An Interpretative Phenomenological Study of College Women Who Participate in High-Risk Drinking, Their Perceptions of Drinking Norms, and the Influence of Those Norms on Their Drinking Behaviors

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AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COLLEGE WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATE IN HIGH-RISK DRINKING, THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF DRINKING NORMS, AND THE INFLUENCE OF THOSE NORMS ON THEIR DRINKING BEHAVIORS

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In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy
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by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

High-risk alcohol use on college campuses is associated with several negative consequences for students. Social norms campaigns are a widely used intervention aimed at decreasing high-risk alcohol use in a university population but their efficacy can vary based on students’ peer groups and gender. Research on gendered drinking norms for college students tends to focus on men, as they are usually identified as more likely to drink alcohol overall and to drink in high-risk ways. Additionally, social norms campaigns implemented in a small group setting, which aim to correct misperceptions of students who may not initially identify with norms of the larger college student population, seem to benefit college men more than college women. Therefore, it is important to explore women’s experiences related to college drinking. This study was conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of undergraduate college women who drink in a high-risk way and their experience of drinking norms as well as their influence on behaviors in order to make future social norms based messages aimed at women more effective. Interviews were conducted with a small sample of college women who participated in high-risk drinking. Data was transcribed and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Themes emerged around perceptions of women’s drinking, perceptions of men’s drinking, messages received from family and others, rituals and consequences of going out, cues for drinking, and responsibility. Implications for social norms messages were discussed, including avoiding messages that encourage moderation by reinforcing gender stereotypes and creating messages around women’s prosocial protective behaviors.
Implications for practice and directions for future research were also discussed.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

One size does not fit all. The beauty of this expression is that it almost immediately evokes an image, maybe of a shirt that swallows one person while barely fitting over the head of another. This study attempts to understand some of the factors that affect the efficacy of social norms campaigns on college campuses especially as they apply to gender. As a practitioner on a college campus, the researcher has implemented and studied a social norms campaign and seen unanticipated differences in the impact of messages in regard to gender, with college men reducing high-risk alcohol use more than women. Within this context, it has become important to understand why, to make headway into understanding motivations for and meanings given to alcohol use among women. It is time to move from acknowledging different sizes to creating interventions that fit all who stand to benefit from them.

Negative consequences have long been associated with high-risk drinking on college campuses including academic problems, injuries, assaults and even deaths, with an estimated 1400 college students dying each year from alcohol-related injuries (Vicary & Karshin, 2002; Kuo, Wechsler, Greenberg & Lee, 2003). Binge drinking, defined as four or more drinks in one sitting for women and five or more drinks in one sitting for men (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), is associated with higher rates of alcohol related problems such missing class, getting behind in schoolwork, engaging in unplanned sex, getting hurt or injured or driving after drinking. Not surprisingly, the more often students binge drink, the higher their risk of problems (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000).
Colleges and universities have long sought to find effective ways to mitigate these problems among their students.

Several studies show that young adults in college drink more than their peers who do not attend college, with the risk of alcohol use disorders significantly greater for college students (Slutske, 2005, Blanco et.al, 2008). This phenomenon does not cross over to other drugs, however, with college students significantly less likely to have a diagnosis of nicotine dependence, drug use disorder, or to use tobacco than their peers who do not attend college (Blanco et.al, 2008). While there could be several explanations for this, such as legal issues associated with illicit drug use and retention issues related to addiction, it seems there is something unique about the college environment’s impact on alcohol use in young adults.

**Statement of the Problem**

Binge drinking is associated with a variety of threats to student health and success on college campuses. These include alcohol poisoning, fatalities, assaults, and academic consequences such as lower classroom performance, lower grades, missed class, and dropping out (Jennison, 2004). Students who binge drink experienced significantly more negative consequences than those who did not, and frequent binge drinkers experienced more severe academic and personal consequences than less frequent binge drinkers (Ziemelis, Bucknam & Elfessi, 2010). There is also evidence that frequency of alcohol intake has a negative impact on grade point average (GPA) (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Many college presidents acknowledged alcohol abuse as a threat to quality of life on campus, and policies on the national level have been implemented to address this issue as

There has been debate about how high-risk drinking is defined, with most practitioners using the measure of binge drinking. While some argued that using this measure overstates the problem (Vicary & Karshin, 2002), studies find that students who drink at these levels experienced much higher rates of alcohol related problems and that the more often they drank these amounts, the higher their risk of problems (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000, Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). To illustrate this point, Wechsler et.al. (2000) offered the following comparison: among all students who drink, 9% of those who drink below binge drinking levels missed a class, 10% got behind in schoolwork, 18% did something they later regretted, 8% engaged in unplanned sex, 4% got hurt or were injured or drove after drinking. Among frequent binge drinkers, the same categories showed 63%, 46%, 62%, 42%, 27% and 57% respectively.

Several environmental factors can affect the risk of negative consequences for campuses. For example, the number of alcohol outlets near college campuses can impact high risk alcohol use, especially when they use alcohol promotions and specials to attract students. Kuo et al (2003) found that campuses with higher percentages of establishments that sold large volumes of beer in close proximity had higher binge drinking rates among students. Also speaking to environmental factors, Wells (2010) found that students enrolled at a religious liberal arts school were significantly less likely to be either heavy or moderate consumers of alcohol than those enrolled at a nearby state university. While knowing the environmental and cultural aspects of a University that might predict high-
risk drinking rates amongst students is important, it may not present a practical area for interventions. Presley et.al. (2002) acknowledged the impracticality of manipulating a college’s characteristics for the sole purpose of affecting the drinking culture.

**Special Populations**

Dowdall and Wechsler (2002) found the research literature on college student alcohol use lacking due to its traditional study of individual alcohol use rates and related problems, often at a single point in time or at a single institution, as opposed to a study of broader political, cultural and organizational factors. It is important to understand particular populations or groups that are at higher risk for alcohol-related harm while at the same time not making assumptions about alcohol’s effects on a certain population based on how it is viewed in the larger culture.

Views that certain student groups have experienced less harm from alcohol use are often untrue. For example, So and Wong’s (2006) study of alcohol and other drug use among Asian-American college students found that despite widespread perceptions of the Asian college student as the “model minority,” Asian-American students showed use rates comparable to if not higher than those of their non-Asian peers. They also found higher rates of beer drinking and smoking among non-U.S. born Asian students (So & Wong, 2006).

Several studies have shown that White college students engage in more high risk drinking than their non-White peers (Boyd et.al., 2005, Vicary & Karshin, 2002), leading many to assume that higher acculturation rates among minority students is a predictor of more high-risk drinking. However, Zamboanga, Raffaielli, and Horton (2006) found that
for Mexican American college students, there was a positive association between ethnic identity and frequency of heavy alcohol use for males, though not for females. The authors hypothesized that for men, identification with Latino culture was associated with elevated alcohol use.

Men as a whole engaged in high-risk drinking more frequently than women on college campuses and experienced more negative consequences (Capraro, 2000, Kuh & Arnold, 1993), though some evidence indicates these differences are decreasing (Boyd et.al., 2005 Keyes, Grant & Hasin, 2008), with women’s alcohol use increasing. Alcohol expectancies, or a student’s thoughts about alcohol and its effects, can be strong predictors of college drinking behaviors and differ between the genders. Social enhancement expectancies (e.g. social facilitation) are predictors of college drinking for both men and women, but Read et.al. (2004) found that beliefs about positive outcomes from drinking were significantly more powerful for women.

For men, alcohol use can be a way to both enact male privilege and navigate the emotional hazards that can come with that privilege on a college campus (Capraro, 2000). In his qualitative study on college alcohol use and masculinity among European American men, Peralta (2007) concluded that masculinity is expressed through drinking behaviors in a context (college) where these expressions are expected, accepted, and legitimized. He went on to contrast European American men’s accounts of drinking with European American and African American women’s, who “…did not assert that women’s heavy alcohol use was a way to express power. Their drinking stories did not symbolize strength or power as women. Women largely viewed heavy drinking among
women as potentially problematic, shameful, and stigmatizing behavior unbecoming of women” (p. 753).

Keyes, Grant and Hasin (2008) found evidence of a closing gender gap in high risk alcohol use by birth cohort in the United States and changing social norms for women’s alcohol use, noting a decrease in negative perceptions of women who “drink at a bar with friends” (p. 26). These changing norms could lead to greater opportunities for women to experience alcohol problems, especially if the trend continues.

**Need for Additional Research**

Social norms marketing efforts are used widely on campuses to address student misperceptions that “everyone is drinking” by putting a mirror to the population and sharing real usage data specific to the campus (Perkins, 2002; Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986; Rentner, 2008). Social norms marketing’s widespread use has spurred a robust body of research on various factors that can influence its efficacy, including the use of large group versus small group norms, the impact of student peer groups on campaign message efficacy, and the impact of gender differences. Umberson and Karas Montez (2010) discussed the many impacts of social relationships on health such as the “social contagion” of negative health behaviors including misperceived norms about alcohol use as described by social norms researchers. They stated, “given the ability of social ties to have both positive and negative effects on health, existing research has likely underestimated the true impact of social ties on health” (Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010, p. 562).

LaBrie, Hummer and Pederson (2007) asked: what is the relationship between
reasons for drinking, specifically social reasons for drinking, and negative consequences among college students? They hypothesized that social reasons would be more frequently endorsed and predictive of drinking behaviors and problems than enhancement or coping reasons. They also sought to identify any gender differences. Their interest in conducting this particular study stemmed from the failure of past research to find links between social drinking and negative consequences, which does not seem to line up with the highly social nature of drinking on college campuses and often reported negative consequences experienced by students. Additionally, they noted that males and females may abuse alcohol for different reasons.

**Purpose of the Study**

Women’s reasons for drinking need to be understood in order for social norms messaging to be as effective for them as it is for men. This requires a study that does not assume a priori what women’s drinking experiences are nor how women are impacted by high-risk drinking. Therefore, a phenomenological approach must be used.

LaBrie, Hummer and Pederson’s (2007) findings showed that social comradery was correlated with every drinking variable they identified (drinks per month, drinking days, average drinks, and heavy episodic drinking events) for women in the sample. It was also a significant predictor of alcohol consequences even outside of higher consumption levels for females. Based on these findings, LaBrie, Hummer and Pederson posed the following questions: what are women’s reasons for drinking, underlying psychosocial traits associated with these reasons, and accompanying problems?

Further, researchers have called for a better understanding of the socially
negotiated rules of conduct and the effect on the relationship between norms and behavior (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015), investigation into how gender-specific drinking norms can be used in social norms campaigns (Korcuska & Thombs, 2005), and creating a gendered approach to harm reduction from alcohol misuse (Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007). If social norms marketing campaigns and other prevention initiatives and interventions are going to be effective with women, their reasons for, communication about, and norms for drinking must be understood. The purpose of this study is to understand how college women experience high-risk drinking and their experiences of and communication about norms surrounding high-risk drinking for women.

**Conceptual Framework**

According to social norms theory, individuals incorrectly perceive behaviors and attitudes of their peers as different from their own (Berkowitz, 2003). Also called “pluralistic ignorance” (Miller & McFarland, 1991), these misperceptions cause individuals to overestimate risk behaviors and underestimate the healthy behaviors of others, which can in turn decrease a healthy behavior or reinforce a problem behavior to match the misperceived norm (Berkowitz, 2003). When social marketing campaigns based on social norms theory are disseminated in a college population, efficacy can vary according to peer group and gender (Thombs, Ray-Tomasek, Osborn & Olds, 2005, Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). If recommendations to increase efficacy of social norms campaigns by integrating gender specific messages (Korsuka & Thombs, 2005) are followed, understanding how gender impacts norms and behaviors around high risk drinking is essential.
While college men’s drinking behaviors have been widely studied (Capraro, 2000, Borsari and Carey, 2006, Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009, Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007, Peralta, 2007), women’s drinking behaviors have not received as much attention, with women’s drinking norms and behaviors mostly defined in contrast to men’s (Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams & Young, 2001). Social norms campaigns can benefit students who drink in low-risk ways or do not drink at all by affirming their behaviors, but those who stand to benefit most are students who drink in high-risk ways (Berkowitz, 2005). Understanding high-risk drinking women college students’ experiences of drinking norms and their influence can provide insight and direction for interventions on college campuses using social norms theory. Because these experiences need to be understood before a social norms approach can be applied, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is used to investigate the research question.

**Research Question for the Study**

Studies on curriculum infusion of the social norms approach as a service-learning project in the classroom setting showed gender differences regarding efficacy (Flynn & Carter, 2015, Flynn, Carter & Craig, 2017). Specifically, males reduced their high risk drinking behaviors significantly more than females. In a qualitative study about the conversations students had about the project outside of the classroom, Carter and Flynn (2018) found that female students reported less likelihood to correct misperceptions around the drinking behaviors of others than did male students. Correcting misperceptions is an important part of an effective social norms campaign. Berkowitz (2005) stated, “[p]roviding accurate information about norms creates
cognitive dissonance by informing those who are `in the misperception’ that what they believe is wrong, i.e. that those who are pluralistically ignorant are in the majority and that those who are in false consensus are in the minority. Introducing cognitive dissonance can catalyze a process of change if information about the true norm is introduced in a way that is believable and credible” (p. 5). Could women’s hesitancy to correct the misperceptions of others somehow be connected to the reduced efficacy of the social norms classroom intervention for them?

To further understand women’s perceptions of norms, their influence on behavior, and how social norms based messages might be directed towards them in the future, one primary and three supplemental research questions were posed. They are as follows.

**Primary Research Question**

The following primary research question guides this study:

- Do college women perceive their drinking norms as different than men’s and, if so, how can social norms-based messages be tailored to women?

Several supplemental research questions will be used to further guide this study. They are:

- How do drinking norms influence the drinking behavior of women currently engaging in high risk drinking?
- How do high-risk drinking college women describe their drinking experiences?
What reasons do college women give for high risk drinking?

Research Design

Women college students were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project via flyers placed around campus offering twenty dollars to participate in the study. Students who contacted the researcher and met the criteria of high-risk drinking were asked to complete two interviews and keep a journal between the two interviews. Monetary compensation in the form of a twenty-dollar bill was provided due to the time they committed to both interviews and keeping a journal.

Interviews were scheduled with students who agreed to participate in the research project. The interviews were semi-structured, with the interviewer asking prompting questions about participants’ perceptions of drinking and drinking behaviors but also following the research participants’ leads. Participants were also asked to keep a journal either by taking notes on their phones or on paper for the approximately 1-2 weeks between interviews. The content of participants’ journals was not used as part of the research, but it was used to facilitate conversations about participants’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences from the previous week(s).

The second interview was scheduled 1-2 weeks after the first interview. Participants were asked to recount any experiences, thoughts, and feelings contained in their journals as well respond to additional question prompts.

In keeping with Pietkiewicz and Smith’s (2014) recommendation, all interviews were scheduled to take at least one hour. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were then
analyzed for identifying the uniqueness of participants’ experiences and then open coding was used to identify patterns.

Data was analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011). The IPA approach focuses on how people make sense of their experience and is concerned with meaning and processes (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). IPA seeks to understand the participants’ lived experiences and focuses on a detailed examination of instances, lending itself to a small group of cases (Shinebourne, 2011). Therefore, this study was limited to 6-8 participants.

Key Terms Defined

The following list features key terms and definitions pertaining to the present study. Each term has been selected based on its importance to the concepts in the study and will assist the reader in clarifying terms in the study.

1. *High-Risk Drinking*: Generally described as binge drinking, or 4 or more drinks in one sitting for females, 5 or more drinks in one sitting for males (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001)

2. *Social Norms Theory*: Social norms theory describes situations in which individuals incorrectly perceive the attitudes and/or behaviors of peers and other community members to be different from their own. (Berkowitz, 2005)

3. *Social Marketing*: The application of commercial marketing techniques including planning, implementation, evaluation, analysis and execution of programs designed to change or influence voluntary behaviors of
individuals in order to positively affect personal or societal welfare.

(Andreasen, 1994)

4. *Social Norms Marketing*: The application of social marketing techniques to distribute social norms messages.

5. *Curriculum infusion*: Curriculum infusion provides an opportunity for students to receive information about alcohol, drug and other health related issues as part of academic classes. (White, Park & Cordero, 2010)


7. *Perceived same-sex norms*: refers to perceptions of typical drinking by same-sex peers (i.e., men’s perceptions of men’s drinking and women’s perceptions of women’s drinking) (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004).

8. *Gender as a social construct*: Gender is not seen as something that lives inside someone, rather it is enacted every day through social transactions and day-to-day activities (Lyons & Willott, 2008)

9. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*: IPA is often used to understand behaviors within a health context by seeking the user perspective while recognizing that understanding behaviors is critical to health promotion, including behaviors outside of the “norm” (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011).
Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is the possibility that some interviews may not include full details of the participants’ experiences with alcohol. There could be several reasons for this. One is the generally considered sensitive nature of the topic of alcohol use especially for participants under the legal drinking age of 21. Although their confidentiality was discussed and ensured, participants may still have been hesitant to share information. This limitation is exacerbated by the fact that the researcher is a staff member at the institution participants attended. To address the limitations of the study, the researcher conducted 2 separate interviews, with the intention of spending time during both interviews to build rapport. The researcher also discussed confidentiality and its limits extensively in order to increase the likelihood that participants would share their experiences freely. The researcher’s past experience as a licensed counselor was helpful in explaining confidentiality and its limits as well as providing a good foundation for rapport building techniques such as active listening, asking open-ended questions, and unconditional positive regard.

Delimitations

The study was limited to understanding high risk drinking females’ perceptions of drinking norms; therefore, only college women who drink in a high-risk way (based on their own self-described behaviors) were recruited. While it is important to understand how all college women perceive drinking norms in order to create social norms messages, low risk and non-drinking college women were not included. This
study took place at one institution so that all participants had experience in the same normative environment. It is possible, if not likely, that there are unique features that impacted participants’ experiences.

Chapter Summary

High-risk alcohol use on college campuses is related to several concerns surrounding student health, safety, and academic performance (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). Social norms marketing efforts were among best practice recommendations for effectively lowering the number of students who participate in high-risk drinking (Berkowitz, 2005), though their efficacy can be limited by a student’s peer group (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Some social norms interventions seemed to be more effective with men (Flynn & Carter, 2015, Flynn, Carter & Craig, 2017), and their drinking norms and behaviors have long been studied. As the gender gap for high-risk drinking narrows, it is important to understand the norms and behaviors around high-risk drinking for college women so that social norms approaches can be more effective with them.

This study sought to understand college women’s experiences and perceptions around high-risk drinking and its norms on a college campus. Interviews with a small sample of college women were transcribed and analyzed utilizing an IPA approach in order to gain insight into their experiences. The following chapters will further address the literature on college student high-risk drinking and norms, methodology used in the study, results, and conclusions.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

High-risk alcohol use is associated with higher rates of problems such as missing class, getting behind in schoolwork, engaging in unplanned sex, getting hurt or injured or driving after drinking. The more often students binge drink, defined as four or more drinks in one sitting for women and five or more drinks in one sitting for men (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), the higher their risk of problems (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000). Men as a whole engaged in high-risk drinking more frequently than women on college campuses (Capraro, 2000, Kuh & Arnold, 1993), though longitudinal studies showed women are engaging in high-risk alcohol use more frequently than they have in the past (Boyd et al., 2005 Keyes, Grant & Hasin, 2008). Understanding high-risk drinking women college students’ experiences of drinking norms and their influence provides insight and direction for interventions on college campuses using social norms theory so that they can be more effective for women (Carter, Flynn & Craig, 2017). An investigation into the experiences and perceptions of women engaging in high-risk drinking provides insight for creating interventions designed to reduce high risk drinking.

History of College Drinking

College student alcohol abuse is an aspect of undergraduate culture that dates back to the Middle Ages when drunken riots pitted college students against townspeople (Boyd, McCabe & Morales, 2005). In America, it is documented that a student group formed a drinking society in the mid-17th century at Harvard University (Boyd, McCabe, & Morales, 2005). The early part of the 20th century saw an elevation of alcohol use in
the American culture (Keyes, Grant & Hasin, 2008), of which colleges and universities are a part. College men in those early decades drank heavily in a time when drinking was both politicized and polarized (Room, 1984). Several American writers came of age during this time who were known as heavy drinkers, and while there were many factors that increased the general acceptance of alcohol use by the American public, Room (1984) noted that “For the ‘lost generation’ of writers and for the collegians of the late 1920’s who followed in their steps, drinking and indeed drunkenness served as a rhetoric of emancipation…from the claims of an older America for moral hegemony” (p.8).

Since the legal drinking age changed to 21 across the country in 1988, there have been several studies to show that young adults in college drink more than their peers who do not attend college (Slutske, 2005, Blanco et.al., 2008). In a study that differentiated between alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence disorders, researchers found that college students were significantly more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse disorders but no more likely to meet dependence criteria. Though there could be several factors to explain these findings, such as those who meet dependence criteria were more likely to leave school, there seems to be some aspect of the college experience that poses an environmental risk factor for alcohol abuse in young adults (Slutske, 2005).

In Crawford and Novak’s (2006) investigation into college students’ view that alcohol use is part of college life, they found that certain traits predicted student perception that alcohol abuse is integral to the role of college student. Such traits included gender (male), having friends who drink heavily, participation in Greek life, drinking before college, and believing that alcohol use is a common campus activity.
Addressing College Drinking

Early prevention programs on college campuses, including general education for incoming students on alcohol and other drug related issues, peer education programs, and awareness events, were generally based on the premise that students were not aware of the local, state, and federal laws and associated dangers surrounding alcohol use (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). These programs, while used to some degree today, have shown little success in effecting student drinking behaviors, which underscores the fact that student knowledge alone does not prevent high risk alcohol use (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). Current programs on campuses in line with best practices used a variety of approaches to the issue, including environmental management in the form of policy enforcement, partnerships with local law enforcement, extracurricular and late night programming options, and academic strategies such as required class attendance (Kington, 2002). Social marketing and social norming efforts were also used widely on campuses to address student misperceptions that “everyone is drinking” by putting a mirror to the population and sharing real usage data specific to the campus. Faculty involvement and curriculum infusion were also ways to examine negative effects of alcohol use in the classroom environment (Vicary & Karshin, 2002), and have shown some efficacy (White, Park & Cordero, 2010; Yearwood & Riley, 2010, Mayhew, Caldwell & Hourigan, 2014).

Social Norms Marketing

Among other environmental management strategies, social marketing and social norming efforts were used widely on campuses to address student misperceptions that “everyone is drinking” by putting a mirror to the population and sharing real usage data
specific to the campus (Perkins, 2002; Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986; Rentner, 2008). Social norms marketing’s widespread use spurred a robust body of research on various factors that can influence its efficacy. Korcuska and Thombs (2003) discussed the following hypotheses that social norms research has generated:

1. Most college students overestimate the prevalence of heavy drinking among their peers.
2. These biased perceptions of the drinking norm help to create permissive campus environments with respect to alcohol use.
3. Students often rely on misperceived norms to make decisions about their drinking behavior.
4. The most influential drinking norms are those formed to characterize the drinking of the proximal reference groups (e.g. close friends) as opposed to more distal reference groups (e.g. typical students on campus).
5. There is a positive correlation between estimates of peer drinking and personal alcohol use as well as with self-reports of alcohol-related problems (p. 205).

