for first generation college students. For example, “negotiating multiple identities” and constantly ruminating about academic performance have been framed as common to first generation students (Orbe, 2004). What confounds this identity struggle even more is that, though she looked Caucasian, Emily reported she is American Indian/Native American. Her race/ethnicity added another layer of complexity to the intersecting cultures she weaves in and out of daily, and the nature of this experience for her was untouched in the interview. Emily talked incessantly about the academic pressure she felt to perform and achieve, especially in light of the fact that others “back home” did not understand that she wanted to become somebody. Another hallmark of first generation college students is that they often do not persist past their second year (Stieha, 2010). Similarly, Emily described being encouraged to go to college but was also not expected to finish and graduate, and this pressure to prove herself actually contributed to her drinking choices as a way to cope with stress. Though parental education level was not part of the demographic questionnaire and the research team can only speculate if Emily’s narrative could indeed be attributed to status as a first generation college student, the connection between female

first generation college students and drinking risk level has not been investigated and warrants further study.

Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

One of the most illuminating findings of this study is the connection between how a woman thinks of herself and her drinking risk level. Not only did the qualitative dialogue highlight these differences quite clearly but the quantitative analysis, though tentatively applied to a small sample, was significantly different on a measure of Gender Self Definition between the High Risk and Low Risk groups. Counselors who work with college students and substance abuse would be prudent to consider how a college woman thinks of herself—her gender identity—to effectively assess the motivations underlying her drinking choices. These differences in women’s experiences, motivations, and needs have been previously researched by Covington (2008) and Covington and Surrey (1997) and make sense in light of Feminist Theory expounded upon in previous chapters. They purported that the unique system of violence, sexuality, and the effects of isolation in which the women lived contributed to women’s substance abuse and that interventions must be based on mutuality, support, and empowerment from women to women. Borrowing concepts from this research, addressing substance abuse on college campuses with women could be conducted in a similar manner. Small group process could be a viable, powerful, and recommended modality of college drinking intervention because it provides a more intimate forum in which to discuss the complex gender related experiences that influence these women’s drinking choices. In the larger context of social expectations, the women may feel drowned out and, in effect, powerless, but in small

groups each woman might better be provided with a forum in which she could find her voice and strength by sharing with others.

Though counselors and counselor educators tend to focus on individual intervention, they must be aware that these college women are living in a culture steeped in broader messages than they can control, and individual choices may be a reaction to feeling helpless in light of these social norms. For example, the women all agreed that drinking in college was a rite of passage and it was inevitably part of the college experience, stating, “it’s gonna happen so you might as well plan for it!” It begs the question, why does it persist, with all of the dangers the women readily shared? The reality that we have built this expectation into our culture must be addressed on many levels, and counselors and counselor educators have an opportunity to advocate for change on a systemic level as well as an obligation to understand the development of the college student in light of mixed parent, family, peer, and media messages that have been pervasive and permissive of high risk drinking. Substance abuse and addiction courses in counseling programs must incorporate a gender lens to effectively teach counselors in training how to assess clients and provide services for women who may present with problem drinking. To be more effective, supervisors and counselors providing substance abuse treatment of college aged women would be wise to tailor their efforts for specific groups of women in the community, school, or in light of the unique campus culture in which they are steeped. We can no longer point to only the Greek affiliated shared culture of high risk drinking, but perhaps the campus wide shared culture or, even on an even broader scale, the college student culture.

College women's gender identity, specifically gender self-acceptance and gender self-definition, can be addressed through curriculum infusion and programming to help build a culture of confidence, competence, and safety for college women. Herein lies a unique opportunity for Academic Affairs and Student Affairs partnerships in which Counseling faculty could collaborate with Women's and Gender Studies, Public Health departments, Women's Centers, and Student Health and Counseling Centers to address these intersections. Such bridge building programs have been forged by Mayhew, Caldwell, and Hournigan (2008) in first year university experience courses and through Alcohol and Drug Education offices in social norms campaigns for specifically college women (Caldwell, 2007) that have shown promise in reducing drinking rates.

One notable dynamic present during the interviews and pervasive in the experiences of drinking on a college campus could be useful specifically for College Counselors and Student Affairs Professionals. There was a general social anxiety emanating from the participants about how to meet people and belong on a college campus. This translated into the college women being convinced that they could not meet people and socialize without the presence of alcohol. This lived experience of their social reality may indicate a lack of security in the larger social context with one's identity and self-concept as a college student. Repeatedly throughout the dialogue, the respondents illustrated instances in which even the mere presence of alcohol, regardless of actual consumption, laid the groundwork for a person feeling comfortable enough to introduce herself to someone. It was as if, in the context of the college social environment, somehow alcohol gave people permission to approach one another, whereas to be sober

and walk up to someone to initiate conversation was unacceptable. There are myriad opportunities to engage campus personnel on many levels in assessing, addressing, and changing their unique college social environment to promote healthier norms.

