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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON FIRST-SEMESTER PENN STATE WOMEN'S
SOCIAL NETWORKS, DRINKING PATTERNS, AND RISK FOR SEXUAL
ASSAULT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore first-semester women's formation of their social networks at The Pennsylvania State University and how their networks influenced their drinking patterns and risk of being sexually assaulted. The overarching research question that was explored was: What is the socialization experience for first-semester Penn State women? It was hoped that more information regarding the "red zone," the time in which college freshmen are most likely to be sexually assaulted, before the 6-7 week of their first semester, would be obtained. To study students' views and experiences, focus groups were advertised to all first-semester students during fall 2011. When five women volunteered, they were scheduled for interviews. The interviews were recorded, then transcribed. The results were then qualitatively analyzed using grounded theory. The core theme that emerged was the "Fast Paced Transition to College." The major sub-themes included: Fitting In, Everyone Drinks, Hooking Up is Easy, Unwanted Sexual Experiences Happen, and Safer Drinking Strategies Used for Protection. More specific open codes are provided for each of these sub-themes, as well as supporting quotes from the interviewees. Recommendations are given in an attempt to brainstorm how to decrease the risks of being sexually assaulted, particularly for women who are beginning their college careers.

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Introduction: First-Semester Transition to College

As many are aware, the transition from high school to college can be a challenging time for all of those involved. Aside from moving out of the house in which many students lived for most of their lives, students must often deal with new challenges without their parents. Such challenges might include moving to a new town and adjusting to a new living setting, sometimes with total strangers. First-year students also need to quickly adapt to a new schedule, usually with a trying academic workload. Learning how to cope with the stress that comes along with such aspects of college is key to a successful transition.

Various studies have shown that the stress levels of college students are not only significant, but are also continuing to grow. With a growing high school graduation to college matriculation rate, freshman year stressors are affecting thousands of students each year (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). While students experience a variety of stressors, one of the greatest areas of stress for college students is financial stress. As many as one out of every three college students considers financial pressure to be a source of daily stress, showing a 6% increase (from 27% to 33%) from the previous year. Seven percent of students experienced difficulty in getting loans from their banks while 17% went as far as seriously considering dropping out of college, with the majority of these students citing financial pressures as their main reasons (Edison Research Economy 2009).

The stress of an indeterminate job future can also contribute to pressure on college students. The average worker holds almost eleven jobs between the ages of 18 and 42 years old (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). Statistics such as this one can cause

students to feel pressured that they need to choose the correct field so they do not switch jobs so often throughout their lifetimes. Further, 57% of college students worry that they will not find a job after graduation, including 63% of seniors (Edison Research Economy 2009).

Possibly even more serious than financial and job pressures are the mental and emotional stresses college students experience while entering and being a student in college. An extensive study conducted by Altschuler in 2009 surveyed 40 random four-year schools, including 2,240 undergraduate students. The majority (85%) of these students said that they experienced daily stress. This was a 5% increase from 2008. The same study showed an increase in utilization of mental health and counseling services. One school even reported a 29% increase in counseling and psychological services in the past four years. Another school declared that 40% of its freshmen visit the counseling center (Altschuler 2000). Such centers can play a crucial role in helping students adjust to the new pressures of fitting in, balancing social and academic lives, and helping them to realize when outside help is necessary.

Aside from centers for counseling, students often turn to peers for advice and/or comfort. Forming friendships and socializing among groups of people can help students feel a sense of belonging. During times of multiple stressors, particularly the fast-paced transition to college, such socializing frequently serves the purpose of decreasing students' stress levels (Indiana University Health Center 2004). Making new friends and relationships can also affect many other decisions that students make throughout their time in college, including decisions about drinking alcohol. Drinking patterns that are established early in the college experience lead to many consequences,

including sexual assault.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore first-semester women's formation of their social networks at The Pennsylvania State University and how their networks influenced their drinking patterns and risk of being sexually assaulted. The overarching research question that was explored was:

What is the socialization experience for first-semester Penn State women?

In order to investigate this question, a qualitative study was designed in which first-semester Penn State women were interviewed. The literature review upon which this study was based is presented in Chapter Two. The methods for this study are described in Chapter Three and the results can be found in Chapter Four. The thesis concludes with a Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations in Chapter Five.