These hypotheses play a role in investigating the impact of the environment on how students perceive and talk about campus drinking norms. Campaigns and messages that focus on negative consequences of alcohol use fail to take into account the acceptance of alcohol use as a normative behavior among college students. Social norms campaigns instead focus on the positive behaviors used by students around alcohol, and to make them effective, it is important to investigate the underlying interpersonal and
social contexts that shape student perceptions (Howard, Griffin, Boekeloo, Lake, & Bellows, 2007). After all, norms are, at their core, communication phenomena (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015).

One body of social norms marketing research has centered around the concept of proximal versus distal norms and their impact on individual student drinking (Korcuska & Thombs, 2003). This literature has critiqued campus wide social norms campaigns’ lack of focus on proximal peer group influences, such as that of close friends, arguing that they are less effective in heavy-drinking friend groups (Maddock & Glanz, 2005).

**Curriculum Infusion as a Small Group Social Norms Intervention**

Curriculum infusion provides an opportunity for students to receive information about alcohol, drug and other health related issues as part of academic classes. Several studies have found positive outcomes related to the use of curriculum infusion around perceptions of campus alcohol use, alcohol expectancies, increased protective behaviors and decreased student alcohol use (Burgraaf Riley, Durbin & Ariano, 2005; Yearwood & Riley, 2010; Lederman, Stewart & Russ, 2007; Hittner, 2013; White, Park, & Cordero, 2010, Mayhew, Caldwell & Hourigan, 2014).

Faculty who use Curriculum Infusion play an important part in reaching students who do not self-select into alcohol and other drug education on campus and also provide messages that students can take with them off campus (White, Park & Cordero, 2010). Curriculum infusion can range from a one-time lecture to ongoing projects or assignments. Any time that faculty discuss alcohol issues in a classroom setting, they encourage interactive dialogue, an important part of changing the campus social/cultural
environment identified by Ziemles et. al. (2010) as an effective prevention strategy.

Programs that used classrooms or workshops to present actual group norms provided a way to address more proximal norms than campus-wide campaigns have the ability to do (Lewis, 2007). Micro level interventions, such as those situated in a classroom environment, give students the opportunity to acquire knowledge about the true behavior of their peers that they might not have access to otherwise and can potentially be more effective than mass communication campaigns in reducing misperceptions (Yanovitzky, Stewart, & Lederman, 2006). Communication courses in particular offer a unique context to address alcohol related issues in the classroom given the relevance of the topic to course content and presumably student interest in said topic (Lederman, Stewart, & Russ, 2007).

Flynn and Carter’s (2015) investigation into the efficacy of social norms as a service-learning project showed evidence for positive perception and behavior change amongst students enrolled in an entry level health communication class. Additionally, men involved in the service-learning project showed a greater decrease in drinking behaviors than did women (Flynn, Carter, & Craig, 2017). Since male drinking norms encourage higher risk behaviors than female drinking norms, it is important to attempt to understand the mechanisms at play in reducing these behaviors in the classroom service-learning context.

**Gender-specific Drinking Norms**

Lewis and Neighbors (2004) defined gender-specific drinking norms as both the same-sex and opposite-sex drinking norms of a typical college student. In a study on
gender-specific perceptions of drinking norms, they found that perceptions of same-sex
drinking norms were more strongly associated with drinking for women in particular
(Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek (2007) found that men reported
more health-promoting behaviors when they perceived that other men were engaged in
health-promoting behaviors, supporting findings that perceptions of same-sex norms are
predictors of health behaviors. They reported:

> Given our findings that men’s perceptions of men’s normative health behaviors
relates to their own adoption of health behaviors, social norms interventions may
also be effective in reducing health-risk behaviors and increasing health
promotion behaviors. Some evidence that men in our sample may experience
pluralistic ignorance in relation to other men’s actual normative health behavior is
that men in our sample tended to view other men as engaging in more health-risk
behaviors than themselves. (p. 2207)

Since alcohol use is linked to a student’s close friend group (Thombs, Ray-Tomasek,
Osborn, & Olds, 2005) and male peer norms predict high-risk alcohol use, an
investigation into the experiences and conversations of women engaging in high-risk
drinking might provide insight into gender differences that affect outcomes of
interventions designed to reduce high-risk drinking.

**Gender as a Social Construct**

According to social constructionist theory, gender is not something that lives inside
someone, rather it is enacted every day through social transactions and day-to-day
activities (Lyons & Willott, 2008). The social constructionist theory posits that women
and men adopt concepts related to masculinity and femininity from their culture which
impacts how they think and act (Courtenay, 2000). Risman (2004) further explained “…
gender identities are constructed on the individual and cultural dimensions [and] vary
tremendously over time and space. Even within contemporary American society, gender structures vary by community, social class, ethnicity, and race” (p. 442). Martin (2004) stated in part that gender provides expectations for individuals, is willingly incorporated into an individual’s identity, dictates the order of social processes, and is a part of society’s major organizations. Thus, individuals can conform to and/or resist gender roles, or do and undo gender, by situating their conduct within normative attitudes and conceptions of activities deemed appropriate for their identified gender (McDonald, 2013).

In his study on the social construction of college men’s identities, Davis (2002) concluded that the extent to which “people accept scripted gender roles either blindly or due to perceived sanctions for acting outside of these roles, their identity is less self-authored and more socially constructed” (p.520). When it comes to alcohol use, Peralta (2007) explored how men used drinking behavior as part of constructing a masculine identity, which is often defined as dichotomous from a feminine identity.

**Drinking Norms Among Men**

In Western society, young adult men drink more than young adult women, making it a gendered activity (de Visser & McDonald, 2012). Montauti and Bulmer (2014) found that college men engaged in significantly more heavy-episodic drinking than college women. Men were also found to hold more positive alcohol expectancies than women and saw alcohol related consequences as less negative (Thompson, Spitler, McCoy, Marra, Sutfun, Rhodes & Brown, 2009).

Capraro (2000) discussed several conceptualizations of alcohol and masculinity
including drinking as a male domain, drinking to deal with the paradox of masculinity, conflict, shame, fear, depression, and the paradox of men’s power (those who appear most powerful socially often feel the most powerless personally). Based on these concepts, he recommended that colleges and universities incorporate more gender awareness to risk-reduction programs and develop gender specific social norms education (Capraro, 2000).

deVisser & McDonnell (2012) discussed the gendered nature of many health behaviors (dieting, exercise, etc.) as well as the role of media in reinforcing the connection between drinking and masculinity in their examination of gender standards for college alcohol use. The role of environmental selection can also play a part in drinking behaviors, and if men belong to predominantly male peer groups, they could be at risk for higher alcohol use (Kahler, Read, Wood & Palfai, 2003).

For men, alcohol use can be a way to both enact male privilege and navigate the emotional hazards that can come with that privilege on a college campus (Capraro, 2000). In his qualitative study on college alcohol use and masculinity among European American men, Peralta (2007) concluded that masculinity is expressed through drinking behaviors in a context (college) where these expressions are expected, accepted, and legitimized. He went on to contrast European American men’s accounts of drinking with European American and African American women’s, who “…did not assert that women’s heavy alcohol use was a way to express power. Their drinking stories did not symbolize strength or power as women. Women largely viewed heavy drinking among women as potentially problematic, shameful, and stigmatizing behavior unbecoming of
women” (p. 753).

College drinking in the Fraternity culture on college campuses is the most frequent, heaviest, and most problematic (Iwamoto et. al., 2011, Kuh & Arnold, 1993). In their exploration of the use of alcohol in Fraternity pledgeship, Kuh and Arnold (1993) noted the culture that college males are normed to during their time as Fraternity pledges, including surroundings, rituals, rules, and activities. The authors concluded that, “the greatest disappointment is that fraternities, and those who support them, have not taken action to assess and address the cultural contexts of these groups to effect changes that will result in behavior by fraternity members that is more congruent with espoused fraternity goals” (p. 333).

Borsari and Carey (2006) stated that the more men interact with peers, the greater the likelihood of heavy alcohol use, noting that men received greater social reinforcement in drinking situations and viewed drinking as a way to enhance support and closeness from peers. Additionally, college men reported greater use of mental disengagement through alcohol use when experiencing stress than did women (Brougham, et. al., 2009). Often, young men did not recognize high risk drinking as problematic; therefore, they were often alienated by messages that attempt to modify their drinking behaviors (Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007).

**Drinking Norms Among Women**

Lewis and Neighbors (2004) sought to determine if perceptions of same-sex norms, which refers to perceptions of typical drinking by same-sex peers (i.e., men’s perceptions of men’s drinking and women’s perceptions of women’s drinking) would
predict both alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems more than opposite-sex norms among undergraduate students. They found that same-sex drinking norm perceptions were more strongly associated with drinking than perceptions of gender non-specific norms for women especially, leading them to conclude that normative feedback should incorporate gender-specific norms.

Ricciardelli, Connor, Williams and Young (2001) examined gender stereotypes, restrained drinking, and self-efficacy for alcohol refusal in college men and women who drink. They found that high-risk drinking women showed lower self-efficacy and capacity to refuse drinking across social situations. Additionally, negative emotional states and temptations or cues to drink also led to lower self-efficacy and lower capacity to refuse drinks even if women in the study stated they were trying to control or were worried about their drinking. The authors concluded that prevention efforts for women need to take into account these more complex cognitions and that “additional studies are needed which consider female drinking in its own right rather than a simple adjunct of male drinking” (p. 135).

Lyons and Willott (2008) discussed the simultaneous empowerment and “unrespectability” of women who drink heavily in their study of high-risk drinking professional women, noting that linking the pursuit of pleasure with female empowerment can be troublesome for women. The unrespectability was due to the meanings within traditional feminine discourses (e.g. control, responsibility, vulnerability) which include hierarchical gendered dichotomies (e.g. dependent/independent) that value male traits above female traits. Thus, it is difficult for
women to be both heavy drinkers and feminine. If female college students drink heavily and within peer groups of other heavy drinkers, their acknowledgement of this could be admitting to “unfeminine” behavior (Lyons & Willot, 2008; Peralta, 2007). These traditional gender norms could ultimately shame or silence women who may be at the highest risk for alcohol related harm even as they raise their awareness of campus norms surrounding high risk alcohol use.

**Marginalization through Gender Stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes ascribe attributes and behaviors to men and women solely based on gender. Heilman (2012) discussed both descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes, with descriptive stereotypes designating what men and women are like and prescriptive stereotypes designating what men and women should be like. Descriptive stereotypes for men tended to involve agency while descriptive stereotypes for women involved communality and they were remarkably consistent across time and culture. There was overlap between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes for men and women, but prescriptive stereotypes also described ways men and women should NOT behave. Therefore, prescriptive stereotypes served to establish normative expectations for behavior for both men and women, but women were more likely to be devalued and degraded for violating gender norms (Heilman, 2012).

Risman and Davis’s (2013) review of the history of studying sex roles and gender discussed research traditions’ early focus on gender at the individual level which later expanded to encompass analysis of organizational structures and interaction systems that created inequality. More recent research has focused on the social environment, with
women’s behavior conceptualized as based in realistic perceptions of an environment which must be navigated in a way that ensures impressions are managed depending on the situation (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010).

Acknowledgement of social environment’s impact on gendered behavior led to the development of theories around how gender power differences are maintained. Ambivalent sexism theory states that stereotypical attitudes and beliefs about women exist on both hostile and benevolent levels, operating as an interwoven system of rewards and punishments that incentivize women’s acceptance of power differences between men and women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Fields, Swan and Kloos’ (2010) investigation into female college students’ experiences with ambivalent sexism theory found that most college women expressed some form of ambivalent sexism when writing about what it means to be a woman.

Connell (2012) argued for the use of gender theory to help navigate the complexities of gender and health. In this context, gender includes a reflexive practice of social embodiment, which specifies how a society handles motherhood, fatherhood, sexuality, reproduction, child growth and all of the social norms connected with these processes. In this light, “...we cannot logically treat gender as an independent variable and health status as a dependent variable. We can give full recognition to embodiment without falling back on the categorical idea that gendered health effects are just about the biological differences between bodies” (Connell, 2012, p. 1678). The need to understand female drinking norms in their own right and not just in contrast to male drinking norms is one way to break a marginalized pattern of gender norms which, as Connell pointed
Chapter Summary

High-risk drinking and its associated impact on health, safety, and academic performance has long been associated with the college experience. Many strategies have been used to mitigate the effects of college student alcohol use including education, environmental management strategies, and social marketing campaigns. Social norms marketing has shown efficacy in reducing high risk drinking amongst college students, but questions remain regarding how to best implement campaigns due to differences in outcomes among males and females as well as students with high-risk drinking peer groups. While gendered drinking norms have been well studied among college men, women’s experiences of high risk drinking and associated norms have been less documented. To create social norms interventions that are sensitive to gendered norms for college women and counteract the marginalization of women’s health issues, their experiences and perceptions need to be better understood.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

High-risk alcohol use was associated with a variety of threats to student health and success on college campuses such as alcohol poisoning, fatalities, assaults, and academic consequences including dropping out of school (Jennison, 2004). Students who binge drink, defined as four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men in one sitting (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), experienced significantly more negative consequences than those who did not with frequent binge drinkers experiencing more severe academic and personal consequences than less frequent binge drinkers (Ziemelis, Bucknam & Elfessi, 2010).

Campaigns and messages that focus on negative consequences of alcohol use failed to take into account the acceptance of alcohol use as a normative behavior among college students (Howard et.al., 2007). Social norms campaigns instead focused on the positive behaviors used by students who drink alcohol as well as those who abstained and have shown efficacy in reducing high-risk drinking on college campuses (Berkowitz, 2005). See Appendix A for some examples of social norms campaigns on college campuses. There is also evidence that social norms campaigns’ efficacy can vary according to a student’s gender and peer group (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). College women’s perceptions and norms around high-risk alcohol use have received less attention in the literature than men’s (Ricciardelli et.al., 2001). This study sought to understand college women’s experiences and beliefs around high-risk drinking and its norms on a
Pilot Study

The research questions as well as the interview questions in this study were informed by a pilot study that was conducted to examine the experiences and conversations of men and women related to a small-group social norms intervention in which students worked together to create messages for an active social norms campaign at their mid-sized university in the southeastern United States. Located in a resort area, the university had unique features such as a high alcohol outlet density near campus and a high rate of alcohol-related traffic fatalities state-wide. These features created a high-risk environment for students as well as a significant gap in perceptions and realities of student alcohol use. The social norms campaign on campus had been in existence for approximately three years when the study took place. Participants were enrolled in a health communication course which included a service-learning project as a course requirement. The project allowed students to learn about social norms marketing principles and apply them to a real campaign. Students in the class were offered extra credit points for participating in interviews with the primary researcher who was not involved in grading any aspect of the projects.

A similar design had been used the previous three semesters in the same health communication classes in an attempt to study the efficacy of this particular small group social norms intervention (curriculum infusion). Quantitative self-report survey data was collected each of these three semesters to determine changes in alcohol use perceptions and behaviors using a pre-test, post-test design (Flynn & Carter, 2015, Flynn, Carter &
Craig, 2017). The previous two semesters, with the approval of the site IRB, included preliminary brief interviews with students in the curriculum infusion class for which students were offered extra credit points. These preliminary interviews as well as findings from the previous quantitative studies informed the questions asked in the pilot study. See Appendix B for the conceptual framework, previous interview response examples, and interview questions for the pilot study.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with 20 out of 25 students from the class (80%) using a semi-structured interview guide. Questions were developed with the goal of understanding students’ experience working on the project as well as conversations they had within and outside of the class. Interviews took place toward the end of the class when the projects were close to being completed and project messages had been designed. Participants were required to sign an informed consent and told that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with each participant’s permission. Researchers used a grounded theory approach to identify key concepts in the interviews (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), with both researchers doing an initial independent analysis of themes and then comparing results (Peralta, 2007). This approach was used due to its emphasis on the “experience and perspective of the research participants rather than that of the researchers” (Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007, p. 156). Open coding was used in order to identify major categories of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Transcripts were further analyzed by reading and re-reading to note patterns and themes accompanied by a process of
categorization, comparison and integration (Piacentini & Banister, 2008).

Participants ranged in age from 18 – 24. Six participants identified as male and 14 participants identified as female. Most participants were juniors (n=10) or sophomores (n=7). See Table 1 for student interviews by gender and year in school.

*Table 1. Student Interviews: Gender and Year in School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freshman</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Findings and Conclusions of the Pilot Study*

Several themes emerged around conversations that students had outside of class with their peers about the project as well as around voicing their opinions to correct the misperceptions of others. Of the 20 students interviewed, 15 reported that they had conversations outside the class about the project and five reported that they had not. When asked if they voiced their opinions to correct misperceptions that other students had around high risk drinking on campus, 12 students reported that they did not. Interestingly, four of the six men in the study reported that they corrected misperceptions while only four of the 14 women reported that they corrected misperceptions. See Table 2 for outside conversations and correcting misperceptions by gender.
Table 2. Gender and Conversations, Correcting Misperceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outside Conversation about project</th>
<th>No Outside Conversation about project</th>
<th>Corrected Misperceptions of Others</th>
<th>Did Not Correct Misperceptions of Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correcting misperceptions is an important part of an effective social norms campaign because it creates cognitive dissonance for students who hold misperceptions about the drinking behaviors of their peers (Berkowitz, 2005).

It appeared that small-group projects based on the social norms approach did encourage conversations between students and their peers about campus social norms campaigns. There were also gender differences between male and female students involved in these projects taking an active voice to correct the misperceptions of their peers, with men more likely to correct peers’ misperceptions. Given that research on male drinking norms indicates a greater acceptance of high risk drinking amongst college men than women (Caparro, 2000, Peralta, 2007, Borsari and Carey, 2006), this willingness to talk about the project with others could be due to less stigma around talking about drinking in general. Some of the discussion in Courtenay’s (2000) article on gender and health theory can also be applied to this phenomenon in that the traditional female role is
more accustomed to participating in health care while “…researching or providing health care is constructed as masculine and defined as a domain of masculine power” (p. 1395). This may provide insight into the possible efficacy of a service-learning project social norms intervention with male students (Flynn & Carter, 2015, Flynn, Carter & Craig, 2017) related to their greater likelihood to share the messages with others and perhaps internalize them as they do due to the construction of providing health information as masculine.

**Significance of the Pilot Study**

The results of the pilot study helped to lay the groundwork for inquiry into gendered social norms approaches that show more efficacy for women by pointing to the need to better understand what women perceive as their drinking norms as well as if and how they talk about them. The pilot study was informed by previous research that showed the efficacy of a small group social norms intervention using curriculum infusion and gender differences, with men decreasing alcohol use more than women. The pilot study helped the researcher to pinpoint how women had conversations with their peers around alcohol use and its risks and uncovered differences in how those conversations unfolded when compared to men’s conversations. It was clear that women’s experiences related to high-risk alcohol use needed to be better understood in order to make social norms messages more effective.

The pilot study also showed that differences in how social norms messages impacted college men and women needed to be investigated using a phenomenological approach. The differences in how conversations unfolded and the feelings students had
around voicing opinions informed the current study’s design of using an IPA approach with a small number of participants in order to uncover the nuances of how high-risk drinking is experienced by college women. It also helped illuminate the need to search for college women’s voices related to high-risk alcohol use.

**Current Study**

To understand how college women experience high-risk drinking, a qualitative study was conducted with focus on the lived experience of a small sample of women college students whose behaviors met high-risk drinking criteria. While the lack of studies on college women’s drinking norms could be due to their tendency to drink in a high-risk way less frequently than men, the closing gender gap and changing norms around drinking in the larger society (Keyes, Grant & Hasin, 2007) indicated that more research is needed. Also, discrepancies in efficacy of social norms interventions in small group settings (Flynn, Carter & Craig, 2017) pointed to a need to understand the experiences of these women.

**Positionality**

It is vital to be aware of the motivations that drive the researcher to do a project as well as be aware of their potential to make the researcher interpret things inaccurately in the analysis phase. For this particular study, it is important to note some biases.

As a practitioner on a college campus who works in part to mitigate the consequences of high-risk alcohol use, I must acknowledge my immersion within the research topic. The literature explores both advantages and disadvantages of the researcher being an insider with regard to the research process, but exploratory
qualitative studies are often developed by practitioners immersed in the area of study (Brunero, Jeon & Foster, 2015). As someone who has experienced first-hand the effects of high-risk drinking on women during my own time in high school and college from friends who were assaulted, to experiences of harassment, to academic impacts, to tumultuous “drama” for lack of a better word, it is important for me to ensure that my perceptions of alcohol use are not imposed on research participants.

In my career, my understanding of how alcohol can impact the college experience has expanded, as I suspect is the case for many college administrators. Not only have I had the opportunity to see the effects of high-risk alcohol use on students on a much larger level as a result of choosing a career in the college environment, the perspective that comes with this fact, along with that which tends to come with age, has allowed me to connect a lot of dots between alcohol and many of the problems that students experience that I was not able to connect as a young woman in college.

I must also acknowledge past first-hand experience with other topics at hand. These include experiencing gendered norms as a woman and experiencing marginalization through the communication of what it means to be a woman as well as rewards for subscribing to traditional female gender roles and punishments for stepping outside of them. For example, I remember being told as a young girl that my career goal of being a doctor was not realistic because doctors were usually men and perhaps I would be better suited to being a nurse.

It also must be noted that although experiences with college alcohol use and gender stereotypes affect a large number of women, my particular experiences have been
through the lens of a white, middle-class person who was raised in a family of educators. This surely plays a part in my passion for education and its transformational properties as well as the importance of its accessibility to everyone. Through my lens, high-risk alcohol use poses a barrier, manifested in different ways for different students, to accessing the benefits of higher education.

**Research Question**

In order to further understand women’s perceptions of norms, their influence on behavior, and how social norms based messages might be directed towards them in the future, the following questions were posed.

This primary research question guided the study:

- Do college women perceive their drinking norms as different than men’s and, if so, how can social norms-based messages be tailored to women?

Several supplemental research questions were used to further guide this study.

They were:

- How do drinking norms influence the drinking behavior of women currently engaging in high risk drinking?
- How do high-risk drinking college women describe their drinking experiences?
- What reasons do college women give for high risk drinking?