A final implication for counselors acknowledges that women do not live in a vacuum wherein mixed messages regarding sexuality and drinking spontaneously sprout. The men around them and in their lives play a vital role in creating attitude change and, thus, behavioral change in understanding how drinking and gender identity interface. Men's understanding of femininity and masculinity and the subsequent choices they make influence the women's experiences and perceptions. I would be remiss in suggesting tailored programming only to women. Interventions could include addressing male responsibility and exploration of creating a healthier societal culture and, perhaps, campus culture that promotes equality, respect, and more congruent gender images and expectations. Indeed, some existing programs can serve as the springboard for more male focused intervention such as Men Can Stop Rape (retrieved at <http://www.mencanstoprape.org>), a national program that encourages males to speak out and get involved in creating healthier conceptions of masculinity and who recently sponsored a Healthy Masculinity Summit. Similarly, WISE Guys, (retrieved at <http://www.wiseguysnc.org>), an award winning North Carolina based program for male teenagers was developed to promote responsibility about sexual decision making and healthy communication and relationships Resources from the Media Education Foundation like the DVDs *Tough Guise* (Jhally, 1999) and *Generation M* (Keith, 2008) specifically acknowledge the violence in current gender images and aim to foster healthy

masculinity. These materials are available and can be easily incorporated into programming discussions and small group processing with college men to help educate them and align them as advocates for creating healthier norms and behaviors regarding drinking and gender identity.

Limitations of the Study

By focusing on a smaller number of participants, the questions of validity and the ability to generalize inescapably surface. However, researchers have tried for the past 20 years to apply broad norms and patterns to address college drinking, and it has not decreased women's drinking. In fact, most of the literature I have reviewed lists as a limitation or a suggestion that more research needs to be conducted with women as their own group. For other qualitative methodologies, Hill et al. (2005) recommended a sample size of 8-12 when employing consensual qualitative research, and Smith and Osborn (2008) posited that even smaller samples could be recruited for IPA due to its idiographic nature, suggesting a case study of 1 or a beginning sample of 3 participants to fully immerse oneself in their world and accurately interpret meaning from their experiences. Although the minimum number of participants desired was met for this study, it was puzzling that only nine volunteers contacted the researcher to participate in the study despite recruitment in 20 courses and extensive efforts to protect the confidentiality of underage drinkers. Perhaps the topic of drinking was intimidating for the women or the incentives were not adequate for the time commitment involved.

Another aspect of this study that could have affected the results was the site selection. This culture of this particular university appeared to be very different from

some of the other sites in the previous qualitative literature. It was located in a mid-sized city in a southern state and some of the factors that have been associated with high risk drinking such as athletic team status and high rates of Greek life involvement were not prominent at this university. There is no football team and a small percentage of Greek affiliation, which could impact the overall drinking culture of this site. From the interviews with these participants as well as anecdotal information of other students, the site is not known as a party school. Though one participant in the High Risk group was a member of a sorority, there were no members of an athletic teams, and I intentionally did not recruit small groups of sorority women or women's athletic teams, as these shared cultures have already been associated with higher risk drinking patterns.

The focus group format may have inhibited more in-depth exploration than conducting individual interviews. Perhaps the women did not share the entirety of their experiences because they were in a group of unfamiliar peers. Self-reported drinking behaviors could be a potential concern regarding the initial AUDIT screening to determine High Risk vs. Low Risk drinking level. However, the amounts and frequency of drinking shared in the focus groups matched the general risk level of the group in which the women were placed. There were no women who, after hearing about their alcohol consumption patterns and habits, appeared to have been in the wrong group. In fact, after each focus group interview was completed, I reviewed the AUDIT scores that the participants entered online and most of the high risk drinkers had underreported their risk level initially.

This study focused solely on those college students who identified as female and as drinkers and did not consider for comparison the drinking and gendered experiences of college men or nondrinking women. By leaving out men, the question remains if women have been given the freedom to expand their conceptions of themselves as gendered, have men experienced a shift in gender identity as well? After all, college women do not live in a vacuum and their male counterparts have been exposed to the same media, peer, and family messages that broaden gender identity on a continuum. How would men answer these questions and is there a connection between how men view themselves as college men and their respective drinking risk levels? In the same vein, nondrinking women's perspectives were omitted and could offer more information on the interface between gender identity and drinking choices.

Due to the narrow scope of this study, the interview protocol was necessarily limited, and variables which also could have provided information about college women's drinking were not addressed. Two groups whose voices may have been lost were those who identify as transgendered and those who were lesbian or bisexual. Since the questions did not explore or distinguish sexual orientation of participants and the demographic questionnaire listed binary option of female and male, those college women may not have responded in the same manner. Subsequently, complex ways in which their gender identity is composed in light of drinking remains untapped. Each of these factors could impact how a college woman views herself and views drinking choices and is fodder for future research.

Another limitation is that because some of these gender identity processes that have evolved are subtle and unconscious, some of the college women may not have realized they had been influenced by a social structure that was more inherently egalitarian. Therefore, the college females being interviewed may have had difficulty giving voice to how thinking of themselves as female has impacted certain behaviors such as drinking. This assumption was supported by several instances during the interviews in which one or more of the women responded to a question with “I don’t know, I’ve never really thought about that.” It is possible that providing the questions ahead of time would have yielded richer, more in-depth reflections.

Researcher Bias

As a substance abuse educator and counselor, I have absorbed several years of anecdotal experiences while listening to college women talk about high risk drinking. From those experiences, I have grown to suspect that there is a connection between how college females view themselves as gendered and how much they drink. Countless college females have used phrases in conversation with me such as “I have to prove myself to the guys” and “my friends and I do what we want—it’s the 21st century!” The more liberated in her gender identity, the more a college female seems to feel comfortable with drinking in a way that was previously relegated to male college students. Most college females I have encountered describe themselves as independent, determined, and nonconformist, believing that she makes decisions on her own without being influenced by outside forces. In fact, this belief in self-sufficiency is a hallmark of the Millennial generation who has more information at their fingertips and readily

research topics on the internet for personal use. That is, they report making decisions for themselves independent of outside voices or norms. However, I believe that the “third person effect” is prominently in play here in which college females easily recognize how everyone around them is impacted but do not see the malleability of their personal perceptions. The media plays as much of a role in influencing accepted drinking behaviors as peers do, and examining its influence may bring awareness to gender identity formation. The external auditor reviewed my journal entries as well as the research team's themes and did not find that our interpretations of the women's responses were biased. The auditor stated that themes were clearly tied to quotes and patterns in the participants' language.