Limitations of the Study

There are multiple limitations to this study. One limitation is that the announcements asking for participants for the study were conducted in classes that have mainly biobehavioral health students. These students were offered extra credit for the study, so this may have skewed the diversity of students from an academic standpoint. Similarly, the fact that participating in this survey was completely voluntary may have attracted people who felt particularly strongly about the subject matter. Another source

of possible error is that the interview setting varied for the participants. While three students were interviewed together, the other two students were each interviewed individually. This was done to accommodate the interviews to the students' schedules. Being interviewed with other people in the room might have made the students feel more at ease or less willing to discuss the topics. Finally, probably the largest source of error for this study is the small sample size of women interviewed. As previously mentioned, the focus groups were held on an entirely voluntary basis so only women who volunteered could be interviewed. However, because this study focused qualitatively on research, the quality of data from the participants is more important than the number of participants interviewed.

Review of the Literature

This first year transition to college has been described as “emerging adulthood” (Homish, et al. 2008). One of the most obvious activities during this time is socializing: making new friends and forming social networks. Making new friends can also be one of the most difficult challenges that college freshmen face. Most students do not make just one or two friends, but form an entire social network of friends. Forming such connections and relationships with others in a social network takes time, as the members must form a sense of trust to be comfortable with one another.

The range of members within a social network can vary from friends of friends, to acquaintances, to extremely close friends. According to House et al. (2008), there are two aspects of social networks: structural characteristics and functional characteristics. Structural characteristics include the *physicality* of who is within the network, including: the number of friends within the network, as well as the stability and density of the network. Functional characteristics, on the other hand, describe the *roles* that members of the group play.

Members of social networks provide both tangible and intangible resources for each other (Berkman & Glass, 2000). For example, a college student might turn to one friend for intangible resources, such as emotional support or advice with a problem. That same student might turn to another friend for tangible resources, such as notes from class, borrowing money, and alcohol for the weekends (House et al., 2008). It has also been shown, by Schulenberg et al. (1996) that the “emerging adulthood” time is a developmental period in which students often experience or experiment with drug and alcohol use, as well as risky sexual behaviors. One possible explanation for this is that

students meet many new friends and form social networks with people who have various interests. Forming new friendships and social networks is a behavior in which almost all humans participate, especially college students who have just entered an entirely new environment. Making friends not only gives students a sense of belonging, but socializing outside of purely academic settings (such as classrooms) allows students to decrease their stress levels. A report by the Health Center at Indiana University (2004) suggests that maintaining healthy relationships and communications with friends decreases students' stress levels. With a healthy life balance including socialization, students are able to handle the aforementioned stresses of college much more smoothly.

Although socializing with networks of friends can positively help students decrease their stress levels, such interactions can also cause negative consequences. One recent study noted that social network members can influence the behaviors of other members within the group -- particularly health behaviors, in a negative way through encouraging smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol (Wenzel et al., 2010). For example, a larger social network with heavy drinkers has been linked to an increase in the frequency of individual heavy episodic drinking (Homish, 2008).

College Drinking

Drinking alcohol is often discussed as a problem on college campuses. For example, Dawson, et al. (2004) showed that many college students believe campus attitudes are more permissive towards drinking than they actually are. It was also shown that students believe other students drink more than they actually do (Dawson et al. 2004). This is an example of the phenomenon of perceived social norms: a belief that

“everyone” is drinking, so it’s acceptable. This is strongly correlated with drinking among young adults (Jackson, et al. 2005).

Because of this widely held belief that peer pressure is an influential force in the decision of students to drink, multiple studies have investigated the links between drinking and social networks. A study by Johnson, et al. (2001) showed that 80-85% of college women drink while Wechsler, et al (2000) showed that 39% of college women engage in “heavy episodic drinking” which is defined as drinking four or more alcohol beverages in one sitting. Statistics such as these indicate that the binge drinking of college women has more than tripled in less than 20 years (Harvard Alcohol Study 1995).

Binge drinking, synonymous to “heavy episodic drinking,” is defined as a woman consuming four or more drinks in one occasion (Wechsler et al. 2000). “Because men have not shown such a dramatic increase in their drinking habits, these research studies also suggest that the gender gap of drinking has narrowed in the past 30 years (Keyes et al., 2008).

Although it has been shown that the average number of heavy episodic drinking occasions in women is greatest in those who are unemployed, come from family incomes of less than \$25,000/year, and have no college education, the previous statistics indicate that binge drinking is also a large problem among college women (Wenzel et al., 2009).