**Research Design**

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach focuses on how people make sense of their experience and is concerned with meaning and
processes. Its assumptions include that understanding the world comes from understanding individual experiences and that personal accounts need to come from those immersed in the experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

An IPA approach was used for a number of reasons. First, its roots are in psychology (Shinebourne, 2011), which can be helpful for understanding any psychosocial traits that might underlie participants’ motivations for and experiences around high risk drinking. Additionally, it is often used to understand behaviors within a health context by seeking the user perspective while recognizing that understanding behaviors is critical to health promotion, including behaviors outside of the “norm” (Pringle et al., 2011). Finally, it allows focus on not only the experiences of the research participants, but also on an examination of the meanings that they impress on those experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

A study using an IPA approach aims to both give voice to the research participants as well as make sense of the phenomenon being studied (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Because the focus of this study was on college women who drink in a high-risk way, IPA’s emphasis on using participants’ experience to explain the phenomenon is appropriate, as it is not generally used to study attitudes about issues that are not directly relevant to participants’ lives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). IPA seeks to understand the participants’ lived experiences and focuses on a detailed examination of instances, lending itself to a small group of cases (Shinebourne, 2011), hence the small sample size used in this study.
A qualitative approach which focuses on individuals whose experiences might be outside of the norm is important for interventions aimed at all college students. As Patton (1990) states: “The logic of extreme case sampling is that lessons may be learned about unusual conditions or extreme outcomes that are relevant to improving more typical programs” (p. 169). To this end, a purposeful sampling method was used in order to obtain participants whose experiences illuminated the questions being studied (Patton, 2002).

The interviews were semi-structured in order to facilitate a natural flow of conversation, with the interviewer asking prompting questions but also following the research participants’ leads. Interview questions were formulated based on findings from the pilot study with the aim of learning more about how college women describe their experiences with going out, high-risk drinking, what norms they perceive for college women around high-risk drinking and if they are different than norms for men, and how they communicate those norms (or not) amongst their friend groups. See Appendices F and G for Interview 1 and Interview 2 questions.

**Research Site**

Southern Coast University (SCU) is located in the southeast United States in a resort area near the ocean. It is a mid-sized public university that saw rapid growth in the early 2000’s. With a mostly undergraduate population between 9,000 and 12,000 students, the university provides a liberal arts education. The largest undergraduate major is science.

Environmental factors influencing high-risk alcohol use among students include a
high alcohol outlet density both near campus and in the surrounding area and a large influx of tourists in the warm months of the year. The state in which SCU is located is ranked within the top 10 out of 50 states for highest rates of drunk driving fatalities.

**Institutional Review**

To conduct the study, the researcher contacted Clemson University’s Institutional Review Board with a description of the research project. Because the data was being collected at SCU, the Clemson IRB stated that it would enter into an agreement with the research site and accept the SCU board approval if it was in line with Clemson University’s IRB guidelines upon review.

The study was approved by SCU’s Institutional Review Board with some revisions. The original research design called for women who were referred to conduct sanctions for violating the university’s alcohol policies to contact the researcher if interested in participating. In the original design, the researcher’s name and contact information would be emailed to women who were referred for conduct violations by the office that adjudicates conduct issues on campus so that the researcher would not receive this protected information. The IRB determined that this information could be identified through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request because student emails would be used. Therefore, the design was changed to recruit students via flyers placed around campus that contained information about the study and the researcher’s contact information. See Appendices C and D for study IRB approval and recruitment flyer respectively.
Data Collection

Women college students who participate in high-risk drinking were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project via flyers placed around campus. The flyers stated that students would be paid $20 for their participation in the study. See appendix D for a copy of the flyer that was distributed around campus. Students who emailed the researcher were contacted by phone to discuss the study, logistics, information about informed consent, and to ascertain if they met the criteria for high-risk drinking. See appendix E for the informed consent used in the study. A small sample was used to allow for richer depth of analysis (Pringle et.al, 2011), with no more than 8 participants being recruited for interviews. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and were asked to complete 2 interviews and keep a journal between the 2 interviews. They were offered monetary compensation in the form of a twenty-dollar bill due to the time they committed to both interviews and journaling.

Initial interviews were scheduled with students who agreed to participate in the research project. Participants were asked to keep a journal for approximately 1-2 weeks indicating what days they drank, feelings on those days, social situations in which they drank, and any related consequences, similar to the study conducted by Bennett, Greene and Schwartz-Barcott (2013) on perceptions of emotional eating behavior. This approach helped participants accurately report on their experiences. Participants were able to choose how they would keep their journal, and options were discussed during interview one which included keeping notes on their cell phones or writing their journal down on paper. As part of their journaling, they were asked to record their feelings at least once a
day, how much alcohol they consumed every day (including days of no alcohol use), and thoughts associated with their drinking. The content of participants’ journals were not used as part of the research study and participants were not required to share what they wrote in their journals, but they were asked to bring them to the second interview in order to facilitate conversations about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences from the previous week(s). The goal of having participants journal about their drinking behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and conversations about drinking was to enhance self-awareness during the time between interviews.

The second interview was scheduled 1-2 weeks after the first interview. Participants were asked to recount any experiences, thoughts, and feelings contained in their journals as well respond to additional question prompts. See Appendix G for interview 2 questions.

All interviews were scheduled for one hour. The interviewer was intentional about building rapport with the research participants, as some questions could be considered personal information and it was important for participants to feel comfortable (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were then analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Each interview was analyzed separately in order to look for patterns and themes within each. The researcher analyzed the interviews in the order in which they were conducted chronologically. Since each participant did two interviews,
the researcher analyzed interview one first, interview two second, and then looked for patterns in both interviews. Initial coding was done by noting questions, reactions and comments by the researcher prompted by the transcripts. Then the researcher read all initial commentary in both interviews in order to identify themes. The interviews for each participant were analyzed in this way.

Next, all interviews were considered together in order to identify connections across interviews (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As patterns and themes were identified, they were grouped into larger overarching themes which provided insight into women’s experiences with, perceptions of, norms around, and motivations for alcohol use in the college environment.

In order to follow an IPA approach, the researcher had to be open-minded, empathetic, patient, flexible and willing to enter the world of the participant while maintaining persistence and curiosity (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Engaging in the double hermeneutics required to truly understand the experiences of the research participants required maintaining reflexivity through means like reflective writing and journaling (Brunero, Jeon & Foster, 2015). To this end, the researcher kept a research journal throughout the process and wrote reflections after each interview.

**The Role of the Researcher**

IPA requires the researcher’s adoption of a dual role in which he or she is both like and unlike the participant (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Its use of *double hermeneutics* acknowledges the fact that it is a dynamic process and that the researcher is
part of the research process (Croston, 2014). As the goal of analysis is to make sense of the participant who is making sense of the phenomenon, high-risk drinking in this study, the researcher is like the participant in that she is a typical human drawing on her own resources to make sense of the world. However, unlike the participant, she must acknowledge her lack of access to the actual lived experience being investigated which can only be understood through what is reported (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Bracketing was used by the researcher in order to identify her own reactions to participants’ experiences through journaling that was done after each interview and again after transcribing each interview. This process was used to ensure that the themes identified were truly found in participants’ accounts and not the researcher’s experiences or perceptions.

**Ensuring Confidentiality**

All research participants signed an informed consent form at the beginning of the first interview and it was discussed. All identifying information was changed when interviews were transcribed. Given the sensitive nature of information shared regarding alcohol use in light of the potential stigmatization of women’s drinking behaviors and participants being below the legal drinking age, confidentiality was discussed again at the second interview. This was important because, as Kaiser (2009) pointed out, when confidentiality is discussed only before the project begins, participants do not have a clear idea of what information they will be sharing.

**Trustworthiness of the Research**

Rapport building was an important part of the interviews, as participants needed
to feel comfortable given the possible sensitive subject matter. Some interview questions (Appendix F) were designed to increase rapport between participants and the researcher. Building rapport ensured trust from the research participants and was important for ensuring the that good data was obtained (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

**Credibility**

Triangulation of the data occurred through the study’s use of the same semi-structured interview guide as well as using follow up interviews with all research participants (Merriam, 2009). The intentional use of multiple participants was also a form of triangulation, as the exploration of one phenomenon from multiple perspectives helps an IPA analyst gain a more multifaceted and detailed understanding of the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Additionally, member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of transcripts and interpretation (Patton, 2009). Member checking was done throughout each interview, with the researcher reflecting back to participants to ensure understanding of what they were saying. Techniques included reflective summaries, follow-up questions, and directly asking for clarification during the interviews. Because IPA is interpretive and multiple participants were interviewed over several weeks, member checking was restricted to clarification during interviews. Additional strategies of peer validation and audit were also used (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

**Transferability**

Field notes were kept throughout the process of obtaining IRB approval and scheduling and conducting interviews (Billups. 2014). All interviews in the study took
place during the last 3 weeks of the semester and first 3 weeks of summer. Students interviewed were either studying for and taking finals or had just completed the semester and were working on campus. Interviews were scheduled in meeting rooms around campus which were out of the way and did not have windows in order to enhance confidentiality. Participants were given 20 dollars at the conclusion of the second interview to ensure that they would participate in both interviews.

**Dependability**

As recommended by Shenton (2004), this study was viewed by the researcher as a “prototype model” (p.71) such that a researcher seeking to conduct the same study would be able to do so. Decisions about research design and data collection as well as self-reflection were discussed with a small group of colleagues. In order to ensure information was being documented, a research journal was kept and updated frequently.

**Confirmability**

In order to enhance the confirmability of the study, an audit trail was created, which allowed each step to be traced as decisions were made. See appendix H for an audit trail of the current study. Bracketing was also used by the researcher throughout the study design and interview process. The researcher used reflexive journaling to record thoughts on research design, reactions to obstacles along the way, reactions after each interview, and thoughts during data analysis. Bracketing was used as an attempt to neutralize bias during the research process (Billups, 2014).
Chapter Summary

The negative impact of high-risk alcohol use, or binge drinking (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), has been well documented on college campuses (Jennison, 2004, Ziemelis, Buckman & Elfessi, 2010). Social norms marketing campaigns focus on the positive behaviors used by students around alcohol and have shown efficacy at reducing high risk alcohol use on college campuses (Berkowitz, 2005, Perkins, 2002; Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986), but their efficacy can vary according to a student’s gender and peer group (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). This study sought to understand college women’s experiences and beliefs around high-risk drinking and its norms on a college campus.

The research questions were informed by a pilot study that examined the experiences and conversations of men and women related to a small-group social norms intervention. The study found that small-group projects based on the social norms approach do encourage conversations between students and their peers about campus social norms but there seem to be gender differences between male and female students involved in these projects taking an active voice to correct the misperceptions of their peers, with men more likely to correct peers’ misperceptions. These results helped lay the groundwork for the current inquiry into gendered social norms approaches that show more efficacy for women.

In order to further understand women’s perceptions of norms, their influence on behavior, and how social norms based messages might be directed towards them in the future, a qualitative study was conducted with focus on the lived experience of a small sample of female students whose behaviors met high-risk drinking criteria. An outline of
the research design, data collection, and analysis was provided.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study sought to understand college women’s experiences and beliefs around high-risk drinking and its norms. Women college students who participated in high-risk drinking were asked if they would be willing to participate in the research project via flyers placed around campus. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and were asked to complete 2 interviews and keep a journal between the 2 interviews.

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and data was analyzed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. A study using an IPA approach aims to both give voice to the research participants and make sense of the phenomenon being studied (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The IPA approach was used to illuminate participants’ experiences, since college women’s drinking norms have not received as much attention in the literature as men’s. It also provided the opportunity for the researcher to apply a lens of sense-making and interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The study was conducted to understand women’s norms around high-risk drinking so that social norms messages can be directed more effectively towards college women.

Research Participants

In total, sixteen interviews were conducted with eight college women in order to answer the primary research question: Do college women perceive their drinking norms as different than men’s and, if so, how can social norms-based messages be tailored to women? Each participant completed 2 interviews with the researcher which were audio
recorded and conducted between one and two weeks apart. Between the interviews, participants were asked to keep a journal documenting if and when they drank, conversations they had about alcohol, and feelings associated with drinking and/or not drinking.

Participants were screened before the interviews to ensure they met criteria for high-risk drinking, defined as 4 or more drinks in one sitting for women (Wechsler & Nelson, 2001), over the last two weeks. The researcher asked participants to provide information on drinking over the last two weeks when scheduling interviews over the phone after explaining confidentiality. Confidentiality was discussed in more detail at the beginnings of both interviews with participants in order to increase the likelihood that they would be honest in sharing their experiences.

Two participants were not included in the final sample because they did not consume enough alcohol to talk about personal experiences with norms, motivations, or consequences related to high-risk alcohol use despite stating they had engaged in high-risk drinking during the screening process. Therefore, the final sample size was six participants who each participated in two interviews. Information about the research participants is below. Pseudonyms were used throughout the transcription process for participants as well as any friends or acquaintances mentioned in their narratives.

**Imani.** Imani, in the process of studying for and taking her final exams when we met, was wrapping up her junior year of college. She identified as an African-American woman and was involved in various aspects of campus life including student leadership roles and campus employment positions.
Imani did not begin drinking in a high-risk way until she came to college. She hoped to pursue a career in the field of psychology or criminal justice after college. She was 20 years old at the time of the interviews and was about a month away from her twenty-first birthday.

**Sarah.** Sarah was also preparing for and taking her final exams during the two weeks we scheduled her interviews. She was completing her freshman year and identified as a White woman. Sarah described herself as enjoying the outdoors and adventurous.

Sarah stated that she began drinking in high school and that her older siblings had “paved the way” so that it was accepted, though not necessarily endorsed, by her parents that she would drink. Sarah had not decided on a major when the interviews were conducted and was 19 years old.

**Tamika.** Tamika was completing her sophomore year when we met and identified as an African-American woman. Tamika was newly involved in a leadership role on campus and reported being more involved on campus during her sophomore year than she had been during her freshman year.

Tamika did not drink before college and had begun drinking in a high-risk way during the previous (sophomore) year. Tamika was studying science and was 20 years old when we met.

**Kory.** Kory was a rising junior when we met for interviews and was working both on-campus and off-campus jobs for the summer. Kory identified as a mixed-race woman. Kory participated in Sorority Life on campus as well as her on-campus job.

Kory had her first drink of alcohol in middle school but did not begin drinking
regularly until high school. Kory was hoping to pursue a career in a health or education field and was 20 years old at the time of her interview.

**Shanice.** Shanice was studying for and completing exams for her sophomore year when we met for interviews. Shanice was a transfer student and had been at the research site for one year when we met. She identified as an African-American woman.

Shanice did not begin drinking until college and still did not drink alcohol when she was at home with her family. Shanice was studying business with the hope of starting her own company one day and was 20 years old when she was interviewed.

**Jessie.** Jessie was going into her junior year and working at her on-campus job for the summer when we met. She was involved in club sports on campus. She identified as a White woman.

Jessie began drinking sips of alcohol with her family as a young teenager and began drinking alcohol in a high-risk way in high school. Jessie was studying the social sciences when we met and was 20 years old.

It should be noted that the research participants were not representative of the make-up of SCU, which is a predominantly White institution. The researcher was open to considering the impact of race on participants’ drinking behaviors and experiences; however, as data was analyzed, notable differences did not emerge around how participants described their experiences and perceptions based on race.

Another aspect to consider in the demographics of the final research sample was that all of the participants were under the age of 21 so could not legally consume alcohol. It is possible that experiences and norms around high-risk alcohol use change after
women reach the legal drinking age. It is also possible that participants over the age of 21 would have provided more detailed accounts of high-risk alcohol use.

**Finding Themes**

To identify themes, the researcher replayed each interview several times and transcribed them each verbatim in order to enhance understanding of participants’ experiences, perceptions, and voice around high-risk alcohol use. Bracketing was used by the researcher in order to identify her own reactions to participants’ experiences through journaling that was done after each interview and again after transcribing each interview. This process was used to ensure that the themes identified were truly found in participants’ accounts.

Interviews were transcribed in an Excel spreadsheet which included columns for both exploratory comments and emergent themes. See Appendix I for a section of the excel sheet used to identify themes. Interviews were transcribed for each participant one at a time, with interview one transcribed first and interview two transcribed second. Participant interviews were analyzed in the order in which they were conducted.

Each participant’s interviews one and two were analyzed independently for emergent themes. Exploratory comments were noted first and then emergent themes were identified for each participant. Next, all interviews were analyzed together in order to identify overall themes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher also engaged in double hermeneutics throughout the analysis phase, meaning two perspectives were used for engagement with the data: that of taking the position of being in the participants’ shoes and that of looking at their experiences from a different angle in order to engage in
sense-making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

**Overarching Themes**

Through this process, seven themes were identified. They were: (a) women’s limits, (b) men have no limits, (c) messages from family/others, (d) rituals and consequences around going out, (e) protective behaviors of women, (f) cues: the c’s of drinking behaviors, and (g) responsibility. Within each theme, subthemes were identified, with at least half of the participants providing accounts and/or descriptions for each. See table 3 for a list of themes and subthemes. Each of these themes influenced how participants thought and talked about alcohol as well as drinking behaviors.

*Table 3. Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Women’s Limits</th>
<th>Theme: Men Have No Limits</th>
<th>Theme: Messages from Family/Others</th>
<th>Theme: Rituals and Consequences around Going Out</th>
<th>Theme: Protective Behaviors of Women</th>
<th>Theme: Cues: the C’s of drinking behaviors</th>
<th>Theme: Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes: I drink less than others/ my friends</td>
<td>Subthemes: Men don’t show intoxication</td>
<td>Subthemes: Girls have to be cautious</td>
<td>Subthemes: Pregaming</td>
<td>Subthemes: Girls stay together/ look out for each other</td>
<td>Subthemes: Celebration</td>
<td>Subthemes: Driving/ Being a designated driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered drinks</td>
<td>Guys brag about drinking/ girls don’t</td>
<td>Girls have to be in control</td>
<td>Looking cute/ getting dressed up</td>
<td>Using/ being a designated driver</td>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>Commitment to attend class/ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intoxicated women</td>
<td>Price/darker side</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Comradery</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Women’s Limits

One important aspect of this study was to understand how participants thought women who drank were perceived and if there were any drinking behaviors that they perceived as more appropriate for themselves or other women. Interview questions asked participants specifically to reflect on their own drinking behaviors, how college women who drink were perceived by others, and how they themselves perceived them.

I drink less than others/my friends

One of the tenets of social norms theory is that students assume other students drink more than they themselves do (Berkowitz, 2005). Lewis and Neighbors (2006) found these assumptions were more accurate in close friend groups and that there were fewer misperceptions around others’ drinking behaviors in these groups. Four out of the six participants described themselves as consuming less than other people they know and/or their friends.

Imani seemed to conceptualize a continuum between sober and drunk in her description. She saw herself as less drunk than those around her.

Um, I think... I'm not usually the drunkest. Like I would say I'm kind of like in between, like maybe closer to the sober side than anybody else. Definitely I wouldn't drive but I'm usually not the DD, so that's good. But I'm not that one to get drunk. Not that, yeah.

Kory also seemed to conceptualize a continuum when comparing her drinking to her friends’, though she did not describe herself as being less drunk. In her description, her lower tolerance was what made her drink less than her friends.

Um, but I would say compared to my friends, I kind of, I would say I drink a lot less just because I have such a low tolerance. It's like it doesn't take a lot to get me
drunk but like some of my friends can take 10 dollars to dollar vodkas and still not get drunk. So I would say I'm definitely on the lower end of that one though.

Unlike Kory, Tamika described drinking less than her friends in terms of being the one who needed to make sure everyone was ok. She described herself as being known for drinking less in her friend group.

Well personally for me, I don't think drinking is a big, like, oh my gosh you have to drink, you have to turn up. I'm just like, I don't know, most of my friends would say I'm like low key, Debbie Downer when it comes to stuff like that because I'm like, I'm kind of like the mother figure, making sure everybody's ok, if I have to drive I make sure that I'm able to drive and stuff like that.

Similarly, Jessie referenced taking care of others as a reason that she drank less than her friends. She referred to experiences growing up that influenced her to drink less than her friends.

Uh, I'm normally the more, like I drink but I don't drink as much as my friends. Because growing up, I've always been the one that kind of took care of everyone. So I would probably have 2 or 3 drinks and then when we have gone out, we've gone to like frat parties in surrounding neighborhoods. And my friends would probably keep drinking, take a sprite bottle or something with not sprite in it. And by the end of the night, my friends are normally like trashed and I'm still kind of at like a buzzed state.

**Gendered Drinks**

Four of the participants stated that there were specific drinks that were more appropriate for women than men. While they acknowledged that some girls drink beer, most agreed that beer was not seen as a feminine drink. Imani noted different preferences among college men and women who drink.

R: (pause) Hmm.. I think they're like more into wine, like fruity drinks I guess, less from beers. I mean I know a lot of girls like beers but less into beers, more
into fruity drinks. Um, wines definitely - I've seen girls drink like a whole bottle of wine, yeah. So I wouldn't say it's less but I would say the drinks vary I guess if that makes sense.

I: So it's more about what they drink versus how much they drink?
R: Yeah. I don't think they drink less per se. It's more about what kind of drinks they're drinking.

Sarah noticed differences in what alcoholic beverages men and women drank in the week between her two interviews. She wrote about a related conversation in her journal.

I: Ok, awesome. Can you tell me about some of the things you wrote about in your journal?
R: Alright. Well I'll start with the easy stuff and then go in to what I did this weekend. Um, so last week I actually, I found myself having conversations about people and what alcohol they do and don't like to drink. Like one of my friends had mentioned, oh like girls can always drink wine but as a guy I feel like it's seen as like feminine or something. So I noticed that a lot, just like what alcohol makes you sicker and stuff like that, just like a conversation that came up so I kind of like wrote that down. But yeah, the thing about wine was funny because I find myself and like my friends, we drink wine a lot. With guys you don't see that as much.

I: So almost like there's male and female beverages?
R: Yeah, they have like expected genders tied with them. Which is weird considering, especially wine I feel like, historically to be drank by males. So I noticed that.

Kory also discussed differences in the alcohol that men and women drink. She stated not only that drinks are different, but that there can be consequences for drinking a drink that is supposed to be for the other gender.

I heard, especially working at my second job, like a dude's never gonna order a vodka cran just because he's not gonna order a vodka cran. So like girls are definitely, like I feel like there's more of a stigmatistic, obviously there are some girls who go out and order beer, but more often times than not, girls will order like mixed drinks. Dudes will be like, I'm not ordering that, that's a girl drink. So
it's definitely like, the drinks are fruitier, like can't taste very much alcohol or, I guess if you're getting a mixed drink you're automatically going for the harder stuff than beer.

Jessie’s observations of gendered drinks included some insight into consequences specific to women who drink. She astutely added her own interpretation of the implication of gendered drinks for women.

I think guys, I mean this could be completely wrong, but I feel like guys are a lot less likely to drink to the point that they're throwing up. Because I mean, I've seen guys get that drunk before but I've seen it a lot less than I've seen like girls in the bathroom throwing up. Or girls stumbling out of parties. And I think it has a lot to do with the fact that guys are bigger so it takes a lot, or it takes more for them to be at that level. But even when I would drink with my friends that were guys freshman year, like they might be drinking beer whereas all of my friends that are girls were drinking like harder liquors or something with more alcohol content in it.