Future Research

There are numerous directions for future study that could be followed to more clearly illuminate the experiences of women on college campuses with regard to drinking and gender identity. A few of these areas are how drinking and gender identity differ in single sex vs. coed universities, how the media influences perceptions of drinking and gender identity for college women, and the how the merging of sexuality, drinking, and gender identity affect women's perceptions of themselves. We must understand the depth of meaning behind women's drinking before we can apply specific interventions that have the likelihood of success on a particular campus.

Since the women in this study agreed that drinking in women only environments and drinking in coed gatherings held vastly different meanings and functions, comparing single sex universities vs. co-ed universities may be a next step in determining how

gender identity interfaces with drinking patterns. Linowski (2004) touched on this potential difference in the college environment with her qualitative dissertation, noting Wechsler and colleagues' (2002) trends that frequent binge drinking of college women increased more at single sex universities than on co-ed campuses from 1993-2001. This is certainly a comparison worthy of expansion.

Because of time constraints in the focus group interviews, the media influence of perceptions of drinking was not investigated. Yet, Lederman, Lederman, and Kully (2009) made a case that the sheer prominence and pervasiveness of media exposure to college women about drinking and the college experience has the capacity to shape belief and behaviors. Some questions worthy of attention for future research are the following: What are the media messages that women receive? To what extent do these messages impact behavior? How do women internalize these messages and how are low risk drinkers able to counteract these expectations? Even more telling may be the media influence of perceptions of gender identity, since adherence to gender expectations has been shown to originate early in childhood and be more impressionable in adolescence. Originally the scope of this study was to include questions about the media's influence on how the women thought of themselves, but time constraints precluded this in-depth exploration. In each of the interviews, some acknowledgment of media's role in the perception of college women was introduced by the participants, and this area remains virtually unexamined in the counseling, substance abuse, and college student development literature.

Related to the media portrayals of young women is the sexuality assumed in drinking; messages of sexual availability and sexual promiscuity conflated with drinking need more attention. In this study, the prevalence of feeling pursued and preyed upon and general feelings of being unsafe in public places conveyed by the women were both alarming and dismaying. Relationships between high risk drinking and experiences of sexism and sexual objectification for college women have already been established by Carr and Szymanski (2010) and Zucker and Landry (2007); the qualitative stories of the women in this study mirror those findings. Expecting to be groped and hit on is unacceptable and, until this issue is acknowledged as a communication of sexual power and oppression, it will remain a harmful component of college women's lives. One way to address this issue is through bridging research and practice, and further research about the sexual messages experienced and the sexual expectations developed by women and men is vital to advance this nascent connection.

Further along the continuum of sexual power, the rates of substance-assisted sexual assault and rape correlated with drinking point to a dangerous association to which college students as a whole have been exposed. Whether this has been socially constructed by the media or by individual gender role expectations, it has been perpetuated by college student behavior in alarming trends as evidenced by the first-hand experiences of several of the women in the study. It would be prudent for anyone working in a campus environment, including faculty, staff, or students, to take note of this reality and collaborate on changing the college culture through adopting best practices of a comprehensive substance abuse prevention program.

For the purposes of this study I did not recruit or restrict participants based on any particular sexual orientation nor was this asked on the demographic questionnaire. However, the sexual orientation of the participant could have affected how she thought of herself as a woman and how she answered the Hoffman Gender Scale items. Subsequently, there is room in future research for exploration about how sexual orientation influences drinking choices for college women. Likewise, those who identify as transgendered may well be positioned to offer professionals and educators a glimpse into the connection between gender identity and drinking for someone whose biological sex and gender expression may be more complex. Investigating the lived experiences of members of the LGBTQ community in relation to drinking in a gendered college world would plausibly yield variations on the results from this study.

Because this study is qualitative and contact with the participants was limited, there are many directions to augment the in-depth exploration of how current women drinkers view gender identity. Some qualitative methods suggest multiple contacts with the participants in addition to interviews such as follow up interviews and focus groups, collecting social and cultural artifacts, and by examining narratives in case studies. On the other end of the methodological continuum, the themes in this study were also noted in variations in a number of other qualitative studies in the last decade so perhaps the literature is ripe for quantitative descriptive studies. There is an opportunity to expand the scope of the participants and begin to examine the prevalence of gender identity facets associated with drinking. For instance the need to develop a scale that incorporates

concepts of gender identity in relation to alcohol would be timely and would add to the literature immensely.

A final area that could be pursued for future study is the presence of a positive male relationship, role model, or influence as a protective factor against high risk drinking. Though the information gathered about the participants' relationships was limited, the low risk drinkers' stories point to the commonality of having significant healthy relationships with males in their formative years, whereas the High Risk drinkers' narratives indicated a deficit in this area. Further exploration of this variable is needed and could generate fruitful data.