**Intoxicated Women**

Participants shared several thoughts around how women who are intoxicated are perceived. One participant, Shanice, specifically spoke about her experience of college being the first time she had seen intoxicated women.

R: Um, I actually didn't see heavy women drinkers until I came to college honestly. It wasn't like a big thing at home. So when I came to college, it was like oh my gosh, alcohol everywhere, so one thing. If you're not used to it, you probably will go crazy - not used to so much freedom to be drinking and stuff or whatnot.

I: *What was that like for you?*

R: I was fine. Cuz when I was home, I wasn't a huge drinker. I would drink every now and then but it wasn't a big issue about me drinking. And now like it's still not a big issue about me drinking, but now like, I know if I want something, I can get it. While at home at my parents’ house, you can't just be like oh I'm gonna get drunk. When I'm staying with my parents or whatever. But now that I have came to college, my mom understands that I drink, but she also knows that I know how
to handle myself, you know?

I: So for the girls who do drink heavily, maybe it's because of the environment?
R: Yeah. They don't care. I mean some people are like that, I don't have nothing against them. It's just like yeah, ok boo, that's you or whatever. I feel like, if they can handle it, they not perceived as a certain way. Go get as many drinks as you want to if you can handle your liquor. But if they get to a point where they're like sloppy, it's just like oh my gosh, she drunk too much. She don't know her limits. She a heavy drinker but she don't know when to stop. So you can be fine - if you here, you drinking, you can be fine, but if you get to the point where it's just like god, they're a sloppy drunk, then it's a problem.

I: So it's not so much about how much they drink, it's more how they handle it?
R: Yeah.

Shanice’s discussion of the “sloppy drunk” was one of several descriptions from participants of negative perceptions around intoxicated women. Kory explained that the perception could vary based on whether the woman was someone inside or outside of the friend group.

It's often times like negative, like oh she doesn't know her limits, she shouldn't go out, she shouldn't do this, she shouldn't do that. I feel like it really depends on like who the girl's with. Like it's really rare that I see a girl in that bad shape and she's by herself. Obviously that looks super bad and it's like oh, she's going out by herself and she doesn't know her limits and she's getting too drunk. But sometimes I feel like if it's in a group of friends like it's almost kind of funny to her friend group. Because like I know when I go out with my friends, if my friend's way too drunk, I know that like she's gonna be ok, like she's with me. Just because like we've been around each other drunk so much, I know like when she's ok, when she's not ok. So like at that point it's funny to me. But to other people it's probably like oh, this drunk girl, she's so loud, she's so obnoxious, she's so.., you know what I mean? So it's like, I feel like it definitely depends on the crowd of people like whether or not they know them, how they perceive them. If you don't know the girl and you see like how drunk she is it can come off as negative, like drunk, annoying, doesn't know her limit. But like if you know the person it's kind of funny, it's like oh ha ha ha because it's like not on a regular basis and it's funny to see you like this, you know?
Sarah specifically mentioned men perceiving an intoxicated woman less favorably than women. Because women might acknowledge that they have been in the same position before, their perception might not be as negative.

I mean definitely not like favorably. I mean I wouldn't want to be seen like that. I mean I can't really judge her cuz I feel like me and my friends have all been there at one point but like guys especially, they're all like, oh look at that girl. She's like trashed right now. It's just like, I don't know, it's not seen in a good light I guess. It's like, I don't know, your makeup will be smushed down your face, like you've just had a long night. But like I said, we've all been there so I can't really judge them for it. Like if you want to drink that much and deal with the consequences, that's kind of your choice I think. I mean, if I'm going out like to a party or like when it was my birthday a couple months ago, I kind of planned for that. You kind of plan like oh you're gonna get really drunk tonight, but like I just don't like getting like that very often. It's definitely something I don't want to be seen, like I don't want to be known as that girl who got really drunk and did this and not even remembered it the next day.

Like Sarah, Tamika specifically mentioned how men perceived intoxicated women. She stated that perception of an intoxicated woman being more open sexually was specific to men and thought that other women would not share this perception.

I think a guy's perspective would probably be like, oh she's more open to stuff so I can probably talk to her easily, shoot my shot as we say today. Yeah, stuff like that. And then girls, probably her friends would be like, oh she's just having fun or whatever. Other girls that are, you know have different values and stuff, they'd be like oh my god, she's crazy, or she needs to calm down, she needs some better friends. Stuff like that. Automatically, I always think oh my gosh, is she gonna be safe?

Imani also stated that there is a sexual aspect to people’s perceptions of intoxicated women. She further talked about an implication of danger in a situation where a woman is intoxicated.
R: Definitely would get like a promiscuous vibe I guess. Um, maybe she's willing to get in the car with these guys she doesn't know too well, or you know, just I guess, I don't want to say a slutty vibe, but like very promiscuous and like, um, not as, you know, I guess standoff-ish as she might normally be. Uh, not thinking about how things could end up I guess. You know, like bad situations, or just, um, just not thinking about the consequences. Even if something doesn't happen, just how it might like be perceived by other people.

I: What would people like say about that person?

R: Um, I definitely think people would say, you know, she's about to get ... I don't want to say that, that sounds bad... she's about to get, like people are going to have sex with her, take advantage of her. Um, there gonna um, kind of like, you know she's not gonna be able to fight it off or, you know, it just kind of, you know maybe like a group so it just kind of looks bad even if nothing like that is going on. I think it's just kind of how it will look.

I: So even if nothing happens, there's still like that...

R: Yeah, even if nothing happens, it's still like.. We've seen drunk girls and our friends are like, you know, oh, she's about to get ran through tonight. Just like really bad stuff that even though it might not have happened, it just looks like it could happen.

I: And how is that... I guess my question would be is that like a judgement that people are making of her? Or how does it feel?

R: I think it's definitely a judgement. Um, people are mean, like you know. We're just all mean people. I hate to say it, but like even if it's something like, you might not say it out loud, but in your head, you're just like, you know, it's not about to end well.. and so, yeah. I think it's definitely judgement.

I: Mm hm. And I guess to take it even further, like that judgement being like, that they're a bad person? Or..

R: I think it's not more of a bad person, I just think it's like, they don't know how to control themself I guess, they need to watch out. Um, they're not being as cautious as they should. Like you know, like I said, females are kind of taught to be more cautious. She's not being as smart as she should, or like, where are her friends at? That's a big one too. Like you know, we all would assume that the female came with a group of friends, so where are they at, you know, get her out of the situation or help her, or her friends might not like her, or you know. Something like that.
In Imani’s last statement, there is judgement based on the fact that the woman is not in control of herself, a theme that will be revisited later, and the fact that she is neither smart nor likeable.

Jessie spoke to the reputation that an intoxicated woman gets and, like Imani, related this to sexual promiscuity. She conceptualized this as specific to the college environment.

I think a lot of times they get the reputation of like the party girl or, I don't know, like a really popular thing is oh, I'm messy when I'm drunk. And so they kind of use drinking as an excuse to be messier people? Like going home with people they wouldn't normally go home with, talking to people they normally wouldn't talk to, dancing on bars, like being sloppy I guess. Um, and then you have girls that do that so they're gonna get the reputation of being the girl that once she drinks, she kind of turns into, um, I don't really know a better word for it, kind of just turns into a whore like while she's drunk.

I: Is that a reputation that women who drink in general get, or just a woman who's done it?

R: I think in college it's different because the majority of college students that are drinking are going to parties, are going out places where music is playing, there's dancing, and once you get drunk, like you're dancing more, I don't know the word, more like sexual I guess? And you're kind of like dancing on whoever will dance with you. But I think in general for women that drink, like they don't get that perception. Because I mean 2 women could go and have a glass of wine after work or something but they're not acting like they're super intoxicated. They're just like have a conversation, maybe like winding down after a day. So I think it definitely depends on the setting you're drinking in, like what you're doing after you're drunk. I think it's just college in general. Like people just like want to go out and they think it's just how it is in college to go out and have that perception.

I: So there's something about putting the word "college" in front of woman that like changes how you think about drinking?

R: Yeah, cuz people will say I want to have fun before I graduate. After I graduate I have to be more of a professional. And so they think they need to just get all of their crazy out at once. And so that's when you see women going to bars, going to clubs, going to parties. Whereas after you graduate, you don't want, like you
wouldn't want a potential employer to see you somewhere and be like she just came in to apply for a job today.

Overall, participants felt that college women who drank were perceived negatively. This negative perception was shared by both other college women and college men, although for different reasons.

**Men Have No Limits**

Participants were also asked questions about how college men who drink are perceived in order to explore if and how these perceptions differ from those of college women who drink. All participants agreed that men who drink in college are perceived differently than women who drink in college. Two subthemes were identified in regard to these perceptions.

**Men don’t show intoxication/men’s intoxication is not noticed**

Three participants described college men who drink too much as difficult to identify. Imani discussed this perception in terms of men having a higher tolerance.

*I: What about the perception of a guy who drinks just a little bit versus a guy who drinks a lot?*

*R: I think that's good. I think, um, I think nobody really wants somebody that drinks every, constantly as a guy. I'm trying to think.. I don't know, I think it's, I feel like it's kind of harder to tell when guys are drunk, so like you know it might be harder to tell they had like one beer versus five. Like you know, I don't know if guys have a higher tolerance, have a bigger body mass or something, but maybe, um, they might handle it better so like it may not be as obvious when they're drunk so it's kind of harder to decipher unless you're looking at them and you can tell that they have x amount of this versus more. Yeah definitely like my boyfriend, you know, I probably can't tell if he's had like one beer or like five. So like it's harder to decipher so it' less noticeable I would say.*
Tamika described the perception of men who drink in terms of norms. She spoke about the difficulty of identifying problem drinking in college men.

I: So we talked a little about women who drink in college and how they're perceived. How do you think that men who drink in college are perceived?

R: Um, normal. I guess like ok. Like, um, I don't know. I honestly would say that people, like if a guy had a problem with drinking most people wouldn't say anything. Because it's like a guy. If it's a girl, people would be like are you ok? Also because, that's like how girls are, we check on each other more. Guys are just like, oh he's a frat person, he's super cool, that's normal. Like he can drink as much as he wants. It's like ok, he's drinking again. It's not even like he's drinking, it's just.. But it's like oh, she's drinking.

I: Ok. So a guy, when he drinks, you don't even really notice?

R: Nope.

Jessie contrasted the perception of men who drink in college with that of women. She discussed how the same behaviors could be perceived differently.

I: So how do you think guys who drink in college are perceived?

R: I don't think guys really have the same like messy reputation when they're drinking. I feel like you see a guy that's drunk and it's just like oh, he's having a good time. Whereas there could be a girl next to him, um, doing essentially the same things, but since she's a girl, she's labeled as like the party girl or like oh she's drunk again and she's about to start acting slutty. Whereas like guys could be completely plastered and they're just like oh, that's just him. That's what he does.

Guys brag about drinking, girls don’t

Participants also discussed differences in how men talked about drinking. Three of them spoke of noticing that the men in their friend groups were competitive about how much they drank and bragged when they drank a lot whereas women did not talk about drinking large amounts in a positive light. Sarah talked about differences she noticed in her residence hall.
R: Yeah. So with girls, um I'm trying to think. Yeah with girls we'll do like wine nights or something like that. We'll drink like casually, a little bit, just get buzzed or like whatever. Um, if we're going out, like I said, for example like me and my roommates pregame. We'll get like a bottle of something and split it. With guys I notice a lot more, um, there's like a room of boys across the hall from us, and when they do like the pregame stuff, they play a lot of beer pong and games and stuff like that. I don't really, like I'm not really into that because like I'm not competitive really. So that's why I'd rather just like sip on a drink and do it that way. But yeah I see like competition a lot and drinking around like guy groups. And even if it's not a game, it's like oh I drank like 10 beers tonight and it's always like a competition between them who can drink more, you know? So I see that a lot. But girls it's definitely more casual and we kind of like, we're not really obvious about it I feel like. We don't make like a big deal out of getting like drinks or anything like that.

I: Would there ever be a situation where girls would like brag about how much they drink?
R: I really can't think of one. I hear I drank too much. I hear that a lot. But it's not like anyone in a favorable or good way saying oh I drank this much last night. No. It's like I drank too much last night and it sucked. So I see that. I haven't really seen anything girl wise in a good way.

Jessie talked about a situation in which a male relative of hers took a breathalyzer.

She had noted in a previous part of the interview that this family member was a heavy drinker.

I: Was he under duress to blow in a breathalyzer?
R: No, he went and bought himself a breathalyzer so he could see how intoxicated he was. So he could brag about it. And then one of my best friends is a guy too and we'll be talking about, um, like I told him the other day, cuz he came to my family's barbecue last year, and he was like oh, how did it go. And I was like you know, it was fun. And he was like, how much did you drink. And I was like oh, I didn't really drink that much. And he was like, oh last night I had however many drinks. And I was like, ok. But I feel like that's a majority of the guys I know. Rather than talking about whatever experience they had, like they always start the story with I had this much to drink and then they go into their story. It's like it's always a bragging moment and then they go into whatever the point of telling the story was.
I: Can you recall any times a girl has done that?
R: I feel like girls, like all the times my friends that are girls have told me stories, and like I'm the same way, I'll tell my story and they'll like pass judgement on my story, like ok, why did you do that. And I'll be like oh, well I had like 6 drinks before I did it. And they're like uh, you did it again. When people tell these stories, that's how I feel like it is. So it's like flipped almost.
I: That's interesting. Do you have any ideas as to why that might be or is it just one of those things?
R: I just think guys like to brag more. Like, it's just like their manly thing to be like, oh I can drink a whole case of beer by myself. Whereas I'm a lot less likely to count how many drinks I had than say my friend that's a guy is. Because we could be sitting in the same room, like drinking and having a good time and like I remember a time specifically last semester we were like sitting there, we were drinking and I was just like kind of sipping and he was like getting another one and he was like, do you want another one? And I was like no I'm good, I have like half this can left. He was like this is already my sixth one. One, how do you drink them that fast and two, why are you counting them? Can you not just like... And then for the next like 2 or 3 times we hung out, it would be like I'm gonna try to beat how many I had last time. So he could like brag about it.

Kory also discussed competition as part of men’s drinking. She interpreted it as putting pressure on men to drink more.

I feel like for guys it's a lot easier to get peer pressured into drinking just because a dude, like when his friends are talking about him, like oh you're not gonna drink because whatever, it's a lot easier for a guy to be like well give me a beer and I'll show you, you know what I mean? So I feel like it's a lot easier if a guy is out with a group of friends it's easier for him to start slamming beers and start getting drunk because like his friends are.

Participants’ perceptions of college men’s drinking differed from that of college women’s drinking. College men were seen as less easily identifiable when intoxicated and if they were intoxicated, it was seen as more normal than women being intoxicated. Participants also saw college men’s drinking as more competitive than women’s.
Messages from Family/Others

All participants discussed messages they got either from their families or others about how girls should behave around alcohol use. This theme included two subthemes which were (a) girls have to be cautious and (b) girls have to be in control.

Girls have to be cautious

Four participants specifically discussed messages they received from their parents about drinking. Sarah discussed how she felt she received a different message than her brothers had because she was a girl.

R: I really .. I don't know. Like I said, I feel like that's just a stereotype that's been like placed on us always. I feel like women forever have always had to watch themselves so that they don't run into like risks or anything when a guy can just kind of do whatever he wants and not worry about it.

I: Do you feel like that's a message that you've gotten in your life?

R: I mean definitely. Like my parents, my brothers when we were younger, well teenagers, like if we're going to a party it's like just be safe, call us if you need anything but for a girl it's like kind of really enforced. Like watch what you drink, like make sure you remember what you drink, what you're doing and I think that's why, like personally, I always make sure to get home at night. Like I'm always safely at home because it was kind of instilled on me to watch what I drink and be careful of what I say and things like that when guys it's like I don't know, that's just how they are.

Imani also remembered getting messages from her parents about how she should behave as a girl. She recalled that the message wasn’t just stick together with other girls, it was make sure you have a man around to protect you.

R: I mean, I think, um, both my parents kind of understand. Like you know, they're not old, they're like 40, like early 40's, so they know what happens in college. They drank in college so, you know, I think for them to be like, ok, don't drink in college, you know, is kind of pointless just cuz like they were in the same situation, they know what was up. So it's not necessarily like, um, don't drink,
you know, I think it's just more so be safe. My mom always, you know, carry pepper spray, you know, carry mace. Everything more so about like being cautious and like ok, I'm not going to just tell you not to do it and expect you to listen to me. Um, definitely don't drink and drive. Like, you know if you're drinking definitely don't need to be driving. If anyone you're with is drinking... you know just definitely more so safety tips versus I'm not going to tell you not to do it.

*I: That makes sense.*

R: Yeah, uh, they hate it when I go places by myself. Even driving home at night, they don't want me to do it. You know, they just felt more comfortable if I had like a guy in the car with me too. Like even 2 girls, they were like, no, you know, anything can happen. I guess with a guy they're like, ok, you know, maybe you'll be more protected.

*I: So a lot of it has been about like safety.*

R: Yeah, more like safety. Yeah.

Tamika discussed her parents as being open to the fact she would drink in college. Their messages also included aspects of being careful and safe especially regarding watching your drink.

*I: So do you think it's normal for college students to drink in general?*

R: Yes. Very normal. I would say nobody thinks it's that big of a deal. Even though, I would say, a lot of my friends' parents are like, you better not. And my parents are just like, be safe, control yourself, don't become crazy. Stuff like that. Make your own drink, cover your drink, stuff like that. Because we kind of know you're gonna do it anyway, so yeah. And I was just like, I drank for the first time mom.

*I: So you told your parents about it? What did they say?*

R: They were like, uh, well my dad was like, make sure your safe, don't do it too much and I'm not kidding, blah, blah, blah. Stuff like that cuz I have a super close relationship with my parents.

Kory spoke about messages that women get from society in general but also added how they were reiterated by her mom in conversations frequently. She contrasted this with messages that men receive.
Women are taught like be careful when you go out. Women are taught a lot more preventative measures than men. Whenever a man goes out and drinks … I feel like it's very hard for like girls to be like, oh I'm gonna go out drinking and people be like ok, have fun. Like if I tell my mom, oh I'm gonna go to the bar, it's never like ok, have fun. It's like be careful, watch your drink, do this, do that. There's like a set of rules that like a girl should follow. So I feel like when people think of women drinking in college, they think of that negative, like she needs to be careful, and it's like almost immediately associated with being raped or like being drugged. And with men it's not like that. If a dude's like, oh I'm gonna go drinking, nobody's like be careful, watch your drink, someone might go home with you, you know? So like whenever someone thinks of a girl drinking in college, that's exactly what they're thinking. Because it is super common, obviously it happens and it's unfortunate that it does, but it just surprises me that when a girl says oh, I'm gonna go out drinking that's the first thing that comes to everybody's mind.

Jessie shared an interesting observation from an experience she had when she went to Europe as part of an exchange program in high school where the drinking age was 18. She found that it was different for women there.

One of the most interesting things I thought, because obviously I don't go to bars here but I went there with them, was that they seemed like they had completely different perceptions of drinking. Like none of the friends I was with that were girls seemed like scared that a guy would take them home or that something bad would happen to them. And I don't know if it was because it was like a really small town and everybody basically knew each other or if it was because you can start drinking at a younger age there and it's just more ingrained in their culture to socially drink. But like I go out here and people are like, oh my god like make sure she's ok, and who's seen whoever. And I'm like I haven't seen her, I'm doing this. But it wasn't like that over there. And then I came back over here and then went to college and everybody just always seemed so worried about where everyone else is. But it wasn't like that at all [over there].
Girls have to be in control

Participants also received messages from family and others about the importance of keeping themselves under control. Sarah described this idea in terms of stereotypes.

I: Why do you think it is that girls are perceived differently if they drink too much than guys?
R: That just goes along with so many stereotypes I feel like. Like girls are supposed to be always put together, like have your stuff together, but like guys, like oh, that's just a boy being a boy. You hear that all the time like oh he's getting drunk this weekend? Like that's totally normal. With a girl it's like, I don't know, you're expected to kind of not get as drunk as the guys I guess if that makes sense.
I: Mm hm. Why do you think that is?
R: I really .. I don't know. Like I said, I feel like that's just a stereotype that's been like placed on us always. I feel like women forever have always had to watch themselves so that they don't run into like risks or anything when a guy can just kind of do whatever he wants and not worry about it.

Sarah’s account of women needing to keep control of themselves was in contrast to her account of men, who she perceived as able to do whatever they wanted.

Shanice talked about how society as a whole perceives women. Like Sarah, she stated that this was opposed to society’s view that men can do whatever they want.

R: I feel like society as a whole has this like perception that, um, I feel like society has a perception that women can't drink a lot and they should be ladylike in their drinking. A lot in their eyes, then they're not lady-like, out of character, they need to just um, oh my gosh, what is that phrase some people use, be seen and not heard. I feel like that's what society thinks. It's sad that it's that way, but I honestly feel like that's how it is. And I actually took a, last semester I took a woman and gender studies class and we actually talked about stuff like that. But like as a man, it's just like he's a man, he can do what he want.

Tamika described the impact of media on messages that women received. She also contrasted this to messages that men receive.
R: Um, I don't know. I would say I think, like, the double standard. Like, I don't know, it's just like, I will say early commercials of alcohol consumption is like guys in commercials, like you'll see guys with a bunch of beer in a cooler, a guy at a bar. Usually he's coming up to a girl with a drink or something. That's how it usually is, was projected more towards the guy anyway. And it's usually like if the guy doesn't get you a drink then why are you drinking type thing. I don't know that's just how I like see it kind of. Yeah.

I: So if you could put words to that, what would it be? Would it be like guys are supposed to drink and girls aren't? Is that it? Or is it a little bit different than that?

R: I would be like, guys are.. it's normal for guys. It's acceptable more. And girls, kind of. You can get away with it just a little. I don't know, something like that.

I: Ok. Tell me more about the kind of:

R: Like, I would say, like, uh, I just think girls are more watched than guys are so people notice more or people say something more, so it's like oh you drink, ok. Oh my gosh you're drinking. And it's like ok you're drinking too much. Like more people would just say something to a girl. To be like, you need to chill, or like, you need to have more fun type of thing. I don't know.

Kory did not contrast messages for women from those for men when she talked about women needing to stay in control. She conceptualized messages as a list of rules that girls have to follow.

I: So when you said there's kind of rules that girls should follow, can you talk a little bit, and I'm sure it's not like a sheet that somebody handed you, but like if you could just kind of summarize, what are the rules that women have to follow when they drink would you say?

R: They would be like, never go anywhere alone, always use a buddy system. Never leave your drink alone. Like don't talk to strange men, don't go home with random people, always go home with somebody that you know. Um, what else have I been told before I go out... I don't know. The main ones are like watching your drink and not going anywhere like by yourself. But like whenever, like it's something nobody would tell a girl, but especially, um, clothing. They'll be like oh, you're gonna be out drinking? Don't wear this. Somebody will grab you, somebody will do this. So it's like not even just like how you act, it's like how you present yourself. It'll be like you can't get too drunk, you can't get incoherent because somebody's gonna do this to you. So I feel like there'a a pressure to
behave yourself I guess with girls. Like in general. Like that would be like, to summarize the rules for girls it would be like behave yourself and don't go too far.

Overall, the messages that participants received from family and society in general emphasized that they needed to be careful and stay in control of themselves. Participants felt that these messages were opposite from the messages that men received.

**Rituals and Consequences around Going Out**

All participants discussed both rituals and consequences related to going out. There were three subthemes identified: (a) pregaming, (b) dressing up/looking cute, and (c) price/darker side. At least three participants described aspects of each subtheme in their interviews.

**Pregaming**

All participants referenced pregaming when describing their drinking behaviors and those of their friends. Pregaming referred to drinking in a smaller group of friends before going out to a club or party. Pregaming is part of going out because, as Sarah explained, it is a way you can be drunk when you go out if you are under 21 and cannot buy drinks at a bar or club. She also explained it is the part of the night that is more laid back because of the smaller group size.

And there's of course like pre-gaming before you go to the bars because if you're not 21, people just drink before actually going there. So like that's big. But just hanging out, like it's just more laid back and easy. I don't really care if I'm around my friends like what I look like or anything. That's nice, yeah.

Kory, who had a fake ID that she knew worked at certain local bars, talked about pregaming as a way to save money in her second interview. She talked about a specific
drink she and a friend drove to several stores to find because they had seen it advertised on social media as having a high alcohol content. She drank it at the pregame so she wouldn't have to buy drinks at the bar.

So we finally get them, so that was on Wednesday, like oh like let's try them, let's pregame with it so that when we get to the bar we don't have to buy drinks. And so we did that and so I didn't spend any money at the bar because the sangria, it does like get you drunk. And like you don't have to drink very much of it for it to get you drunk either. So that was like a plus. So we did that before we went... So we were pregaming and we finally get there at like 10:30 and so then we're there and we're all just hanging out, dancing, we're all just hanging around and listening to music. ... So they're just like buying their drinks but I didn't drink anymore because the sangria had already gotten me drunk enough, like I wasn't gonna spend money if I didn't have to.

Shanice described pregaming as a regular part of the going out ritual and also mentioned drink prices at bars being too expensive as one reason for pregaming. Her description put pregaming as happening for about 30 minutes to an hour before going out and including drinking games and shots.

R: Ok. Uh, I'll probably take a nap at like 8:00 and then - I'll probably take a nap for 2 hours and then get up at 10. And then I'll uh wash and stuff and get ready and then about 10:45, that's when we'll start pregaming. And usually it don't be like just straight cups, it be like shots. And then you start to realize like how many shots have I taken? Especially like when I'm playing Uno, it's just like oh I lost count. I don't even remember how many shots I took. So then, uh, we freshen up about 11, 11:30 and then we'll be on the way to the party around that time. And then, I guess 11:45, 12, around that time we'll get to the party and then we'll stay there til 2, 2:30 and depending on like where the party is, we might drink there. It just depends if it's like a house party, they tell you to bring your own alcohol or if it's at a club you have to buy the drinks and they be high so I barely buy them.

I: So the pregame is almost always shots.
R: Yeah, most of the time it's just like shots, yeah.
Jessie described a pregame that she didn’t participate in but happened in her apartment between our first and second interviews. She observed that her roommate and her roommate’s friends had consumed quite a bit of alcohol before going out.

I didn't see what they were doing like while they were out there, but after they left I walked out there and there were like 3 empty wine bottles, and I like came in and counted, there were 11 people there. So there were 3 empty wine bottles, 2 empty cases of beer, a half empty case of beer, and then a big empty bottle of tequila. So wherever they were going, I don't know why they wasted their time going because I think they probably did the job while they were in my apartment. Because there was so much stuff like everywhere. Like, it looked like 40 people had been inside my apartment. And then they were still going out.

Overall, pregaming was seen by participants as a regular part of going out. It served several purposes including drinking in a smaller, more laid back group prior to going to a party or club, getting drunk prior to going to a party or club if you were under 21 and didn’t have a fake ID to buy drinks there, and getting drunk prior to going to a bar or club so you could save money on buying drinks.

**Dressing up/looking cute**

Three of the participants talked about dressing up as part of going out. Tamika discussed differences between hanging out with a group of her friends that are all women and a group of her friends that are all men.

Well the girls, they don't usually play video games and stuff. It's just like a lot of talking, or like doing makeup, hair, or like listening to music. It's more of us like moving around. We could destroy a room like getting dressed and stuff. And then with my guy friends, we're already all dressed, we met up and we're just sitting
there. Usually it's like 5 chairs, like we're sitting on the couch, and everyone's just talking, making jokes.

In her description, the girls getting dressed together and doing makeup was considered part of their night together.

Sarah also described differences between men and women when it came to dressing up for a night out. She discussed the effort that women have to put into looking good when they go out, describing it as “more work.”

*I: Tell me about the more work part*

R: Um, I don't know, I just hate having to like, cuz you have to reach like, not reach a standard, but like I feel like I can't just go to like (local bar) or (local bar). I don't just want to go in like jeans and a t-shirt. You want to like wear something cute, wear cute shoes, kind of look your best I guess because you're gonna be hanging out with like a lot of people and it's just a very social environment. I'd rather just be laid back, kind of relaxing in like a sweatshirt and jeans. That's just me. That's kind of what goes into it I'd say.

In discussing a party she had gone to the week before in her second interview, she talked about feeling underdressed because she hadn't put in the effort. She talked about a different standard for men and women.

Guys can literally show up in whatever, but girls always try a little bit harder. Like I said, I wore the clothes I wore all day and I felt underdressed. And I was wearing like shorts and a t-shirt. But these girls had on like cute tube tops and sparkly shirts, like shit like that. It was like you could tell that effort was put in it. I mean my roommate did the same thing, she kinda got ready. But I just wasn't really feeling it. I mean maybe I would have had like a better time if I did do that because like when I got there I did feel a little bit like underdressed. It was like, ah, maybe I should have like changed my top or like changed my pants. So like that definitely, maybe that had an influence over how much I enjoyed the party, you know? ... I don't know if that's like a self-conscious thing but I feel better and I can like talk to more people if I'm like dressed up and do my makeup. Especially when I'm drinking and stuff. I already have the confidence when I'm drinking but
it just makes me feel that much better I think. So like I don't know if guys feel the same way really about that.

In Sarah’s description, dressing up was a part of feeling confident when going out.

Kory’s description differed. She equated getting dressed and going out to feeling productive.

I don't know, I like the idea of like fixing myself. Like I like doing my hair, doing my makeup, I like to go out. It gives me like a sense of productivity. And like, I don't know, when I go out it's really just for like the social environment. I like to like be with my friends, meet new people, talk to people.

In each description, getting dressed up added to the enjoyment of going out in a different way. For Tamika, it was a part of the evening’s activities when hanging out with other girls. For Sarah, even though it took more effort, it made her feel more confident when talking to other people. For Kory, it was part of feeling productive.

**Price/darker side**

All participants recounted negative experiences they encountered when drinking and going out. They used such phrases as “the price you pay” and “darker side” in these descriptions, hence the name of this subtheme. All of these experiences involved the participants and/or their friends drinking too much.

Though Shanice described several experiences of drinking too much and throwing up, she did not interpret these experiences as bad, more just part of the bigger picture of going out and drinking alcohol. She did, however, talk about the impact of alcohol on relationships.

I just be talking about all kinds of stuff. Whatever comes to mind. Like usually, I'll think before I say stuff. But when I'm drunk, whatever comes to my mind, I
just say it. And that's not always good. So one of my roommates, that she doesn't stay there (laughs) that was so funny. Yeah, I said she doesn't stay there and we was just being nice to her so she'd have some place to stay (laughs). And I remember telling her that but I also knew it was just the alcohol talking and she knew that so she wasn't paying me no attention. But at the same instance, like some situations I can be drunk but I can clearly recall what some people would say and they not be drunk. And I be like ok. So you're saying it's me cuz you think I won't remember the next day, but I remember.

While Shanice laughed off a situation in which she might have hurt someone else’s feelings by something she said when drunk, she was less light-hearted about things people have said to her when they thought she was drunk and wouldn’t remember.

Like Shanice, Kory described drinking too much and throwing up as not necessarily negative. To her, it was just part of the overall drinking experience and helpful for learning your tolerance.

So it's like definitely - I remember my first time I went to a house party my freshman year that I was like way too drunk. And I came home and I was like throwing up, hunched over the toilet seat, like oh my god, I'm never going to drink again. This is awful, I woke up the next morning like oh my god, I'm never going to drink again. Next weekend I went out and got drunk. But it's definitely like, I don't know, like I wouldn't say that it was like negative, it was just taught me more of like, ok, it just taught me more about my tolerance if I had to say.

She recalled another time freshman year involving drinking too much and getting sick. Though she did not seem to think it affected her negatively, she recalled controversy over a friend calling for hospital transport for another friend who had consumed too much.

I vividly remember getting into a car, my friend came to pick me up from a house party and, it was a night - I hate throwing up - but it was one of those nights where I drank too much, so as she was pulling off I just remember pulling over out the side of her car and throwing up out the window. And you'll see that a lot at
house parties. There's no like specific one that I can think of but definitely like you'll see people like bent over running to the bathroom. Like I would never throw a house party because there's throw up everywhere, it's so dirty and it's disgusting. Um, I remember one night my freshman year I went out with a group of my friends and it wasn't my roommate, it was my friend and her roommate, and her friend was like way too drunk and in the backseat like incoherent so she got really worried and I remember she like called 911 even though the girl was like no, don't call 911, like I can't afford the hospital bill. She did it anyway and like the girl went to the hospital and they had this whole argument about oh, you shouldn't have done that and like my parents are so mad, they can't pay for this, they know I'm in college getting super incoherent. So I remember that night.

Sarah recalled times that she had consumed too much alcohol and thrown up as well. Unlike Shanice and Kory, she expressed embarrassment and regret in those situations. She talked about worrying what others might think of her.

Yeah. Like I said, my thing is that I get - like that time I went out and I got really sick, I was so embarrassed. I felt sooo embarrassed, I was like I never want to throw up from drinking again. It wasn't even - I was so sick and I didn't even care about really my well-being, I was really more worried about what they were gonna think about me. So like that's a personal example. And I kept apologizing, I was like I'm so sorry, I'm so sick, this isn't gonna happen again. And it was like oh, why are you like apologizing? But inside I was like just so embarrassed.

Participants also described situations in which they were affected by the actions of others they didn’t know when going out. Imani discussed a time she encountered a frightening situation at a club. She described the incident as scary and yet something that one becomes accustomed to over time.

I remember like a fight going on in a club one time. Um, I think it was like 2 or 3 fraternities I think? I'm not even sure who it was, but we just heard like a bottle crack and we thought it was a gun so like everybody just kind of went over to the wall, you know, like everybody's like running over to the wall hiding, ducking down. And then, um, that was one of my first times going out so I was kind of scared - I wasn't even drunk or anything. I maybe had like ... I don't think I even
had anything to drink. I don't remember, but like, um, it was definitely, um, a scary experience. Yeah, just cuz I wasn't used to anything like that. So yeah. They shut down the club and like I guess stuff like that kind of started to get normalized. I mean maybe not like so much, but just like clubs getting shut down, people arguing, that started to get like, ok, it happens all the time now.

From Imani’s description, there is some amount of violence that is expected when going out to large parties or clubs.

Sarah also described the atmosphere of going out as being impacted by people you don’t know in negative ways. Like Imani, she expressed that this gets normalized over time.

Um, so like, I mean that happens, this happens so much especially at parties and stuff. I mean I'll be at a party and someone will go up behind my friend or my roommate and like touch their back, lower back, or like grab their ass, like stuff like that. I don't know, it's just little stuff like that and at the time it'll freak you out but you talk about it after and, ok, like this just kind of happens, it's not ok but it already happened so what am I gonna do about it now, you know? And it wasn't anything like super aggressive or like it obviously was not rape so it's like there's only so much you can do if it's like, I don't know, something like that.

From Sarah’s perspective, girls experience being groped on a regular basis when they go out. Along with this is an acceptance that there is nothing to be done about it.

Jessie talked about a night out in her hometown when she and a friend got stopped by the police. She described it as very upsetting not only because she was treated badly by the police officer and was worried about legal consequences and upsetting her family, she felt it happened in spite of the precautions she took to be safe.

Because like in my mind, which granted was probably completely askew, like I thought we were being responsible. We were going home early, we had a sober friend, I went with her to this party because like I thought these 2 guys were creepy and she's like really pretty so I was like you are not going to a party with
them, with these 2 guys I don't know and I really don't think you know. And I like, I really don't remember what was going on the day of, but I remember telling my friend, like if we go to a party, if I get drunk can you drive me home? And then all of that happened and I was like oh my god, this is not worth it at all. So I just think that, because that was totally social for me. I was like let's go out, have a good time, and then like it just all went wrong so fast. And I think that kind of happens to a lot of girls. They don't realize, like they get to a certain point and they stop, like, having the ability to make good decisions. Cuz honestly we should have just gone home from the first place we were cuz neither one of us should have been out anymore.

Going out was described by participants in terms of participating in certain rituals as well as involving a price that all accepted as a part of the overall experience. Preparations included drinking ahead of time and dressing up. The price participants described ranged from getting sick to getting groped to legal issues. In these descriptions, participants accepted these aspects of going out in college as normal.

**Protective Behaviors of Women**

Because all participants described negative consequences surrounding high-risk alcohol use and/or going out, it is not surprising that they also all described protective behaviors that they and their friends used when going out. Two subthemes emerged around the most often discussed protective behaviors. These subthemes were (a) girls stay together/look out for each other and (b) using/being a designated driver.

**Girls stay together/look out for each other**

Participants talked about both sticking together within their own friend groups and looking out for other girls in general when they went out. Three participants specifically mentioned going to the bathroom in groups as both a protective behavior within friend groups and as a way to check on other women who were out. Sarah talked
about the importance of going to the bathroom in groups, and/or having a friend watch
your drink when going to the bathroom.

I: Are there ways that girls in your group like look out for each other I guess?
R: Yeah definitely. That's like the buddy system. Always the buddy system.
Whenever we go out, if you're going to the bathroom, somebody's going with you.
That's a good way. Or if you do have to leave your drink, like if you go to the
bathroom, a friend is like taking care of it for you. You're not just leaving it alone.
So that's definitely like, I've done that and I've had people do it for me. So I mean
that's a good way. I'm trying to think if there's anything else, any other way we do
it. But I mean just the buddy system I guess that's a big thing. Especially if you're
drinking, anything can happen. Like a guy can come up behind you or you could
trip on your way to the bathroom. Little things like that that you just take into
consideration.

Tamika echoed the importance of going to the bathroom in groups when out. She
attributed this specifically to her group of friends who were women. She explained that
her experience going out with women friends was different from her experience going
out with friends who are men.

We care a little bit more, they check on you a little bit more. They won't walk
away for like an hour and then come back and be like, are you ok. Or send me a
quick text. Girls are like always together, we go to the bathroom together, yeah.
Stuff like that. So it's just like, ok, more comfortable.

Kory also talked about women checking in on each other in the bathroom when
going out and extended it to women outside of a friend group. She described a situation
she witnessed while working at her off campus job in which women who didn’t know
each other looked out for one another.

Um a lot of the time, especially like in situations that I've been around, like if I
see a girl or my friends see a girl, or I've seen people who I don’t know do this, if
a girl is like falling over, random girls will just be like, hey like are you ok? Or
like get her some water. It's like especially, I don't know, I feel like when girls go

out they do like look out for one another sometimes I guess you could say. And you always see that thing where like girls in the bathroom at the bar are the nicest girls that you'll meet. Which is true, I've like never met a mean girl in a bar bathroom. But like definitely I feel like whenever that happens girls especially, for instance last night I was at work, I work (down at the) beach and I work at like, it's a bar -it's a restaurant but like later on in the night it turns into like a bar scene. And so there was like this girl like falling over, clearly had too much to drink, needed to sit down. So like um I see this group of girls who just came into the restaurant to eat. Like some man was talking to her, he was not, like he did not walk in with her, just talking to her and every time he would like come closer to her she would kind of like back away. Even though she was like super drunk, she was clearly like kind of discomforted. So this group of girls who, like they don't know each other, were like, hey girl, we're sitting over here, like pulling her away from that situation. And I feel like that's really common for like girls, like when they see another girl in trouble, they're gonna like pull her and be like do you need this, do you need water, are you ok, do you want to come with us.

Imani echoed Kory’s sentiment in her description of how women stay together when drinking. She also noted that this was in contrast to men.

Like I wouldn't want to be in a situation where, you know, I could get taken advantage of and like if I did something with my friend and she was like acting real crazy I might just hang around her more just to make sure she's ok. So I think it's more, um, people are kind of like more cautious when females are drinking just because they want to make sure she's ok. And I feel like with guys, you kind of like feel that they can take care of themselves more.

Shanice talked about the importance of women looking out for each other and taking initiative if it becomes clear that someone has had too much to drink. She recounted a time when she and a friend stopped drinking when they noticed their other friends were becoming intoxicated.

But we like, me and my friends and my roommates, we're like, oh we're gonna feel good but we're not gonna go crazy cuz somebody got to be the reasonable one out of us, you know, to keep us all good. All of us being messed up, that's just a bad situation. Ain't no telling how that will go. So one or two of us have to get
right, and I have been in a situation where, uh, it was me and 3 other girls, and me and my friend was drinking. We was drinking before them. And when they came in, they ended up getting messed up more than us. So when I - we was going to a party - and they was getting like messed up messed up so I started like drinking water and trying to like eat bread to like, you know, bring it down a little bit because I was like, well all of us can't be going into a situation messed up. And they was really messed up. That's how bad situations happen, that's how people take advantage of other people, and you've got to have like a good friend to say, you know, hey, you're too messed up, you're not going out. Or you're good, like I got you. Like you need that kind of relationship when it's like drinking around people.

She went on to recount how the situation played out as the night went on.

I: And what did you end up doing? Did you end up having to get them out of that situation?
R: Um, well we stopped them from drinking because they wanted to keep drinking. So we stopped them from drinking, we finally got them together, we made it to the party or whatever. By that time they wasn't tore up, but they was drunk. They was drunk. And it was a situation where my friend was like, she needed to fix her skirt. And I said, ok I'll fix it for you. And it was a dude that was by her and was like, well I'll fix it for you but I'm not gonna really fix it, I'm gonna take it off. And she didn't realize what he actually said and she was like, ok you can fix it. And I was like uh no, he can't fix it, I got it, it's time for us to go home because that's just like too much. Yeah, that was a crazy night.

Jessie stood out from the other participants in terms of her description of women staying together when going out. On the one hand, she acknowledged that it made her feel safer in situations when she had consumed too much alcohol.

I: When you said the perception of girls who are drunk is that they're more vulnerable, do you think someone would have perceived you that way that night?
R: I think they could have, but I think when you stay in more of a group you're less vulnerable. Because typically if you're like in a group, like a guys' not gonna, I mean they could, but they're less likely to approach an entire group of girls to talk to just one girl rather than the one girl that's alone at the party. Like if she's alone then her friends are nowhere to be found, they're not gonna come and step
in. Whereas I was with my friend that was a girl and then we met like another group of friends there. So there was probably like 7 or 8 of us in this group, standing there talking, having a good time. So I think that makes it like less vulnerable from the outside looking in.

On the other hand, she thought that this was not something that women necessarily chose to do and acknowledged that she herself would not always stay in a group if given the choice.

R: I think girls just kind of stay together like more so than guys do. Because I don't think guys ever really think about when they're going out, oh something could go wrong. But girls have to be like, oh like I have to stay with my friend, I don't want her going home with somebody. But guys are like oh, go home with somebody. Like tell us about it tomorrow. But girls, it's like they naturally just stay in a pack.

I: Do you feel like people do that voluntarily or do you think they do it because they feel like they have to?

R: I think that like when we're younger we're kind of taught to stay in groups. So I don't think it's necessarily voluntary but by the time we're in college it feels voluntary. Like I don't consciously think, oh I need to stay with my friend Bakkah, like she's gonna go somewhere. But like I don't think I would have naturally done that. I think that growing up we're taught to stay in groups, have a buddy. And so now that we're in college, we've been told that for 18, 19, 20 years, that just kind of naturally happens now.

I: Do you feel like if you hadn't been brought up that way, would you do it anyway? Or would you be like see you later, I'm going to do my own thing?

R: I think I would probably fall somewhere in the middle. Like oh you're ok? I'm gonna go to this now. But like I don't really do that now because I'm like, oh well we should probably stay together. We came here together, we should probably leave together, like I want to know what happens to you if something does.

I: So in your ideal world you'd be the check-in.

R: Yeah, like oh you're still good? Cool. Glad you're having fun, I'm gonna go have fun over here.

The participants’ descriptions of staying together when going out were the most commonly use protective behavior, with all participants discussing situations where they
had done this specifically to avoid negative consequences. Their descriptions painted a picture of a kind of unspoken community around women who go out and drink.

**Using/being a designated driver**

The other most frequently described protective behavior used by participants was using/being a designated driver. However, the participants had different experiences with and interpretations of drinking and driving. Imani’s description of using this protective behavior within her friend group was pretty straightforward.

We kind of take turns, you know? When it was my boyfriend's graduation he didn't drive. Anytime after that you know we just take turns. Like if it's at like a mutual friend's house then, um, he stays in the same apartments as me so we don't have to go anywhere, we can all just - some of my friends can stay over at their house and then my boyfriend stays at my house so you know it kind of works itself out to where we don't have to have a DD or anything. It really just depends what's going on.

Kory’s description of using a designated driver in her friend group was similar. She described them as taking turns, though she said that it depended more on how everyone was feeling than the logistics of the situation.

There's normally, we normally, since we go out like throughout the whole weekend, there's normally like that one person who drinks like the least. Like that one designated person who's like, I don't feel like drinking tonight, cuz we always have a DD. So it's like oh, well I don't want to drink tonight, so we rotate who's drinking a lot, who's not drinking a lot, who doesn't care, who cares, stuff like that. So there's always a DD so there's always that one person who's kind of like the mom of the group because we always go out in groups.

Tamika talked about being a designated driver as not only a way to keep the friend group safe, but also as a way to not drink. She discussed it as an effective way to keep from being questioned if she did not want to drink.
I: So that's a way you can not drink but not get push back from people?
R: Mm hm. Like, no I'm the DD. If you're just like, oh and that's another thing, if you're like the DD, they're like oh ok. If you're like no, I just don't want to drink, they're like what? Why not? So yeah.