Conclusions

College women's high risk drinking rates are increasing and college drinking in general for women has caught up with college men's drinking frequency. Substance abuse prevention and intervention programs thus far have failed to consistently reduce or impact these rates overall. Therefore, there is a missing piece that we have fallen short of understanding. This is the first study to explore college women's conceptions of themselves as women in the context of drinking choices. The responses from the college women drinkers in this study indicate that gender identity in some way influences, shapes, or affects their drinking choices and provides those in the field with some previously missing information. What college students fail to account for is that we are social beings who live in a world full of socially constructed messages, whether or not we are aware of their existence. It was my hope that this study would help bring these pervasive and sometimes subtle messages to the forefront of the discussion regarding

what it means to be a college woman today and how that may influence drinking choices. By unpacking the perceptions we have about gender identity that are most relevant to college females today, these interviews and results contributed to making the unconscious conscious. Although in its infancy, continuing to examine gender identity could shed light on women's unique needs regarding drinking and other substance abuse.

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APPENDIX A

PILOT STUDY CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT—LONG FORM

Project Title: Perceptions of college women, drinking, and gender identity: A pilot study
Project Director: L. DiAnne Borders, advisor; Elizabeth Likis-Werle, doctoral student

What this study is about

This is a research project. The purpose of this pilot study is to gain a better understanding about college females' experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as females in today's world. I also am gathering information about the experience of answering the questions and participating in the focus group.

Why are you asking me?

You are being recruited for this study because you meet the criteria of being a currently enrolled full time female undergraduate student at UNCG between the ages of 18-24 who engages in alcohol use.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree to be in the study, you will participate in a focus group approximately one hour in length and a brief feedback group that may last an additional half hour. Pizza and nonalcoholic drinks will be provided. The group will be conducted by Elizabeth Likis-Werle, a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development. The focus group will consist of a semi-structured set of questions about your college experience, your drinking habits and perceptions, and your experiences and perceptions about being female. There is also a brief 14 item questionnaire and some demographic information that will be collected. Afterwards, you will be asked to give feedback on the questions and the experience.

Are there any audio/video recordings?

No, the pilot study will not be recorded.

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board has approved this study and has determined that the risks to participants are minimal. Due to the topic of this study, some participants may experience some discomfort or distress when thinking about the questions. The interviewer and student researcher, Elizabeth Likis-Werle, is a Licensed Professional Counselor and, if additional support is needed or desired, she will provide participants with appropriate referral sources, such as the Counseling and Testing Center and the Nicholas Vacc Counseling and Consulting Clinic. As the law of North Carolina state that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21 years, underage participants may feel uncomfortable disclosing drinking behaviors that are considered illegal. To minimize this risk, the researchers will ensure that no identifying information about the participants will be recorded or collected, pseudonyms will be assigned, no names will be on the demographic form, the Hoffman Gender Survey, or used in the focus group interview. Additionally, researchers are requesting a waiver of the documentation of the consent form so that the participants' signature will not be linked to them.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact **Eric Allen** in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Any other questions, concerns, or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by L. DiAnne Borders at (336) 334-3425 or borders@uncg.edu or Elizabeth Likis-Werle, who may be contacted at (336) 617-8686 or selikisw@uncg.edu.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of taking part in this research?

There may be benefits to society as your responses and experiences will be analyzed along with other college females in order to assist professionals in the counseling and student development fields to better understand the lives and experiences of current college women. Your participation may also allow counselors to create recommendations for health and safety programming that is offered on college campuses specifically for women.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you may find it useful to reflect on the experiences you share with the researchers.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, all participants who complete the study will be given \$5.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Your privacy will be protected. You will not be identified by name or other identifiable information as being part of this project. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You will not be identified by name in the recorded interview, and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of the research project. No names will be on the forms. To maintain confidentiality within the group, we ask that participants keep all information shared in the focus group confidential within the group and to not share this information outside the group.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. Being in this study is completely voluntary.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By participating in this focus group you are agreeing that you read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing and consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. You are also agreeing that you are between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. Please keep a copy of this informed consent form for your personal records.

APPENDIX B**PILOT FLIER**

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and I am recruiting students for a research project. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about college women's experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as women in today's world. I'm looking for participants for a brief online survey and a focus group. If you are:

- aged 18-24
- female
- full time student
- describe yourself as a current drinker (have used alcohol in the past 2 weeks)
- willing to be interviewed

This focus group will take 1.5 hours of your time and you will be provided with pizza and \$ 5 for participation

Please contact Elizabeth Likis-Werle at selikisw@uncg.edu for more information in the next few days. Principal investigator for this study is Dr. L. DiAnne Borders, Department of Counseling and Educational Development

APPENDIX C

PILOT RECRUITMENT CLASS SCRIPT

Hello—My name is Elizabeth Likis-Werle and I am a third-year doctoral student in the Counseling department here at UNCG. I am in the process of recruiting students for a focus group as part of my pilot study for my doctoral dissertation. I am looking for volunteers who are willing to participate.