Jessie had a different perspective on being a designated driver. Having grown up in a family of heavy drinkers, she described experience of being a designated driver from an early age among other caretaking behaviors.

I: You said something earlier about how when you were growing up you were the one that had to take care of people. What was that like?
R: Well my sister is 4 years older than me. She started drinking earlier than I did. And she does not have a very high alcohol tolerance like at all. Two or three drinks and she should probably stop but that doesn't mean that she does. And so, um, like since I'm the youngest in my family, I've been the designated driver for, I've been driving for six years, so six years. So like my parents would go to dinner and maybe have a couple glasses of wine and they could have driven, but like I would drive. So I was kind of, because I was the youngest in my family, I was always the one driving people or like making sure, especially with my sister, because she gets drunk and throws up like - I don't know why she still drinks as much as she gets drunk and throws up. But like, um, I can't even count how many times I've had to hold her hair back, or like help her put her pajamas on for bed or like go and check on her in the middle of the night to make sure she hasn't thrown up in bed. And so I think that growing up with those experiences, it made me less - it made me not want to be in that position more than girls who maybe had never had anything to drink before they came to college.

From Jessie’s perspective, being a designated driver earlier than most people made her more responsible than women who were drinking in college for the first time.

In contrast to the other participants, Shanice’s description of being a designated driver was not necessarily in line with effective protective behaviors. In her second interview, she described a situation where she had driven home from a party the previous
week. The story came up early on in the interview when she was asked what she wrote about in her journal.

_I_: What about while you were drinking or after you were drinking - did you keep track of your feelings? Things you were doing, thinking, saying, any of that?

_R_: The more I drank, I actually wanted to eat more. That actually kind of messed me up Saturday because I ate before I started drinking. I ate a sandwich from McDonalds and some fries. And whenever I got there my roommate had pizza so I ate a cheese pizza in between. I was already drinking. And by the time I got home, I threw that right up. Usually when I'm messed up, well I wasn't messed up, but usually when I'm messed up, I'll throw up multiple times. But i just threw up one time and I was fine. I was like ok, I can go to sleep now.

_I_: Do you remember things that you were thinking or things that you were talking to people about?

_R_: I was, my other roommate that I share a bathroom with was in the car with me and I was like I just want to make sure we make it home safe cuz I'm not drunk where I know I can't drive, but I want to make sure like we don't get in a wreck or nothing. I want to be ok. I just kept talking to her. And she was like well, you know, if you feel like you're real bad, pull over and then I'll drive. And that's happened before where I'm ok to drive or not and we had that conversation before we went to the party - if we're messed up, if we're both messed up we'll just stay at the condo. If one of us messed up, just drive home. I ended up driving home, it worked out fine.

_I_: Would you say you were probably on the edge? Or were you pretty good?

_R_: I was on the edge. But I was like remaining focused if that makes sense. For me being kind of intoxicated, I was trying to clear my head, like just focus on driving and get home. Cuz it's not far - it wasn't that far from school but still, things can happen in like a second. That's what I was thinking.

While Shanice stated that everything worked out fine, it seems this behavior was more risk-taking than protective.

**Cues: The C’s of Drinking Behaviors**

Participants were specifically asked to give reasons for drinking in the interviews. Several subthemes emerged in their descriptions, with at least half of the participants
giving descriptions of each reason for drinking. The subthemes identified were: (a) drinking to celebrate, (b) drinking to relieve stress/anxiety/sadness, (c) curiosity/experimenting, (d) liquid confidence, and (e) social/fun.

**Celebration**

Several participants stated that one reason they drank was to celebrate. Tamika described a night out with friends to celebrate something.

Ok, well usually I go with my friends and we all get ready together and it's like oh, let's take some shots or somebody made like jello shots or something. And it's usually like 2 of those and then whoever is the DD drives us to our other friend's place and it's like I'll either have a drink, a cup, or like I'll have like one of those little mini solo cups of shots, and I'll probably do like 2 or 3 of those unless I have a cup and then I'm just sipping that for the rest of the night. Usually that's it, but in the moment I'm like oh yeah, let's have fun type stuff. Yeah. Especially if I'm doing it and it's like a celebration thing. It's like let's get turnt.

Shanice also described drinking to celebrate as involving drinking more than drinking for other reasons. She talked about how it might differ from drinking to relieve stress.

R: I've drunk maybe if it feels like a celebration. My birthday, my friend's birthday, or if we're at a cookout or something. That's not really stress because, well we're at a party, let's enjoy ourselves, everyone else is drinking, stuff like that.

I: Is there any difference in like how much you drink or how it goes if you're drinking for a celebration versus like just regular I guess?

R: Um, for a celebration I would say it's more. It would be more. But if it was just for myself, just a little bit.

I: Would you say that's true for most people?

R: Um, definitely. Because most of the time at celebrations, it's just like the drinks keep coming. It's unlimited, you know what I'm saying? But when you're just by yourself or whatever in your room, once the bottle's gone or once your little cup
or drink is gone, it's gone. But at a celebration, you can just keep going back or whatever. So yeah.

Imani specifically mentioned taking shots as a way to celebrate. She talked about the expectation to have alcohol as part of a celebration.

I feel like that one is more so expected, like um especially when you're with friends. Like that's part of celebration - having alcohol and drinking. So like taking shots is, you know, you do it during good times, so it's something you do for fun the same way someone would go to a party. I guess it's just a part of celebrating.

Jessie talked about drinking as a way to celebrate not just in her friend group at college but also back home with her family. This was a norm that she grew up with from her description.

I: What would you say for you your main reasons for drinking are?
R: Well like I said, my mom's side of the family, they all drink. So when we get together, there's more than likely alcohol involved. And there's music, and it's just always been like a good time. Like to watch them. So that's kind of my perception of drinking. I don't think of drinking as like a get-away, escape from the world. Like I drink because it's a good time to drink and have fun with your friends.

Participants’ descriptions of drinking for celebration included both kinds of drinks and amounts that were more appropriate for celebrating. It was seen as part of what a celebration should be, whether with friends or family.

Coping

Participants also described reasons for drinking around relieving stress or anxiety or sadness. Kory talked about times her friends get together and talk about drinking to forget about a stressful week or problems with boys.
Well I know like, especially in my friend group, like whenever we're fixin to go out or we're having like a hard week at school, it's like oh I can't wait to go out tonight. I need this after the week that I've had. And like dudes it's expected that they're just gonna drink. Like I said earlier, if you go into a guys house on like a Tuesday night, like all playing fortnite, you can casually see them slamming beers down and it's whatever. You're not gonna go to a girls house and see them taking shots. Like sometimes like a wine night, wine Wednesday's a thing, it's like have a wine and a movie but you won't see them like taking shots or drinking a whole case of beer with their girlfriends, you know what I mean? So I feel like girls definitely do it, with my friend group, I would say whenever we're having a hard week, we'll be like oh I need this after the week that I've had. A lot of times, I don't really have, me personally, I don't really have like a reason for like, this is why I'm drinking tonight. Um, it's more of just like a, I want to be social and go out type thing. But I know like a lot of times my friends, like with whatever guy we're dealing with, are like I'm gonna drink to forget his name, whatever whatever. So it's like normally stuff like that. Or like I had a rough week in school or like so and so is being mean to me or whatever, more of like personal things like that are getting to them.

Sarah talked about drinking as a way to relieve social anxiety, especially if she was out with a large group of people. She described it as a way to cope with this anxiety.

I mean people with anxiety, I have friends with anxiety that drinking kind of helps them cope with it. It's kind of like that nervous thing that I have. It just helps relieve - I guess that's kind of stress relief though but it's like different. I don't know, with mine it's like social anxiety and it gives me that kind of relief.

In the second interview, Sarah went on to describe what happened to her when she went out sometimes and started feeling overwhelmed or when her anxiety got bad. She stated that if she hadn't had too much to drink, she could usually take time to herself and remove herself from the situation. But if she did have too much to drink, she experienced the opposite of relief when she continued to drink.

I: If you had had a lot to drink, would it be harder to do that than if you had had just a little bit or opposite?
R: If I had had more to drink, I probably would be less likely to take the time to myself. Like I would just sit there and continue to get overwhelmed and continue to drink more. Cuz like I just wouldn't want to go off on my own. If I'm still like conscious and can still like understand what's going on, then I can separate myself. But if I'm like drinking a lot and continue to drink, I definitely don't find myself doing that. I'll just end up in bed that night be like wow, I didn't have a good time because I didn't allow myself to do that.

Imani and Shanice both talked about drinking by themselves to relieve feelings of sadness or stress. Imani described psychological, if not physical, relief when drinking to relieve stress.

I: Tell me more about being in your feelings. Like what does that mean to you?
R: Being in my feelings. Um, it can be different things. Usually like, you know, you just had a bad day, just stressed out. Um, I know sometimes I'm just, I like just need to be alone. I'm an introvert so I just need to be alone by myself. If I were to pour myself a drink or whatever, that would probably just get me in my feelings. Like you know, just let me listen to some sad music, let me just be by myself. And it's like just a way of comforting myself I guess you could say.
I: And is there any time when you, like have you been in that situation in the past? Like just been by yourself, wanted to be in your feelings, like had access?
R: Yes
I: And like how does that go? Does the alcohol like I guess quote unquote help? Or like how does that play out for you? Cuz I could see some people like, ok let me do this and it doesn't help, makes them feel worse, and other people maybe it makes them feel better.
R: I think it's more like a psychological thing. Like you feel like you should do that when you're in that kind of mood. So like I'm not necessarily feeling better, my stomach might hurt more, I might be feeling a little bit out of it, maybe a get a nice nap but does it necessarily help me feel better? Probably not but psychologically it makes me feel better.

Shanice talked about school as a major source of stress. Drinking was a way to forget about her responsibilities.

R: No I probably would be in school but I probably would take a semester off because it gets overwhelming sometimes. Even if I'm not stressing out, I could
just like get very overwhelmed. And don't know how to handle everything because it just be all so much at one time.

I: What is it like when you get overwhelmed?
R: It's aggravating. It actually makes you want to drink when you're just like I have so much to do. I'm over it. At this point I just need to drink my responsibilities away and drink my pain away. That's how I feel.

I: Is it like school just by itself or is it a combination of things?
R: It's definitely school. Cuz my life is not bad. It's not bad, it's ok. But school just adds the extra stress to it. And paying for books. Uh I really be thinking about the amount of debt I'm gonna be in when I graduate. That stresses me out. It's definitely just school. It's school that stresses me out.

Participants descriptions of drinking to relieve stress, anxiety and sadness ranged from banter among friends when going out to drinking alone to forget responsibilities.

While participants found drinking as effective in providing relief, they also acknowledged that drinking too much could have the opposite effect.

**Curiosity**

Another reason participants gave for drinking was curiosity. Tamika, who had just started drinking that school year, recalled her friends planning out the night to see how she would act when she was drunk.

I: So what about for you, when you do drink. You said you pretty recently, like within this year was your first experience. So tell me what that was like, what you thought about it, how you handled it.
R: Ok, well, that's a funny story. Ok so my friends were like, yeah we need to see how you act when your drunk and stuff just so we know how to take care of you and stuff. And I was like, oh, that's smart. And I went over to their place and they already had it set up, but it wasn't open so they were like here you go and I opened it and I was like, how much should I pour? I don't know how to do this stuff or whatever. And they were like the, like, you know like the red solo cups with the little line thing at the bottom? They're like pour that much, that's a shot. So I did that and they were like, maybe 3 of those and see how you are. And I took 3 and I was like, I feel pretty normal after like an hour or so I would say or
whatever. I think I ended up just mixing it with apple juice - did I mix it with apple juice? And I think I had like that much in there. And THEN I felt it. Yes. And they were like - actually I remember literally saying this - I was like I really don't like this because I don't feel as smart as I usually do. I'm one of those type of people. And they were like, just enjoy it. Be quiet. Like ok. I just remember watching them play basketball on the xbox. That was it. They were like, you're pretty good. And I was like, I just remember like, I really like this. And I remember being really loud, they were like you're talking really loud. Yeah, that was it. I remember walking to my room, and they were like you're good? And I was like yeah, fine. And I woke up the next morning and I was fine.

Tamika offered some contradictions in her description. She acknowledged not enjoying it at first because she didn’t feel as smart, but she went on to say that as she got more intoxicated, she really liked it.

Kory talked about being away from her parents as an opportunity to drink more and explore the effects of alcohol. She described the experience as a way to learn more about herself and her body.

Now that I'm like away from my parents, they know that I drink but now that I'm away they don't have to see me and I don't have to go home to them every night, like I feel like I'm not as pressured to like cut back on myself. So like especially since I've been in college, if someone's like do you want a drink, it's like yeah. I'm just gonna keep drinking. [...] Because in high school, I would never really test my tolerance because I wouldn't get super drunk. But definitely in college I've learned like my tolerance and like how I act when I'm drunk and like - me and my sister both, whenever we drink we get like super red right here. People are like oh my god, are you ok? You look like super red. And were like, no we're fine. We just like, the blood rushes to our chest. At first when I started to drink like that I would be like, oh my god am I ok? I was like am I allergic to alcohol? Is this normal? And my sister was like no, that happens to me too. It's just like a blush type thing. And I just learned like how my body reacts to certain things. My body does not react well to tequila. I don't drink tequila because I hate it. And I've learned how like I don't enjoy beer. I won't drink it because I don't like the way it tastes. So it's more, I learned more about how my body reacts to certain thing and my personal preference on things.
Imani discussed her upcoming 21st birthday and how she looked forward to trying different kinds of drinks. She conceptualized turning 21 as a way to see what all the fuss was about going to bars and having access to whatever alcohol you wanted.

I: If it's a night where you're like celebrating and wild, and you had like all the money, what do you think your total would be?
R: I would definitely take a lot of shots, as many as I can handle. I can't tell you how much that is cuz I honestly don't know. Um, until I felt like, ok like, I would try to like not do it back to back. I would definitely drink water in between, definitely have food in my stomach. And I would take precautions cuz I know like ok, you know you're probably gonna get drunk. But I would be curious just to see, um, I guess what the fuss is all about. I think curiosity is definitely a big part of that.

Confidence

Confidence was also described as a reason that participants drank. Both Imani and Sarah talked about alcohol helping them to talk to people in social situations. In Imani’s description, drinking helped her be less shy and more likely to open up to other people.

R: Like um, you know how, I'm pretty shy at first, like come across - I'm also very blunt if that makes sense so I can go and start talking to people when I need to. So you know, probably be a lot more social but like you know, I'll be more carefree with my words, like might say something that kind of sounds stupid. Especially if I'm drunk cuz you know - and usually I like kind of filter my words and just kind of think about what I'm saying but if I'm not, who knows what's gonna come out.

I: And is that like a good thing?
R: Um, I think it can be. I also think it can get you in trouble. I know sometimes I'm just like shy. I just don't talk so I think like me opening up, being social, that's how you have a good time, you know, you can meet new people, you can have good experiences. Of course on the flip side you can say the wrong things, you can start stuff up with other people but I think like as long as like, you know, you're not to the point of gone, that you should be ok. A couple shots or whatever, I think you should still be fine. You should still have your sense enough to know
what you're saying. But you know the shyness that might be there, it might not normally be there. No I mean the shyness that might normally be there might not be there that time.

This description echoed what Shanice discussed in regard to negative consequences related to what she said when she was drunk. Imani, however, thought that even though you risked saying something you might not normally say, it was outweighed by the benefit of being able to talk to people more easily in a social situation.

Sarah described confidence from drinking alcohol as a way to overcome social anxiety. She incorporated one of the rituals identified as another subtheme, getting dressed up, with this confidence.

*I: So stress relief in a way?*
*R: Honestly, yeah kind of. I would definitely say that. Stress relief and, like, I think I'm more confident too. I think that's a big thing. I'm definitely more confident when I drink. Like a guy I wouldn't normally talk to, I could go up to the bar after a couple drinks and definitely talk to him. Talk up a storm probably. So that's a big thing too. Yeah.*

*I: And what is like the feeling behind the confidence?*
*R: I don't know. I just feel like I can, like especially if I'm dressed up and stuff and my makeup done, I just feel like I can do anything. Like talk to anyone, do whatever I want. I don't really have like any - and the alcohol obviously helps with that. Like I'm not really worried about little things. So that's nice too.*

Kory had a less positive description of liquid confidence. She talked about a situation where a friend started talking to an ex-boyfriend when they had been out at a bar the previous week during our second interview.

She was like oh we were just talking, having a normal conversation, like talking about our days, talking about all the other people at (the bar). And she was like, oh we didn't even talk about us, like it wasn't even like that. It was like harmless conversation. But like me, as her friend, I know like it's not harmless. Maybe when we go out next week she's gonna like keep talking to him or keep going
back to him, keep texting him and keep wanting to talk to him even though she knows like he's no good for her. So I don't know, it's just like liquid confidence I guess when she gets a few drinks in her. Because she doesn't act like that when she's sober. If it's the middle of the week and the middle of the day and she's not drinking, she's not like oh I want to talk to him, I want to go say hi to him. Like she doesn't care to go say hi to him. But like as soon as she gets some drinks in her it's like oh, I'm gonna go say hi, see how he's doing. It's like one of those situations. In a way it was like harmless, but I know that like sober her wouldn't have done it. So that's how that situation went.

Liquid confidence was seen as a way to open up in social situations and cope with anxiety by participants. It was also seen as having a downside, with sometimes negative effects associated with lowered inhibitions causing people to say things they wouldn’t normally say or talk to people they wouldn’t normally talk to.

**Comradery**

Participants also discussed drinking to be social and have fun. Several described how alcohol is just part of being social in college. Tamika discussed her desire to join a sorority and how that would likely increase her access to alcohol.

R: Oh, sorority girls are like, you know the bottle thing? Like people will just give them bottles of alcohol because, like hey you know.
I: You mean to one individual person? Or to like a group of people?
R: They'll give it to like one girl that's in the sorority, but then it's like for all of them I guess type thing. So yeah, that's another reason why I think they're more likely to get drunk and drink more.
I: And what do you think is behind that? Or why do you think that is? So if you were just by yourself, like you weren't the DD, you're not in a sorority, you're just hanging out. Would somebody give you a bottle do you think?
R: No. Cuz I've been in those situations. I think it's like, uh, oh you're in the sorority, so. And also the brother sister thing of sororities, so like the brothers are like, ok, that's our sister sorority so gotta make sure they're good type thing.
I: So you have been in that situation and nobody give you a bottle? Like,
whatever, you're not in our sister sorority.
R: Yeah
I: Have you ever thought about joining a sorority? Is that ...
R: (nods)
I: Do you think you might do it?
R: Yeah. I think it will definitely make me more social. It will put me in situations where you probably would drink more and stuff, but just because I know how I am I'm probably not.

Sarah talked about drinking with her girlfriends as the most social and fun environment for drinking.

I mean, if I'm drinking, if I'm just with girlfriends, we will have the time of our lives. Like we'll just be hanging out talking, gossiping, whatever. And that's always fun, I love that. Like no pressure or whatever.

She went on to describe the memories and stories she was creating when going out drinking.

I don't know, I think it's, I want to say it's super fun but it's also like crazy. I think like going out is when you make some of the, like some of my personal best memories are like times when we were going out, times somebody did this when they were drunk or like whatever. Or like I don't know, I kind of feel like that's sort of like the generic college thing and like parties and stuff like that. But I don't know, it's fun. I mean I have plenty of fun that doesn't involve drinking but like those are just some of the memories that like stand out to me are nights when we got dressed up and went out and did this, or like she danced on a table, something like that. Those are like the stories you tell your friends and stuff.

Jessie described what she observed during the week between interviews as far as drinking to be social. She also alluded to a difference between drinking to be social and drinking to get drunk.

Um, I took away from it that one of the biggest reasons people drink is for the social aspect of it. So it's like it's fun to sit around and drink with your friends but you can only sit around and drink with your friends for so long before you're
actually drunk. And then some people stop at that point and some people keep going.

Kory expanded on the idea of drinking to have fun and be social, defining it specifically as not related to coping with problems or mental health issues.

Like I would like to think that like I have relatively good like mental health. Like I'm not in like a bad place mentally, like I don't have depressive thoughts, I don't, like I don't know, I'm not down on myself like that, I feel like I have pretty stable mental health. So it's never like oh I feel bad about this, I'm gonna drink, I'm gonna do this. [...] It was more like a social setting, like I'm, like I don't know, I'm not one to like drink because a problem. It's kind of like more like a social, like oh I'm just gonna do it cuz it's fun type thing.

Drinking to have fun and be social was conceptualized as both normal and part of creating good memories in college. There were aspects of wanting to be in social groups where more alcohol would be present, wanting to have good stories to tell, knowing that drinking to be social involved some level of moderation, and drinking to be social was separate from drinking to cope with problems.

**Responsibility**

Participants were also asked about situations in which they would be less likely to drink. Responsibilities were identified as the main reasons participants chose not to drink. There were two subthemes that emerged from this question. These subthemes were: (a) being a designated driver and (b) commitment to attend class/work.

**Driving/Being a designated driver**

Several participants discussed being a designated driver as a reason not to drink alcohol in any given situation. In her second interview, Sarah discussed a party that she had gone to during the day and the fact that she didn’t drink because she had driven there.
Oh actually, last Friday, this past Friday, so it wouldn't even have been - when did we meet? Thursday? Tuesday? I don't remember. But anyway, that Friday I actually went to a darty, a day party or whatever, but I was the driver, so I didn't drink anything.

Imani specifically mentioned the fact that the main reason she would not drink if she was out and had access to alcohol was if she was driving. Even though she did not like to be the one not drinking when everyone else was, she would if she was the designated driver.

*Is there anything else you can think of, just for going out and um ... are there ever times when you go out and you do have access to drink that you don't?*

R: Um, when I'm the DD. Yeah. Um, I one of those people, um, I don't necessarily have to get drunk, you know, as long as I'm feeling good. I guess when others are drunk and you're not drunk, it gets annoying. But I don't necessarily have to be drunk to have fun going out. Like I can just take a shot and go out and have fun.

*I: That makes sense. So the biggest thing would be being a DD.*

R: Yeah. I'll take a sip of something but otherwise that's it.

Shanice’s description of driving as a reason for not drinking was a little different. While other participants described taking turns as a designated driver as meaning the driver didn’t drink at all or limited themselves to one drink, Shanice described it as a reason for drinking less. As evidenced in her previous description of this night, driving did not mean she didn’t drink, but it did mean that she drank less.

*I: Gotcha. Were there times during the week that you were more likely to drink? Or less likely to drink? And if so, what made you more or less likely to drink?*

R: I was less likely to drink when I had to drive back to my room. Well, I didn't have to, I could have stayed there because she had a little condo, but no, I wanted to go back to the house so I didn't drink as much.

*I: That was Friday?*
R: That was Saturday. That was my roommate's party. But I went to my old school that I transferred from. My god sister goes there and I stayed with her. And I didn't drive so I drank more.

Tamika described being a designated driver as a way to not only drink less but to avoid pressure from others to drink. According to her, it was seen as the most legitimate reason by others to not drink.

I: So that's a way you can not drink but not get push back from people?
R: Mm hm. Like, no I'm the DD. If you're just like, oh and that's another thing, if you're like the DD, they're like oh ok. If you're like no, I just don't want to drink, they're like what? Why not? So yeah.

**Commitment to attend class/work**

The other subtheme in the reasons for not drinking theme was don’t want to miss class/work. Several participants stated matter-of-factly that drinking was for when school and work responsibilities were done. Jessie stated that it meant she usually did not drink during the week.

I'm definitely more likely to drink when I don't have to get up early the next morning. Which, this past week, I've gotten up early almost every single day for work. So drinking on a Monday night to go to dollar vodkas, that's not something I'm gonna do. Because I get up early - I'm at work by 8 am on Tuesday. And there's not enough time between dollar vodkas and 8 am for me to be functional. And then, outside of getting up early, um, I don't like to drink if I don't have like all of my work done. Like I might not necessarily be writing my paper that night but I don't feel like I deserve to go out and have that much fun if I still have work to do. So those are usually the only times I wouldn't be open to going out.

Sarah echoed the sentiment of not drinking during the week. Homework responsibilities was one of her reasons for not drinking.
Yeah, ok. So a regular night, like a regular night I don't usually drink. I drink mostly on the weekends. Um, but a regular night I'll get back from work or class or whatever and I'll probably, I don't know, I'll either go to the gym or if I have a lot of homework to do, do that. Um, with my roommates mostly, I mean occasionally I'll go hang out with my friends in the library but for the most part I just chill in my dorm with my roommates cuz we're pretty good friends.

Kory specifically separated going out from drinking. Like Jessie and Sarah, she stated that she did not typically drink during the week. However, she did sometimes still go out to socialize without drinking.

*I:* So on a typical night that you go out, and you said, so that's like Thursday, Friday, Saturday. The rest of the week, you said when you go out you usually don't drink?

*R:* Yeah. If I do, it would probably be, well if I go out during the week I don't normally drink, if I go out it would just be for the social aspect of it. Just because a lot of the time I work on campus and I work earlier in the mornings so I don't want to be hung over sitting at my desk so I drink only on the weekends, or like go to class and like not make it to class because I was out drinking the night before. And I would go broke so much faster if I went out every day of the week and I don't want to do that. So I don't normally drink during the week. If I go out it will just be for the social aspect of it.

Participants identified reasons for not drinking related to having to drive and having to fulfill their responsibilities. The picture painted was one of drinking being acceptable only if one was meeting their responsibilities.

**Chapter Summary**

This study was conducted to understand women’s experiences and beliefs around high-risk drinking and its norms on a college campus. Women college students who participated in high-risk drinking were interviewed in order to gain insight into their perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. The researcher used interpretative phenomenological
analysis (IPA) to give voice to participants’ experiences and to identify common themes.

The primary research question guiding this study was: do college women perceive their drinking norms as different than men’s and, if so, how can social norms-based messages be tailored to women? To address this question, it was important to use a phenomenological approach since women’s drinking behaviors have been less studied than men’s (Ricciardelli et al., 2001).

Following data collection, transcription, and analysis, seven themes related to college women’s experiences with high-risk alcohol use were identified. They were: (a) women’s limits, (b) men have no limits, (c) messages from family/others, (d) rituals and consequences around going out, (e) protective behaviors of women, (f) cues: the c’s of drinking behaviors, and (g) responsibility. Each theme contained subthemes which were descriptions related to the theme that were shared by at least half of the participants. Some subthemes were experienced in a similar way among participants while others were experienced differently. Taken together, they painted a picture of the culture college women both experience and create around alcohol use. In order to understand the implications of the findings for answering the primary research question as well as the three supplemental research questions (How do drinking norms influence the drinking behavior of women currently engaging in high risk drinking?; How do high-risk drinking college women describe their drinking experiences?; What reasons do college women give for high risk drinking?), chapter five will discuss how the study’s results relate to the literature, implications for practice, implications for policy, and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Student health, safety, and academic performance were all negatively affected by high-risk alcohol use on college campuses (Vicary & Karshin, 2002). Among other environmental management strategies, social norms campaigns have shown efficacy in lowering the number of students who participate in high-risk drinking (Berkowitz, 2005). Peers can influence the impact of social norms campaigns, with students who socialize in high-risk drinking friend groups experiencing the distal general student norms used in most campus campaigns as less salient than their own group norms (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Small group social norms interventions such as those that take place in a classroom setting have addressed this issue, but studies have shown them to be more effective with men (Flynn & Carter, 2015, Flynn, Carter & Craig, 2017). Women’s norms and behaviors around high-risk drinking need to be better understood so that social norms interventions can be more effective with them.

This study investigated college women’s experiences and perceptions around high risk drinking and its norms on a college campus. Interviews were conducted with six college women who participated in high-risk drinking. A small sample size was used to conduct in-depth interviews and allow for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which involved using double hermeneutics to give both voice and sense-making to participants’ experiences (Brunero, Jeon & Foster, 2015).

Summary of Research Questions and Findings

The primary research question for this study examined college women’s
perceptions of their drinking norms. The question was: Do college women perceive their drinking norms as different than men’s and, if so, how can social norms-based messages be tailored to women? There were also three supplemental research questions. They were: How do drinking norms influence the drinking behavior of women currently engaging in high risk drinking? How do high-risk drinking college women describe their drinking experiences? What reasons do college women give for high risk drinking?

By conducting two interviews each with six research participants and analyzing data using an IPA approach, seven overarching themes emerged. They were: (a) women’s limits, (b) men have no limits, (c) messages from family/others, (d) rituals and consequences around going out, (e) protective behaviors of women, (f) cues: the c’s of drinking behaviors, and (g) responsibility. Each theme related back to one of the above research questions, as described below.

In considering if college women perceived their drinking norms as different than men’s, one theme that emerged was “women’s limits.” Participants revealed that there were expectations and norms for women’s drinking in terms of how they compared their own drinking to others’, what was appropriate for women to drink, and how much women should drink. Several participants described their own drinking as less than their friends. Less was conceptualized as less drunk, less alcohol but as drunk due to a lower tolerance, and intentionally less so that they could look out for their friend group. Thus, the idea of “I drink less than my friends” actually had several different meanings.

Participants also saw different alcoholic beverages as more or less appropriate for women, expressing that women were supposed to drink liquor, mixed drinks, and wine
while men were supposed to drink beer. They expressed that both women and men followed these norms around what was appropriate to drink.

Finally, participants discussed perceptions of women who were intoxicated. All participants reported negative perceptions of women who were overly intoxicated. Those perceptions could change, however, depending on the situation. For instance, Kory explained that people might perceive an intoxicated woman negatively if they didn’t know her, but if it was someone within the friend group, everyone would know she was ok and would find it funny. Sarah explained that men might perceive an intoxicated woman negatively, but other women would be more forgiving because they had been in that position themselves. Shanice discussed how it didn’t matter how intoxicated a woman was as long as she could handle herself and didn’t appear too drunk.

The second theme that emerged in regard to if college women perceived their drinking norms as different than men’s was “men have no limits.” Participants all stated that college men drank more than college women. There was also a perception that men who drank in a high-risk way were difficult to identify. Participants felt that men’s high-risk drinking was so normalized that it would be almost impossible to tell if a man had a drinking problem. They also discussed how it was difficult to tell if a man was intoxicated because they felt men didn’t show outward signs of being drunk. For instance, Imani said it was hard for her to tell the difference between her boyfriend having one beer or five beers. There was also reference to college men’s intoxication being perceived differently than women’s. Jessie talked about how a man and a woman could act exactly the same way when drunk and the man would be seen as having a good
time while the girl would be seen as “slutty.”

Participants also saw differences in how men and women talked about alcohol. They talked about men keeping track of their drinks so that they could brag and compete with each other over who could drink the most. Jessie discussed men in her friend group counting beers when they went out to see if they could beat the previous night’s count. When asked if women ever bragged about how much they drank, Sarah replied that she could not think of a time when that would happen.

A theme around “messages from family/others” emerged in answer to the research question: How do drinking norms influence the drinking behavior of women currently engaging in high-risk drinking? All participants said they had received messages from family, others, or society in general about how women should behave around alcohol. One message was that girls have to be cautious. Sarah discussed how her brothers had received different messages than she had from her parents, with the messages for her focusing on safety, watching her drink, and not going home with people she didn’t know. Tamika also stated her parents emphasized safety and watching her drink if she went out. Kory contrasted messages she received with her perception of messages that men received and noted that women are never told just to have fun when they go out.

Another message participants received was that of needing to be in control. Like Kory, Sarah contrasted this message with her perception of messages for men and stated that men were allowed to do whatever they wanted while women were told they had to keep themselves under control. Shanice referred to women being seen as unlady-like if
they did not keep themselves under control and Tamika noted that advertisements for alcohol focused on men, with them being the agents responsible for giving alcohol to or being asked for alcohol by women. Kory summarized this message as “behave yourself and don’t go too far.”

Two themes emerged from the data in response to the research question: How do high-risk drinking college women describe their drinking experiences? One was “rituals and consequences around going out.” Participants described rituals around going out, including pregaming and getting dressed up. Pregaming, or drinking with a smaller group of friends before going out to a party, bar, or club, served several purposes. Sarah described it as a part of the night with a small group of friends that was more laid back and carefree. She and Kory also noted that it provided an opportunity to get drunk before going out if you were under 21 and couldn’t buy drinks at the bar or club. Shanice said pregaming was helpful for saving money since drinks at the bar could be expensive. Participants described pregaming as being used for getting intoxicated, not just a little buzzed, before going out.

Participants also talked about getting dressed up as a ritual that women participated in before going out. Tamika described it as a fun part of the night while going out with an all-female group of friends, while Sarah described it as an expectation to reach a certain standard that was not placed on men. Kory stated that it helped her to feel productive and enjoyed the process of getting dressed up to go out.

All participants also described a price or darker side to going out. This
ranged from throwing up from drinking too much, to being exposed to violence. For example, Imani described an experience in a club where everyone was running from what they thought were gunshots. Other descriptions of “the price you pay” included being groped by men at parties (Sarah) and getting in trouble with the police (Jessie). Overall, participants saw these consequences as an accepted norm around drinking and the price they paid for going out.

To attempt to avoid some of these consequences, participants described behaviors that women engaged in when going out. A theme of “protective behaviors of women” arose from these descriptions. All participants stated that women stick together and look out for each other when they go out. This included watching each other’s drinks, going to the bathroom in groups, and moderating their own drinking if they noticed their friends were getting too intoxicated. Participants also stated that this extended beyond the friend group and that women in general looked out for each other when they were out. Kory described a situation she witnessed in a bar where she worked in which a group of women intervened on behalf of a woman they didn’t know who was clearly intoxicated and being potentially preyed upon by a man she didn’t seem to know. Not all participants felt this was voluntary behavior, however, and Jessie specifically stated that while she thought women were conditioned to stay in groups for safety, she would prefer to have more independence when going out.

The other protective behavior participants described using consistently was designated drivers. They described their friend groups as using different methods for determining the designated driver. Imani stated in her group they took turns
while Kory described it as based on which person expressed feeling like they didn’t want to drink on any given night. Though all participants described conversations and agreements in their friend groups about using a designated driver, there was still some risk around this behavior. While some described the DD as consuming no alcohol, others described the DD as drinking less than others or drinking less than they normally would.

Participants were specifically asked why they drank and/or what situations would make them more likely to drink to answer the research question: What reasons do college women give for high-risk drinking? A theme that emerged from the data was “Cues: the C’s of drinking behavior.” Participants identified several reasons for drinking including celebration, coping, curiosity, confidence, and comradery. Participants described drinking for celebration as involving drinking larger amounts and taking shots. Tamika talked about going out to celebrate as a reason to “get turnt.” Descriptions of drinking to cope ranged from going out in a group after a stressful week to drinking while in a large group to relieve social anxiety to drinking by yourself when feeling sad or overwhelmed. Participants viewed drinking to cope as effective as long as it wasn’t too much. Curiosity was another reason participants gave for drinking. Kory recalled drinking in middle and high school out of curiosity and then expanding these behaviors in college in order to establish and test her own limits. Imani talked about looking forward to her 21st birthday so she could go to bars and try different drinks to see what all the fuss was about. Drinking for confidence referred to participants using alcohol to feel more comfortable talking to men (Sarah) and more outgoing (Imani). Kory stated the
confidence could be detrimental, however, noting a night that a friend talked to an ex-boyfriend that she wouldn’t have normally if alcohol hadn’t been involved.

Finally, participants discussed comradery as a reason to drink. They stated that drinking was a way to bond with friends, make memories, and have good stories to tell about college. They acknowledged that drinking to be social did involve moderating alcohol intake and identified it as separate from drinking to cope.

Participants also identified reasons they would be less likely to drink. The theme of “responsibility” arose out of these responses. One reason participants gave for not drinking was having to drive or being a designated driver. Interpretations for what this entailed varied among participants. Tamika stated that she used being a DD as an excuse to not drink at all when she went out sometimes and stated it was an effective way to avoid pressure from others to drink. Sarah also identified being a DD as a reason to not drink at all. Kory and Imani both conceptualized being a designated driver as limiting yourself to one drink or so when out and Shanice stated that driving was a reason to drink less when going out.

Commitment to attending class or work was another reason given for not drinking. Participants agreed that work and school needed to come first, and for the most part they limited their drinking to weekends for this reason. Jessie and Sarah stated that they generally did not go out during the week and Kory stated that if she did go out, it was just to socialize and she did not drink during the week. All cited having to get up early to go to class and/or work as the reason they did not drink during the week.

The picture that emerged around high-risk drinking for the participants in
this study was driven by the primary and supplemental research questions which elicited themes around shared experiences. Women did experience their drinking norms as different from men’s and described perceptions of intoxicated women as negative. There were nuances in these perceptions, however, based on the friend group and gender of the observer. Norms for women were driven by messages they received from their families and society which focused on women being cautious and staying in control. They experienced rituals and consequences when going out, some of which were specific to women, including dressing up and being groped by men. There were also protective behaviors they experienced as specific to women which were staying in groups and looking out for each other. They gave several reasons for drinking including celebration, coping, confidence, curiosity, and comradery as well as reasons for not drinking including driving and work/school responsibilities.

**Findings as Related to the Literature**

This study sought to understand women’s high-risk in its own right and not just in contrast to men’s. As Connell (2012) stated, “The power dynamics that organize gender categories, and set boundaries around them, mean that a marginalized pattern of gender practice can itself be considered a health problem.” (p.1678). The participants’ perceptions of appropriate drinking behaviors for women, such as drinking hard liquor instead of beer yet receiving punishment for becoming too intoxicated (being seen as promiscuous), served to reinforce marginalized gender practices around health rather than creating a level playing field for high-risk alcohol use interventions.

In a similar vein, deVisser and McDonnell’s (2012) study on gender double
standards for alcohol use found that, “although respondents often acknowledged the
inequity of their expressions of double-standards, the prevailing attitude was that
men’s and women’s drinking and drunkenness are subject to different scrutiny and
judgement” (p.637). They cautioned against using these double standards to create
messages encouraging moderation, noting that reinforcing harmful gender
stereotypes could not be justified even for the goal of reducing high-risk alcohol
use. This study reinforced these findings, and further, suggested it is likely that such
messages would be ineffective. Results showed that women felt the need to stay in
control and in line due to gender stereotypes. Social norms messages could be
created to reflect these societal norms, but participants expressed distress over these
rules and would likely resent such messages. It does reflect a conundrum, however,
in that liberation in terms of women’s drinking puts them in a higher risk category.

Ricciardelli et.al. (2001) found that taboos about women’s drinking remain
widespread even while gender roles become more permissive, the gap between men
and women’s high-risk drinking narrows, and high-risk drinking becomes more of a
social expectation for women. In this study, participants seemed to agree, stating
that women drank similar amounts as men, though perhaps less frequently. At the
same time, all participants felt there was a negative perception of women who drank
a lot.

Even though participants thought there was a negative perception of
women who drank too much, there was agreement among all that women’s drinking
overall was accepted as normal behavior. This seemed to support Keyes, Grant and
Hasin’s (2008) finding of a closing gender gap in alcohol use as well as their call
for specifically targeting women in prevention and treatment efforts. Indeed, participants’ perceptions of a lack of taboo around women’s drinking while at the same time feeling that rules and drinks were different for women is surely part of negotiating this closing gap.

Alcohol expectancies have also been explored in the literature, and gender differences have been found regarding cognitions about alcohol and its effects (Read et. al., 2004), calling for novel research approaches to inform interventions based around expectancies. This study specifically found expectancies among college women around drinking for celebration as well as drinking for confidence.

There have also been calls to better understand social motivators for drinking. LaBrie, Hummer and Pederson (2007) found that students drank for social purposes and emotional escape/relief, which this study supported. They also found that social motives predicted negative outcomes above consumption for females, concluding that drinking to be social with friends and its negative outcomes needed to be better understood. This study found that for women, drinking to be social can lead to higher levels of consumption if celebrating due to expectations around drinking more and taking shots. Also, when drinking in social groups, the notion of gender appropriate drinks could lead to more negative consequences since women were expected to drink liquor or mixed drinks instead of beer.

In terms of norms, Rimal and Lapinski (2015) found that group-oriented people expressed more positive attitudes and stronger behavioral intentions toward high prevalence behaviors in their social groups than more individualistic people. Gender
stereotypes describe women as more group oriented than men (Heilman, 2012) and participants described behaviors that fell more or less within traditional gender norms in regard to women staying together and looking out for each other when going out. However, Jessie, who held some of the more stereotypical beliefs about women who drink being seen as promiscuous and using alcohol as an excuse for this behavior, seemed to resent the norms of women needing to stay together all the time when out. This could be described as a more individualistic orientation and could explain the subscription, or at least desire to subscribe, to the more minority norm that participants described for men of being able to go out and drink on your own without worry. Thus women’s norms shape behaviors, but perhaps less so depending on how much the woman personally subscribes to traditional gender roles.

In a study on gender specific norms, same-sex norms were found to be better referents for women and perceptions of same-sex norms were more strongly associated with drinking (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004). Women in this study felt that they drank less than other women, indicating that the gap between perception and reality exists in same-sex peer groups for women. Additionally, there could be potential for gender specific messages that focus on protective behaviors used by women (staying together, looking out for each other).

After conducting a study on gender role conflict and sex-specific drinking norms, Korcuska and Thombs (2003) called for future research to investigate designing, implementing, and evaluating social norms interventions for small, same-sex peer networks. This study pointed to some possible paths forward by highlighting the fact that
participants viewed themselves as drinking less than their female friends as well as some salient peer group norms especially in regard to taking care of each other. For example, group decisions were made about who would drive, who would drink less, and where they would go ahead of time so that everyone could stay together.

**Implications for Practice**

In considering how to move forward in light of this study’s findings, it is important to note that caution must be taken when tailoring social norms messages for women. Unintended consequences regarding reinforcing gender stereotypes are a danger. As McDonald (2013) pointed out, “… categorizing anything that men do as a type of masculinity and everything women do as a type of femininity can serve to reinforce stereotypes about women and men as well as to reify differences between the sexes, instead of also pointing to their similarities” (p.565).

Umberson and Karas Montez (2010) provided a framework for using findings on social ties and health to reduce social disparities and promote health within a population. They called for addressing six fundamental goals when creating interventions: *promote benefits of social ties, do no harm, reduce social isolation, reduce harm, coordinate policies and programs, and provide help where help is most needed.* These policy goals can be applied to implementing social norms messages for women on college campuses.

A strength of social norms campaigns is their focus on the positive health behaviors of the majority. *Promoting the benefits of social ties* is a good fit for the pro-social nature of a social norms campaign. Specifically, norms around women’s protective behaviors of staying together and looking out for each other would be an example of
messages that promote benefits of social ties.

A practitioner seeking to implement social norms messages for women would also need to heed the caution of do no harm by avoiding messages that encourage moderation by reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. Social norms campaigns traditionally eschew scare tactics, but because these stereotypes are so ingrained in many students and practitioners involved in creating campaigns, they may not even acknowledge gender stereotypes as such. As someone who has implemented a campaign on a college campus, I can speak to the need to repeatedly remind students and others to stay away from their seemingly default instinct to use scare tactics in campaigns.

Social norms campaigns also work well for reducing social isolation when they create messages that encourage prosocial behavior. A focus of messaging on the prosocial bystander behavior interview participants described, for instance women looking out for women they may not even know, would be a way to reduce social isolation within a campus community. This message could also be expanded beyond women helping women to everyone helping everyone as a way to promote prosocial behaviors while also breaking down gender stereotypes.

The goal of reducing harm is also important to keep in mind when creating social norms messages specific to women. Umberson and Karas Montez (2010) conceptualized this as preventing and alleviating negative features of social ties. Participants described several benefits they saw from drinking in moderation some of which were related to social ties. Social norms marketing is a harm reduction approach and it uses messages that do not encourage or discourage drinking but promote behaviors that reduce
associated harm. When thinking about what this might look like for women specifically, messages around moderation within friend groups and planning for designated drivers could be an approach.

The goal of *coordinating policies and programs* can be complicated in a university setting. Umberson and Karas Montez (2010) suggested a framework of connecting existing policies and programs that address social ties in health (as social norms campaigns do) with each other in order to map a larger strategy that will work to identify gaps and allow greater coordination. This is often easier said than done on a college campus. While many do have comprehensive programs to address high-risk drinking, of which social norms campaigns are a part, campus wide coordination of efforts is both difficult and, frankly, exhausting. In their examination of integrated communication marketing in institutions of higher education, Havemen and Smeeding (2006) discussed the challenges of coordinating marketing efforts university wide. They stated:

> The lack of a marketing communication focus tends to be the result of how IHEs have evolved over time. As institutions have grown their enrollment and program offerings, they have also become increasingly fragmented internally. Typically this has resulted in functions becoming compartmentalized and departments operating without any knowledge of other parts of the institution. Professionals within IHEs tend to view themselves as part of a distinct department competing for limited organizational resources rather than as part of a comprehensive system working toward common objectives” (p. 147).

Considering the questions from faculty, administration, department chairs, and others surrounding a general campaign using distal norms, it is hard to imagine the complexity it would add to create targeted messaging for women. There could be obstacles around getting the intended audience to see messages as well as around who else would see them
and ways they might challenge the messages. These challenges do create opportunities, however, to explain the principles behind social norming and gain allies along the way.