- You are being asked if you want to be in a pilot research study. We are trying to find out about the experience of **college females and drinking**.
- You are eligible for this study if you are female full-time traditional aged undergraduate college students who identifies as a current drinker.
- This discussion and the flier given to you will tell you about the study to help you decide if you want to be part of the study. Participation in this study is **voluntary**.
- You will be asked to participate in a focus group with a set of semi-structured interview questions that will last approximately an hour in length with an immediate 30 minute follow up to give feedback on the format, questions, and experience. This will be a total of 1.5 hours of your time.
- There are **no costs to you** to participate in this study. If you meet eligibility criteria and agree to participate, you will be provided with pizza and a non-alcoholic drink during the focus group. At the completion of the study, you will **receive \$5** for your time.
- All information obtained in this study is strictly **confidential** unless disclosure is required by law. Legally and ethically, I am required to break this confidentiality if you report to me that you are suicidal or homicidal. Real names will not be used during the focus group and you will be assigned a pseudonym. The pilot focus group will not be recorded.
- There are **no direct benefits to you** for participating in this study. Benefits to society may include that your responses and experiences may be used to further assist professionals understand the lives of college females and to create recommendations for health and safety programming offered on college campuses for women who have had similar experiences.
- The Institutional Review Board has agreed that the **risks involved in this study are minimal**. However, discussion of some of these experiences may cause unintended distress or discomfort. If you or the interviewer feels like you need additional services or support, referrals will be made available.
- If you decide you want to be in the study you will be given a **consent form**.
- If you decide you do not want to be in the study later you are free to leave whenever you like without penalty or unfair treatment. Participation in this study is in no way an expectation of being in this class.

APPENDIX D
PILOT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Describe your social life here at college.

→ What are some ways you have fun? What are some ways that you deal with stress?

→ Tell me about your group of friends here at college.

2. Tell me about the last time you drank alcohol.

Was this a positive or negative experience for you? Explain.

Was this a typical experience/time of when you drink? If not, tell me about your usual drinking experiences. For these more typical experiences, do they tend to be positive or negative? What makes this a positive experience for you? A negative experience?

3. What is it like, as a female, to go out to a bar or club where alcohol is being served?

4. What do you think about other females when you see them drinking?

5. Describe how you feel about yourself when you drink.

6. What are the differences between hanging out with your female friends and hanging out with your male friends?

****GIVE HOFFMAN GENDER SCALE here****

7. What was it like to take this questionnaire?

8. Growing up, what messages did you get about being a female?

→ What do you think about being a female in today's world?

9. Tell me about a time when you felt you were equal to males.

.....when you felt unequal to or less than males

10. Some people say how females are portrayed in the media promotes drinking. What do you think? Do you think you've been influenced by watching those shows?
11. Are there any other experiences you would like to share about drinking or being a college female that come to mind that I did not ask about?
12. What do you think college administrators, counselors, and faculty need to know about the female students on their campus and their decisions around drinking?

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you female?
 Yes
 No

2. What is your year in college?
 First year
 second year
 third year
 fourth year
 fifth or higher

3. What is your age?
 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

4. What best describes your race?
 Asian American Indian/Native American
 African American/ Black European
 Caucasian/White Latina
 Other _____

5. Are you a member of any of the following groups on campus?
 athletic team
 sorority

6. In the past two weeks, how often have you had alcohol?
 1-2 days 3-4 days 5-6 days 7-10 days 11-13 days all 14

7. When you drink alcohol, how many standard drinks (12 oz. beer, 4 oz. wine, 1.0 oz. liquor) do you usually consume?
 1 2 3 4 5 or more

APPENDIX F

ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS IDENTIFICATION TEST

Box 4	
The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Interview Version	
<p>Read questions as written. Record answers carefully. Begin the AUDIT by saying "Now I am going to ask you some questions about your use of alcoholic beverages during this past year." Explain what is meant by "alcoholic beverages" by using local examples of beer, wine, vodka, etc. Code answers in terms of "standard drinks". Place the correct answer number in the box at the right.</p>	
<p>1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?</p> <p>(0) Never [Skip to Qs 9-10] (1) Monthly or less (2) 2 to 4 times a month (3) 2 to 3 times a week (4) 4 or more times a week</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<p>6. How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>
<p>2. How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?</p> <p>(0) 1 or 2 (1) 3 or 4 (2) 5 or 6 (3) 7, 8, or 9 (4) 10 or more</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<p>7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>
<p>3. How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <p><i>Skip to Questions 9 and 10 if Total Score for Questions 2 and 3 = 0</i></p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<p>8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>
<p>4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<p>9. Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?</p> <p>(0) No (2) Yes, but not in the last year (4) Yes, during the last year</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>
<p>5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?</p> <p>(0) Never (1) Less than monthly (2) Monthly (3) Weekly (4) Daily or almost daily</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>	<p>10. Has a relative or friend or a doctor or another health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?</p> <p>(0) No (2) Yes, but not in the last year (4) Yes, during the last year</p> <div style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>
<p>Record total of specific items here <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><i>If total is greater than recommended cut-off, consult User's Manual.</i></p>	