The final goal of this framework is to provide help where help is most needed. This too can be difficult on a college campus. The invisibility of women’s high-risk alcohol use is a challenge. Beginning conversations before implementing messages around women’s drinking would be an important step for any practitioner to take. These conversations, while necessary, can also create their own challenges. Harrison (2010) stated that student affairs professionals are placed in dual roles as both advocates for students and upholders of institutional systems. These roles sometimes conflict and student affairs professionals have to navigate a very political environment with many different demands. There are political issues related to addressing both high-risk alcohol use and traditional gender roles on college campuses. Any recommendations to address high-risk alcohol use among college women will have to be implemented by professionals in what can potentially be a hostile environment.

Policy Implications

Applying the above framework to a campus social norms campaign would entail extra time and resources. From a practical standpoint, a micro-level social norms intervention within the classroom involves a good understanding of social norms principles as well as a sizeable class time commitment from the instructor. Adding the dimension of different messages for different genders would also introduce an element of understanding issues around gender through a critical lens as well as the extra time needed to implement any aspects of the project needed to create gendered messages. With
that said, there are many faculty members on any campus with social norms knowledge, gender studies knowledge, or even both. Practitioners need to be willing to form relationships with faculty members and dive deep into pedagogy and even research to create these interventions. It is very time consuming but the pay-off is big.

The investment on the part of practitioners also needs to be long term. No intervention is successful right away. There is always room for improvement, or even the need to recreate a social norms message, or even an entire campaign. It became clear after the pilot study that women were experiencing and carrying the messages of the research site’s social norms campaign in different ways than men were. This was not an expected finding. So the next question became what should be done about it?

As the current study has shown, part of the issue is the invisibility of women’s voices in social norms campaigns from the beginning. Even after studies showed that messages needed to be different for men and women, nobody had recommendations for what that might look like. It is clear that women need to not only be involved in the creation and vetting of messages, but they need to be included. Social norms campaigns need to include women’s perspectives. On a college campus, this means educating college women and men on gender marginalization and gender stereotypes around alcohol use at the same time as the dangers of high-risk drinking. It means not treating high-risk drinking and behavioral expectations for men and women as different issues.

It also means not going for the easy path of reinforcing gender stereotypes that encourage women’s moderation. Women need to be intentionally involved in every step of the process. Gender specific focus groups around newly created messages would
create a safe space for women to share feedback, including experiences of gender stereotypes related to drinking, and would give practitioners valuable information regarding how to best reach students.

Single-gender groups could be important because traditional gender stereotypes play out in all areas of social norms campaign creation. For example, a campaign implemented correctly involves student participation every step of the way. In a mixed-gender group of students creating a brand, messages, and marketing tactics, could men be more vocal and women more hesitant to voice their opinions? Could the traditional gender roles of men providing health-related information and women being recipients of that information play out in this group setting? How much have these dynamics played out in the past with practitioners unaware of the possible alienation of women in traditional social norms campaigns?

Practitioners need to be aware of all of these tensions and do more to apply a critical lens to their interventions. Instead of using a one size fits all model, or targeting specific groups which can be just a marginalizing, practitioners can do more to develop messages that are inclusive. While the process of developing messages might be done within single gender groups, final messages need to use language that is inclusive. Social norms messages that focus on high-risk alcohol use can be modified to include information that breaks down gender stereotypes. This could look something like including information on effective communication, or making sure that any visuals represent all kinds of people, or incorporating messages about gender specifically.
Directions for Future Research

Participants clearly expressed that they felt norms around drinking for men were different from norms around drinking for women. As the first of its kind to specifically investigate women’s drinking norms as they relate to social norms messaging, this study’s findings could be used to refine this type of intervention. One possibility would be to continue small group interventions in the classroom and separate groups by gender. Or, students could self-select into their own groups but also be given information on sex-specific drinking norms as part of the assignment. Another possibility could be leaving classroom assignments the same, but afterwards conducting focus groups by single gender to explore which messages would be most salient. Studying each of these designs either separately or together could guide future micro-level social norms interventions.

Another important direction for future research is to investigate efficacy of social norms messages with students in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Questioning, Intersex, Plus (LGBTQI+) community and create recommendations for these students. Youth who identify as a sexual minority have been shown to use alcohol at a higher rate than those who identify as a sexual majority (Talley et.al., 2014), suggesting that they are likely to drink at higher rates on college campuses as well. Those students’ experiences of social norms messages, their saliency, and effectiveness is another important aspect of inclusion that needs to be explored.

The entire construction of social norms messages is based on the idea that people’s behaviors are driven by their desire to behave in ways that are perceived as “normal”, but what about people who belong to marginalized groups? If someone has
been told their whole life that they are other, is there harm being done by any message that attempts to highlight the behaviors of the majority? For women specifically, is there harm being done by messages that fail to acknowledge that some their protective behaviors, however positive, are done because they live in a rape culture? Do women who identify as feminists face difficult decisions related to following norms versus behaving in ways that fall outside of them? These are all questions that merit further study.

**Final Reflections**

Birnbaum and Edelson (1989) provided one of the best quotes I encountered in my Ph.D. studies in their book *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. They said, “The apparent paradox that American colleges and universities are poorly run but highly effective is easily resolved if either or both of these judgments are wrong. But what if they are both right?” (p.3). I love this statement and question because I don’t think they could be more appropriate based on my years working as an administrator on a college campus.

Addressing high-risk alcohol use on a college campus is a great example. Tensions exist between faculty, administration, and trustees on not only how, but whether, to address this issue. They all fill different roles, come from different backgrounds, and encounter and are influenced by different aspects of the institution. Faculty can consciously or unconsciously contribute to a high-risk alcohol environment by positioning themselves against campaigns they see as initiated by administration or marketing offices. Trustees, who are often businessmen, may minimize the impact of
high-risk alcohol use among students in the interest of guarding the reputation of the university. The business model can encourage traditional ideas of university marketing around athletics, facilities, and idealized college experience without accounting for the associations all of these can have with high-risk alcohol use. In the same breath, there can be efforts to ensure that any data or statistics that could shed a negative light on the institution be kept under wraps. These tensions leave student affairs professionals who want to implement messaging around high-risk alcohol use in a bind.

At the same time, it is these very institutions that produced the knowledge, research, academic freedom, and flexibility to create and launch social norms campaigns. Any other institution in the world could not have created the idea nor the body of research surrounding its implementation and effectiveness. The seemingly imperfect, lumbering gait and pace that mark forward motion and change on college campuses are exactly what make the institution work. After all, one size does not fit all.
Appendix A

Examples of Social Norms Campaigns

Sacred Heart University

Michigan State University

Hobart & Williams College
Appendix B

Pilot Study Question Development

Framework as suggested by the literature:

1. Students who drink to excess are less likely to experience alcohol-related problems when they employ protective strategies. This is particularly relevant for men and for those students whose drinking exceeds the norm.

   * Qualitative methods should be used to further clarify the kinds of protective strategies students employ (Benton et. al., 2004)

Past interview data examples:
Q. Do you feel like working on this campaign or this project has impacted you personally?
A. Yes, I realized that a couple of days about when I was about to have a drink, I realized because I usually consume like five drinks I am not going to lie, but then I was like five drinks is a lot and I’m learning how to moderate my drinking so yeah I think I did.

Possible interview questions for this semester based on these calls for further understanding from the literature:

Please describe some protective behaviors you and/or your friends use when drinking (id differences and similarities between genders). How often do you use these strategies? Are there different times and/or situations in which you would be more or less likely to use protective strategies when drinking?

2. Service learning develops “personal autonomy through real world experiences, and by promoting co-operative skills, this pedagogical tool develops within individuals a recognition and faith in their potential. It helps them become active members of the community and it enhances their ability to be self-assured, to assume new responsibilities, and to influence individual’s growth as well as that of their community.”

   * Qualitative studies on service learning “…seek a narrative construction that allow the participants in the research to speak their meanings in ways that encourage them to recognize themselves and their own perspectives as valid sources of knowledge generation.” (Munter, 2002)

Past interview data examples:
Q. Overall what did you feel like you learned from participating in this campaign?
A. Umm that everybody’s gonna…like when you come to college you have your
perceptions but I think it’s better to know the facts and like when you do learn the facts I think it’s good to share with other people because by informing others I feel like that can stop a lot of misperceptions and possibly slow down drinking and the problems we have with drinking.

Q: Did your perceptions of the data change at all while working on this project?
A: Yes it did, it took me a while to still believe it even after thought. It did change my perception because now I know that not everybody drinks. It’s just you know sometimes people get it from your friend’s perspectives and stuff and not actually the whole school.

Q: What do you think lead to the change?
A: I would say further research and just really thinking about it because you really think okay everybody doesn’t drink. Just meeting with my group members and just knowing them like some of them don’t drink.

Q: Overall, what do you feel like you learned from participating in this project?
A: I think I learned that, like I said not everybody drinks and I learned different ways that you can connect with other people within the coastal community about getting those messages out. By seeing everybody’s presentations I realized that maybe you’re connecting to the audience by using pathos is a better way to do it, because I know that it affected me. I was like okay if this drinking can cause you to not be able to do something else then you know then maybe you should change.

Q: What was your reaction to the student data the first time you saw it?
A: Yeah right. That was why we came up with the campaign that we did, we were the doubters. All of us when we sat down and talked about what kind of message we were going to present. We wanted something that was going to make an impact and one of the things that we found was that all of us had the same reaction. Yeah right.

Q: Did your perceptions of that data change at all while working on this project?
A: Mhm, not just for coastal but for other schools too. When we looked at the website with all of the data and everything that has been accumulated really across the country was pretty surprising.

Q: So what do you think led to the change?
A: My personal view point, yeah, working on the campaign really made a difference.

Q: Did you feel like you were contributing toward the larger social norm campaign on campus?
A: Doing the campaign that we did? Yeah, especially some of it or if it even ends up getting used, I really think that and not just our part of the project but I think there were a lot of projects that I think would really make a difference if other people saw them. I spoke to some people in some of my other classes about what we were doing and they were like wow really? I never even really looked at those Wally posters or I didn’t believe them.

Q: Overall what do you feel like you learned from participating in this project?
A: That the perceptions that I think a lot of people hold are really skewed the wrong way. I think especially for freshmen that could be a real problem if they come in anticipating a certain type of behavior they are going to adjust their own behavior to suit that norm and that’s going to cause a lot of problems. It’s better for people to be educated ahead of time so that they don’t think for themselves or so they have the fortitude to say when someone is trying to urge them to do something “hey I’m not the only one that doesn’t want to do this.”

Q: Right, so overall do you think working on this project has impacted you and if yes, how so?
A: Yeah, I think it really helped me to and I was able to say to some people when they said something like “I don’t believe that Wally stuff that’s crap.” And I would say to them well how much do you drink? They would respond with “oh I only have like 2 or 3 but that’s just me” but that’s not just you, that’s more than just you and that’s important to know.

Q: Did you feel like you were contributing towards the larger social norms campaign on campus? Do you feel that your designs has the potential to be used by the client?
A: Yes I do, when we did our project we were told that we did a difficult one with excuses and that was something that ya’ll were working on trying to tackle and we probably gave ya’ll some ideas to work with.

Q: Did you try harder on this campaign because a client might use what you created or did you just basically do it for the grade?
A: I tried a little bit harder because I knew that it could potentially be something that the whole campus saw.

Q: Did you talk to your classmates other than your group members in this class about the project throughout the semester?
A: I did, I wanted to know what other people were working on and how they were tackling it. It seemed easy but it really wasn’t.

Q: Did you talk to friends and acquaintances outside of this class about the project or data?
A: Yes, I talked to a lot of people trying to get ideas and perspectives on the issue of how to go about doing our project and the numbers. I talked to a lot of people.

Q: Overall what do you feel like you learned from participating in this project?
A: I feel like I learned a lot about myself and my drinking habits. I learned how to deal with all of that and people around me. I learned about the numbers and about the college students and their thoughts and ideas and portrayal on the whole campaign and drinking period.

Q: Overall do you think working on this project has impacted you and if yes how so?
A: Yeah I do feel like it impacted me. As far as drinking I thought I was a binge drinker but in reality I’m really not. As far as my perception of other people has changed. I thought even though I’ve been here 4 years I thought everyone at coastal got wasted. People actually don’t, there are designated drivers and
people who are willing to be designated drives and not everyone sits down and has 6 drinks.

Possible interview questions for this semester based on these calls for further understanding from the literature:

What was it like for you to work on this project? What were your interactions with your group members like? Did you interact with people outside of your group or this class regarding the things you were learning while working on the campaign? What conversations did you have? What did you learn from them? Did you feel like your project could have an impact on other students? Did it have an impact on you?

3. The social marketing field is guided by several theories and disciplines, none of which are sufficient to explain or direct social change. Several deeper explorations into social marketing could be used to “develop a better understanding of the factors that influence health behavior and improve social marketing’s tools for modifying the social-structural environmental, and individual-level determinants of social change”

*Investigate a wide array of potential behavior change determinants (e.g. emotions and motivation), recognizing that the most important factors are unlikely to be the same for all health behaviors (Grier & Bryant, 2005)

Past interview data examples:

Q: Overall do you think working on this project has impacted you? How so would you say?
A: Just being more aware, that I’m not alone if I decide not to drink. There are a lot of people that are not drinking, even though it may not feel like that.

Q: Overall do you feel that working on this project has impacted you?
A: I would say it didn’t because as an athlete I already don’t participate in that kind of activity a lot.

Q: Overall do you think working on this project has impacted you if yes, how so?
A: Yes it has, it opened my eyes up more to people are looking to do and that people actually do think before they drink. For example the statistic that most people don’t drink more than 3 but you don’t believe that is true until you know the facts.

Q: Overall what do you feel like you learned from participating in this project?
A: That these are real numbers and that you guys just didn’t make them up out of nowhere.

Q: Overall do you think working on this project has impacted you?
A: Yes I think about it now when I’m out.
Possible interview questions for this semester based on these calls for further understanding from the literature:

Did you feel that working on this project influenced your own perceptions? Behaviors? What were some of the things that influenced you? Do you feel you had an influence on others? What might have impacted you to make changes or to not make changes? (id differences and similarities between genders).
April 10, 2018

Elizabeth Carter

RE: Women’s Perceptions of Drinking Norms

Dear Elizabeth:

It has been determined that your proposal #2018.74 is APPROVED by Institutional Review Board under the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Research Subjects Categories #6 & 7.

This approval is good for one calendar year commencing with the date of approval and concludes on (4/10/2019). If your work continues beyond this date it will be necessary seek a continuation from the IRB. If your work changes or is concluded before this date please so inform the IRB.

Approval of this protocol does not provide permission or consent for faculty, staff or students to use university communication channels for contacting or obtaining information from research subjects or participants. Faculty, staff and students are responsible for obtaining appropriate permission to use university communications to contact research participants. For use of university e-mail to groups such as all faculty/staff, all students or other large groups on campus permission must be first obtained by the researcher from the Office of the Provost after the research protocol has been approved by the IRB. Please allow at least one week to receive approval.

Note, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to report immediately to the Institutional Review Board at any occurrence of any changes in procedures involving human subjects and any unexpected risks to human subjects, any detrimental effects to the rights or welfare of any human subjects participating in the project, giving names of persons, dates of occurrences, details of harmful effects and any remedial actions. Such changes may affect the status of your research. The Amendment form and other IRB forms are located at.

Secondly, be advised that although Informed Consent is not specifically required for research that is Exempt from IRB review, should you elect to use them, signed Consent forms and/or other research records, as applicable, must be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the research and shall be accessible for purposes of audit.

If you have any questions concerning this please contact the IRB Coordinator at or

Thank you,

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

Director, Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services
IRB Administrator
Appendix D

Study Recruitment Flyer

Earn $20 for participating in a Research Study

I am a Ph.D. student at Clemson University and I am looking for female college students to participate in a research study about women’s perceptions of drinking norms. Volunteers will be asked to participate in 2 interviews which will be scheduled one week apart and will be paid $20!! If you would like to find out more about if you are eligible and how to participate in the study, please email me at elcarte@g.clemson.edu.

Email contact information

Elizabeth L Carter
eelcarte@g.clemson.edu
Elizabeth L Carter
eelcarte@g.clemson.edu
Elizabeth L Carter
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eelcarte@g.clemson.edu
Appendix E

Informed Consent

Interview Consent for Research Study

**Title of the Research Study:** Women's Perceptions of Drinking Norms

**Principal Investigator:** Elizabeth L. Carter

**PI Contact Information:** elcarte@g.clemson.edu

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Tony Cawthon

Faculty Advisor Contact Information (if applicable): cawthon@g.clemson.edu

**Department:** Educational and Organizational Leadership Development

I agree to participate as an interviewee in this research study, which concerns Women's Drinking Norms.

I understand the interview(s) will take place:

- Location: [Redacted]
- # of interviews: 2
- Length of each interview: 1 hour
- Interview topic: Women's perceptions of drinking norms and their influences on behavior

I understand that the benefits of the research may include contributing to understanding women's health behaviors and what influences them.

I understand that the risks and discomforts of the interview may include: You will be asked questions about your alcohol use. You will not be asked to share any information you are not comfortable sharing.

The confidentiality of your responses will only be violated when required by law or the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. This usually includes, but may not be limited to, situations when your responses indicate that you or a clearly identified individual is at risk of imminent harm or situations in which Coastal Carolina University faculty are mandated reporters, such as instances of child abuse or issues covered under Title IX regulations. For more information, please visit the Title IX webpage at: [Redacted]

All employees of [Redacted] are considered Responsible Employees for the purposes of Sexual Misconduct and are mandated to report any instance of misconduct that they know of or should know of to the Title IX Coordinator.

If applicable, for participation in this study, you will be compensated with $20.00 upon the completion of 2 interviews, scheduled for 1 week apart. You will only receive the $20 when both interviews are complete.

I understand that the interview is voluntary and there are no consequences if I choose not to participate.

I understand that I do not have to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time with no consequences.

I understand that I [ ] will [x] will not be photographed, [ ] will [x] will not be videotaped, [x] will [ ] will not be audiotaped as part of this study.*

If recorded, I understand that tapes, transcripts, recordings and/or photographs may be published or used in presenting the researching findings at a later date.*
I give the PI, Elizabeth L. Carter, ownership of the tapes, transcripts, recordings and/or photographs from the interview(s) conducted with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in the following location: Locked file cabinet in locked office. All audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed. All identifying information will be taken out of transcripts.

☐ I understand that information or quotations from tapes, transcripts or recordings will be published without my review and approval.*

☐ I request that my name not be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.

☐ I request that my name be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.

*If I have questions about this research study, I can call the PI shown at the top of this form.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for the oversight of this research and you may contact them with questions or concerns by calling: or emailing:

This research study has been approved on Click here to enter text. by the IRB. This approval will expire on Click here to enter text. unless the IRB renews the approval prior to this date.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, received satisfactory answers and want to participate. I understand I can keep a copy of this form for my records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's Name (PRINT)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix F

Interview One Questions

1. What are some things you like to do with your friends?

2. Tell me about a typical night for you when you go out?

3. What would you describe as normal drinking for a college student?

4. What would you describe as normal drinking for a female college student?

5. What are some experiences you’ve had when going out since you’ve been at college?

6. How do you think women who drink in college are perceived?

7. How do you think men who drink in college are perceived?
Appendix G

Interview 2 questions

1. What were some of the things you wrote about in your journal?

2. Were there any feelings that came up more often than others?

3. Were there any feelings that made you more or less likely to drink? If so, what were those feelings?

4. Were there any feelings that made you more or less likely to drink when you went out? If so, what were those feelings?

5. What is going out like for you?

6. What kind of conversations do you have with your friends about going out and/or drinking?
Appendix H

Audit Trail

Research project is proposed

IRB is submitted to site and Clemson University

Research design is changed from using adjudicated college women to recruiting from the general population due to confidentiality concerns from site IRB

Recruitment flyers are posted

Students who respond to flyers are screened to determine if they meet criteria

Interviews are scheduled and conducted

Interviews are transcribed by researcher to ensure all words and nuances are captured

Interviews are analyzed individually

Themes across interviews are identified
Appendix I

Interview Transcript Excel Sheet Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Gender appropriate drinks              | *I*: So that's like for college students in general, so if we're getting specific for female college students or college women, what would you say is typical or normal drinking for college women?  
R: (pause) Hmm.. I think they're like more into wine, like fruity drinks I guess, less from beers. I mean I know a lot of girls like beers but less into beers, more into fruity drinks. Um, wines definitely - I've seen girls drink like a whole bottle of wine, yeah. So I wouldn't say it's less but I would say the drinks vary I guess if that makes sense.  
*I*: So it's more about what they drink versus how much they drink?  
R: Yeah. I don't think they drink less per se. It's more about what kind of drinks they're drinking.  
*I*: Why do you think that is?  
R: I think beer is more of a... I hate the taste of beer. I ask my boyfriend like how he drinks it all the time and he said it's an acquired taste. Like it's something you don't like and then you just keep doing it and you eventually like it. I don't know, for me it just doesn't taste good. (laughs) | Girls drink different drinks, fruity drinks are more feminine  
Girls don't drink beer (which has lower alcohol)  
Beer is an acquired taste                                                                                       |
| Men stay in control when drinking      | *I*: Now what about for men, like college men? What would you say is typical drinking for a college guy?  
R: Probably about 3 to 4 beers is like, that would be like normal, like I guess buzzed, not like drunk. Um, definitely shots, lots of shots. Yeah. | Typical drinking for men is beers and more shots but they don't get drunk                                   |
| Men who drink are normal                | *I*: How do you think that men who drink in college are perceived?  
R: To be honest, I think it's kind of like normal. I'm not saying you expect it, but I think it's not like, oh there's this college boy drinking. It's like, ok, something you see all the time. Um, yeah, it's normal. I don't think anyone would look at it as, oh |
| Girls have to be cautious, stay together|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Drinking for college men is normal  
Men could get violent and aggressive when they are too drunk  
Women are more cautious when they drink, they have to be                                                   |
no, that's crazy.
I: Is there any scenario where a guy's drinking in college would be considered not normal?
R: Um, I think it's when they're too drunk, I guess maybe yelling. I feel like guys get more violent, aggressive - like angry violent when they're drinking, so um, that would definitely like cause a scene. Or reckless acting, I definitely think that's like too far, and that's like, kinda calm down.
I: Mm-hm. And what about for women. How do you think women who drink in college are perceived?
R: Mm, I think it's more like, ok, you have to be careful. Like I know like when I'm drinking it's like I have to make sure I have a ride home, it's more like precautions. It's like, ok, who's going to take me home, do I have a safe place to stay. It's more thought to it. Like I wouldn't want to be in a situation where, you know, I could get taken advantage of and like if I did something with my friend and she was like acting real crazy I might just hang around her more just to make sure she's ok. So I think it's more, um, people are kind of like more cautious when females are drinking just because they want to make sure she's ok. And I feel like with guys, you kind of like feel that they can take care of themselves more.
I: So the biggest difference from what you're saying is that girls just have to put more thought into it ahead of time?
R: Yeah, I think so. They kind of just worry about their safety more. Like I've never really seen too many guys just like, oh I want to make sure I'm not walking by myself versus a female.
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