APPENDIX G

HOFFMAN GENDER SCALE, FEMALE FORM

Hoffman Gender Scale: Form A (for Females)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some- what Agree	Tend to Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. When I am asked to describe myself, being female is one of the first things I think of	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am confident in my femininity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I meet my personal standards for femininity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. My perception of myself is positively associated with my biological sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I am secure in my femininity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I define myself largely in terms of my femininity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. My identity is strongly tied to my femininity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I have a high regard for myself as a female.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Being a female is a critical part of how I see myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I am happy with myself as a female.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I am very comfortable being a female.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Femininity is an important aspect of my self-concept.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. My sense of myself as a female is positive.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Being a female contributes a great deal to my sense of self-confidence.	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX H
MODIFIED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<u><i>Interview questions</i></u>	<u><i>Focus area</i></u>
<p>1. Describe your social life here at college. Tell me about your group of friends here at college. What are some ways you have fun? Do you experience stress at times here at college? What are some ways that you deal with stress?</p>	INTRO
<p>2. Tell me about the last time you drank alcohol. → Was this a positive or negative experience for you? Explain. → Was this a typical experience/time of when you drink? → If not, tell me about your usual drinking experiences.</p>	DRINKING
<p>3. For these more typical experiences, do they tend to be positive or negative? What makes this a positive experience for you? A negative experience?</p>	DRINKING
<p>4. What is it like, as a female, to go out to party, bar, or club where alcohol is being served?</p>	DRINKING
<p>5. When you see other college females drinking what are your thoughts about them?</p>	DRINKING
<p>6. Describe how you feel about yourself when you drink. ****GIVE HOFFMAN GENDER SCALE here****</p>	DRINKING
<p>7. What was it like to take this questionnaire? → How would you describe the ideal female?</p>	GENDER
<p>8. Growing up, what messages did you get about being a female? → What do you think about being a female in today's world?</p>	GENDER
<p>9. Some females say they act differently around males than when they are around other females. What are the differences between hanging out with your female friends and hanging out with your male friends when you are drinking?</p>	GENDER

<u><i>Interview questions</i></u>	<u><i>Focus area</i></u>
<p>10. Tell me about a time when you felt you were equal to males in a social situation . . . when you felt unequal to or less than males</p> <p>11. Do you think your attitudes about drinking and/or your drinking behaviors have been influenced by other things? If so, what has influenced your drinking?</p> <p>12. Are there any other experiences about drinking and being a college female that come to mind that I did not ask about?</p> <p>13. What do you think college administrators, counselors, & faculty need to know about the female students on their campus and their decisions around drinking?</p>	<p>GENDER</p> <p>CONCLUSION</p> <p>CONCLUSION</p>

APPENDIX I**PERMISSION TO USE HOFFMAN GENDER SCALE**

Rosemarie Hoffman rhoffman@csulb.edu

12/13/11

to rhoffman, me

Hello Elizabeth,

You have my permission to use the HGS in your research. Please let me know the results of your study as I like to keep track of findings of studies using my instrument. I am attaching the current version and scoring instructions.

Best of luck and let me know if you have any questions.

My apologies for the delay in getting back to you.

rmh

~~~~~  
Rose Marie Hoffman, Ph.D.

Professor, School Counseling

Department of Advanced Studies in Education & Counseling

College of Education

California State University, Long Beach

1250 Bellflower Blvd.; Long Beach, CA 90840-2201

office: AS-223

email: rhoffman@csulb.edu

website: <http://www.ced.csulb.edu/school-counseling>

## APPENDIX J

### IRB APPROVAL



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**  
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore  
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.  
PO Box 26170  
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170  
336.256.1482  
Web site: [www.uncg.edu/orc](http://www.uncg.edu/orc)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

**To:** Leslie Borders  
Counsel and Ed Development  
226 Curry Building

**From:** UNCG IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

**Approval Date:** 3/05/2012  
**Expiration Date of Approval:** 3/04/2013

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)  
**Submission Type:** Initial  
**Expedited Category:** 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups,6.Voice/image research recordings  
**Study #:** 12-0070

**Study Title:** Experiences and Perceptions of College Women's Drinking and Gender Identity

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

**Study Description:**

This research will help form the basis for prevention and intervention programs targeting specific areas that are unique to females' needs and motivations.

**Regulatory and other findings:**

This research meets criteria for a waiver of written (signed) consent according to 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2).

**Investigator's Responsibilities**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

Signed letters, along with stamped copies of consent forms and other recruitment materials will be scanned to you in a separate email. These consent forms must be used unless the IRB has given you approval to waive this requirement.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification application available at <http://www.uncg.edu/orc/irb.htm>). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the "Unanticipated Problem/Event" form at the same website.

CC:  
Sarah Likis-Werle, Counsel And Ed Development  
ORC, (ORC), Non-IRB Review Contact

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO  
 CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT –long form

Project Title: Experiences and perceptions of college women's drinking and gender identity  
 Project Director: L.DiAnne Borders, advisor; Elizabeth Likis-Werle, doctoral student

**What this study is about**

This is a research project. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about college females' experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as females in today's world.

**Why are you asking me?**

You are being recruited for this study because you meet the criteria of being a currently enrolled full time female undergraduate student at UNCG between the ages of 18-24 who engages in alcohol use.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

If you agree to be in the study, you will first be asked to complete a brief 10 item online questionnaire to determine your drinking risk level. Then you will be asked to participate in a focus group approximately one and a half hours in length. Pizza and nonalcoholic drinks will be provided. The group will be conducted by Elizabeth Likis-Werle, a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development. The focus group will consist of a semi-structured set of questions about your college experience, your drinking habits and perceptions, and your experiences and perceptions about being female. There is also a brief 14 item questionnaire and some demographic information that will be collected during the focus group meeting.

**Are there any audio/video recordings?**

Yes, the focus group will be audio and video recorded and transcribed for analysis by a team of researchers.

**What are the dangers to me?**

The Institutional Review Board has approved this study and has determined that the risks to participants are minimal. Due to the topic of this study, some participants may experience some discomfort or distress when thinking about the questions. The interviewer and student researcher, Elizabeth Likis-Werle, is a Licensed Professional Counselor and, if additional support is needed or desired, she will provide participants with appropriate referral sources, such as the Counseling and Testing Center and the Nicholas Vacc Counseling and Consulting Clinic. As the law of North Carolina state that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21 years, underage participants may feel uncomfortable disclosing drinking behaviors that are considered illegal. To minimize this risk, the researchers will ensure that no identifying information about the participants will be recorded or collected, pseudonyms will be assigned, no real names will be on the demographic form, the Hoffman Gender Survey, or used in the focus group interview. Additionally, researchers are requesting a waiver of the documentation of the consent form so that the participants' signature will not be linked to them.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact **Eric Allen** in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Any other questions, concerns, or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by L. DiAnne Borders at (336) 334-3425 or borders@uncg.edu or Elizabeth Likis-Werle, who may be contacted at (336) 617-8686 or selikisw@uncg.edu.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of taking part in this research?**

There may be benefits to society as your responses and experiences will be analyzed along with other college females in order to assist professionals in the counseling and student development fields to better understand the lives and experiences of current college women. Your participation may also allow counselors to create recommendations for health and safety programming that is offered on college campuses specifically for women.

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

UNCG IRB  
 Approved Consent Form  
 Valid 3/5/12 to 3/4/13

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you may find it useful to reflect on the experiences you share with the researchers.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, all participants who complete the study will be given \$5.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

Your privacy will be protected. You will not be identified by name or other identifiable information as being part of this project. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You will not be identified by name in the recorded interview, and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of the research project. Pseudonyms will be used on all forms and in all data collection so no real names will be on the online AUDIT, the demographic form, the Hoffman Gender Survey, or used in the focus group interview. For the online AUDIT assessment, temporary access to participant's identity is necessary to score the form and assign them to a focus group. At the completion of this project, any access to emails or identifying information will be deleted. To maintain confidentiality within the group, we ask that participants keep all information shared in the focus group confidential within the group and to not share this information outside the group. Transcriptions of the focus group sessions will be reviewed and analyzed by a research team made up of the doctoral student researcher, the faculty dissertation chair, and a master's level counseling student. The latter two members of the research team will not have access to identifying information of the participants, as they will only see pseudonyms on the transcriptions and assessments.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. Being in this study is completely voluntary.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By participating in this focus group you are agreeing that you read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing and consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. You are also agreeing that you are between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. Please keep a copy of this informed consent form for your personal records.

UNCG IRB  
Approved Consent Form

Valid 3/5/12 to 3/4/13

**Flyer for class recruitment**

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and I am recruiting students for a research project. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about college females' experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as females in today's world. I'm looking for participants for focus groups. If you are:

- aged 18-24
- female
- full time student
- describe yourself as a current drinker (have used alcohol in the past 2 weeks)
- willing to be interviewed

The focus group will take 1.5 hours of your time and you will be provided with pizza and \$5 for participation

**Please contact Elizabeth Likis-Werle at [selikisw@uncg.edu](mailto:selikisw@uncg.edu) for more information** in the next few days. Principal investigator for this study is Dr. L. DiAnne Borders, Department of Counseling and Educational Development

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I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and I am recruiting students for a research project. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about college females' experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as females in today's world. I'm looking for participants for focus groups. If you are:

- aged 18-24
- female
- full time student
- describe yourself as a current drinker (have used alcohol in the past 2 weeks)
- willing to be interviewed

The focus group will take 1.5 hours of your time and you will be provided with pizza and \$5 for participation

**Please contact Elizabeth Likis-Werle at [selikisw@uncg.edu](mailto:selikisw@uncg.edu) for more information** in the next few days. Principal investigator for this study is Dr. L. DiAnne Borders, Department of Counseling and Educational Development

**APPROVED IRB**

**MAR 05 2012**

### Script for class recruitment

Hello--My name is Elizabeth Likis-Werle and I am a third year doctoral student in the Department of Counseling & Educational Development here at UNCG. I am recruiting students for focus groups as part of my study for my doctoral dissertation. I am looking for volunteers that are willing to participate.

- You are being asked if you want to be in a research study. We are trying to find out about the experience of **college females and drinking**.
- You are eligible for this study if you are female full-time traditional aged undergraduate college students who identifies as a current drinker.
- This discussion and the flyer given to you will tell you about the study to help you decide if you want to be part of the study. Participation in this study is **voluntary**.
- You will be asked to participate in a focus group with a set of semi-structured interview questions that will last approximately an hour and a half in length.
- There are **no costs to you** to participate in this study. If you meet eligibility criteria and agree to participate, you will be provided with pizza and a non-alcoholic drink during the focus group. At the completion of the study, you will **receive \$5** for your time.
- All information obtained in this study is strictly **confidential** unless disclosure is required by law. Legally and ethically, I am required to break this confidentiality if you report to me that you are suicidal or homicidal. Real names will not be used during the focus group and you will be assigned a pseudonym.
- There are **no direct benefits to you** for participating in his study. Benefits to society may include that your responses and experiences may be used to further assist professionals understand the lives of college females and to create recommendations for health and safety programming offered on college campuses for women who have had similar experiences.
- The Institutional Review Board has agreed that the **risks involved in this study are minimal**. However, discussion of some of these experiences may cause unintended distress or discomfort. If the you or the interviewer feels like you need additional services or support, referrals will be made available.
- If you decide you want to be in the study you will be given a **consent form**.
- If you decide you do not want to be in the study later you are free to leave whenever you like without penalty or unfair treatment. Participation in this study is in no way an expectation of being in this class.

APPROVED IRB  
MAR 0:5 2012

## APPENDIX K

### REVISED IRB APPROVAL



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**

**OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**  
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene Mitchell Moore  
Humanities and Research Administration Bldg.  
PO Box 26170  
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170  
336.256.1482  
Web site: [www.uncg.edu/orc](http://www.uncg.edu/orc)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

**To:** Leslie Borders  
Counsel And Ed Development  
226 Curry Building

**From:** UNCG IRB

\_\_\_\_\_  
Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

**Approval Date:** 4/18/2012  
**Expiration Date of Approval:** 3/04/2013

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)  
**Submission Type:** Modification  
**Expedited Category:** Minor Change to Previously Reviewed Research  
**Study #:** 12-0070

**Study Title:** Experiences and Perceptions of College Women's Drinking and Gender Identity

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this modification is no more than minimal.

**Submission Description:**

This modification, dated 4/17/12, addresses the following:

- Addition of individual interviews for participants who were unable to attend the focus groups but willing to participate.
- Change in consent to reflect change in protocol.

**Regulatory and other findings:**

This research meets criteria for a waiver of written (signed) consent according to 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2).

**Investigator's Responsibilities**

Signed letters, along with stamped copies of consent forms and other recruitment materials will be scanned to you in a separate email. These consent forms must be used unless the IRB has given you approval to waive this requirement.

**CC:**  
Sarah Likis-Werle, Counsel And Ed Development  
ORC, (ORC), Non-IRB Review Contact

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO  
 CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT –long form

Project Title: Experiences and perceptions of college women's drinking and gender identity  
 Project Director: L.DiAnne Borders, advisor; Elizabeth Likis-Werle, doctoral student

**What this study is about**

This is a research project. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about college females' experiences of drinking and how they view themselves as females in today's world.

**Why are you asking me?**

You are being recruited for this study because you meet the criteria of being a currently enrolled full time female undergraduate student at UNCG between the ages of 18-24 who engages in alcohol use.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

If you agree to be in the study, you will first be asked to complete a brief 10 item online questionnaire to determine your drinking risk level. Then you will be asked to participate in a focus group or individual interview approximately one and a half hours in length. Pizza and nonalcoholic drinks will be provided. The group will be conducted by Elizabeth Likis-Werle, a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development. The focus group will consist of a semi-structured set of questions about your college experience, your drinking habits and perceptions, and your experiences and perceptions about being female. There is also a brief 14 item questionnaire and some demographic information that will be collected during the focus group meeting.

**Are there any audio/video recordings?**

Yes, the focus group or interview will be audio and video recorded and transcribed for analysis by a team of researchers.

**What are the dangers to me?**

The Institutional Review Board has approved this study and has determined that the risks to participants are minimal. Due to the topic of this study, some participants may experience some discomfort or distress when thinking about the questions. The interviewer and student researcher, Elizabeth Likis-Werle, is a Licensed Professional Counselor and, if additional support is needed or desired, she will provide participants with appropriate referral sources, such as the Counseling and Testing Center and the Nicholas Vacc Counseling and Consulting Clinic. As the law of North Carolina state that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21 years, underage participants may feel uncomfortable disclosing drinking behaviors that are considered illegal. To minimize this risk, the researchers will ensure that no identifying information about the participants will be recorded or collected, pseudonyms will be assigned, no real names will be on the demographic form, the Hoffman Gender Survey, or used in the focus group or interview. Additionally, researchers are requesting a waiver of the documentation of the consent form so that the participants' signature will not be linked to them.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact **Eric Allen** in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Any other questions, concerns, or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by L. DiAnne Borders at (336) 334-3425 or borders@uncg.edu or Elizabeth Likis-Werle, who may be contacted at (336) 617-8686 or selikisw@uncg.edu.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of taking part in this research?**

There may be benefits to society as your responses and experiences will be analyzed along with other college females in order to assist professionals in the counseling and student development fields to better understand the lives and experiences of current college women. Your participation may also allow counselors to create recommendations for health and safety programming that is offered on college campuses specifically for women.

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

UNCG IRB  
 Approved Consent Form

Valid 4/18/12 to 3/4/13



There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you may find it useful to reflect on the experiences you share with the researchers.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you for participating in this study. However, all participants who complete the study will be given \$5.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

Your privacy will be protected. You will not be identified by name or other identifiable information as being part of this project. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. You will not be identified by name in the recorded interview, and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of the research project. Pseudonyms will be used on all forms and in all data collection so no real names will be on the online AUDIT, the demographic form, the Hoffman Gender Survey, or used in the focus group and interview. For the online AUDIT assessment, temporary access to participant's identity is necessary to score the form and assign them to a focus group. At the completion of this project, any access to emails or identifying information will be deleted. To maintain confidentiality within the group, we ask that participants keep all information shared in the focus group confidential within the group and to not share this information outside the group. Transcriptions of the focus group sessions will be reviewed and analyzed by a research team made up of the doctoral student researcher, the faculty dissertation chair, and a master's level counseling student. The latter two members the research team will not have access to identifying information of the participants, as they will only see pseudonyms on the transcriptions and assessments.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. Being in this study is completely voluntary.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By participating in this focus group you are agreeing that you read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing and consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. You are also agreeing that you are between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. Please keep a copy of this informed consent form for your personal records.

UNCG IRB  
Approved Consent Form  
Valid 4/18/12 to 3/4/13