Further, a study by Timerlake, et al. (2007) showed that although current college students are less likely to have been drinkers before college, they are more likely than their non-college peers to be binge drinkers once they have entered college (Dawson, et al., 2004). Dangerous drinking also affects all races. While the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking is the greatest in non-Hispanic white women, non-White and Hispanic

women have a higher average number of heavy episodic drinking episodes per month than non-Hispanic white women (Corbin et al. 2001).

Further studies have linked dangerous college drinking to previous drinking experience. A survey of 870 incoming freshmen women at the University of Buffalo showed that while 27% of these students abstained from drinking the year before they entered college, only 12% continued to resist during their first year of college (Parks et al., 2008). The same study also showed that 14.8% of the surveyed students were new drinkers while over half of the students who were already drinkers increased their drinking from the previous year before entering college. Additionally, the students who were already used to consuming alcohol scored higher than the new drinkers on multiple measures of alcohol consumption, including heavy episodic drinking (Weschler et al. 2000). From 1998-2005, Hingson, et al. (2009) showed a 7% proportional increase in heavy episodic drinking of college students, aged 18-24. Students who increased their drinking over the transition period of their first year of college also scored higher for alcohol-related problems such as disciplinary and academic disruptions (Wechsler et al., 2000).

Another study by Hingson, et al. (2002) stated that of the 8 million US college students, over 2 million drove a vehicle while under the influence and over 3 million rode along with a drunk driver in the previous year. These statistics emphasize the fact that half a million full-time four-year students were unintentionally injured while under the influence of alcohol (Hingson, et al., 2002). From 1998 to 2001, the number of alcohol-related unintentional injury deaths (per 100,000 students) increased by 6% (Hingson, et al., 2005). Aside from unintentional accidents, alcohol can also trigger violent behavior.

Grossman and Markowitz's *Alcohol Regulation and Violence on College Campuses*

(1999) lists four behaviors that can frequently result from heavy drinking:

1. Trouble with the police or college authorities,
2. Causing damage to property,
3. Fighting or arguing with others,
4. Taking advantage of someone else or being taken advantage of sexually.

Students who exhibit heavy episodic drinking behavior experience the immediate risks of alcohol poisoning and running into trouble with the law, whether it be under-age drinking or driving under the influence. Such students are also more likely to engage in risky sexual practices, have more sexual partners, and experience a greater transmission rate of sexually transmitted infections (Raj et al., 2009).

Sexual Victimization in College

While some students loosen their sexual structure/expectations, some students fall victim to the other end of the spectrum – unwanted sexual experiences – sexual assault. The statistics of sexual assault are terrifying. While 25% of adult women reported some form of sexual victimization throughout their lifetime (Ullman & Brecklin, 2000), another study (Fisher et al., 2000) reported that 2.8% of college women had experienced an attempted or completed rape just within the previous academic year.

Many variables factor into one's risk of sexual assault (VanZile-Tamsen et al., 2005). However, a study by Parks, et al. (2008) showed that there are a few characteristics that can be used as predictors of one's risk of being sexual assaulted. Such characteristics

include the psychological symptoms of students during their first year in college, including a history or current problem with depression, anxiety, or personality disorders. Other important features include the students' numbers of consensual sex partners, and an increase in their drinking levels. In contrast, women who live with their parents have much lower rates of experiencing sexual aggression (Buddie & Testa, 2005).

All of these studies point to the concern of increased vulnerability to sexual assault during women's time in college. In fact, Humphrey and White (2000) reported that the time period of greatest risk for women to become sexually victimized is during their first year of college. The assessed risk declined each subsequent year of college, but not before over 20% of the women had been victimized at some point throughout their four years of college. A survey of almost 1000 freshmen college women in New York showed that 21.9% of them had experienced victimization. Of those women, 15.3% had experienced sexual aggression at least one time, while 2.2% had experienced physical or sexual victimization. Further, of the women who had been victimized, 12.6 % reported severe physical victimization, while about triple that - 38.4% - reported severe sexual victimization (Parks et al., 2002).

However, these statistics are even lower than those found by Dowdall et al. (1998), indicating that 25% of college women have experienced an "unwanted sexual advance" over a one year period. Of these women, 2% had been victims of sexual assault or date rape as a consequence of someone else's drinking. Such statistics show that college women must not only be aware of their own drinking levels, but also of the drinking patterns of those around them. This awareness factors into the dynamics of social networks, particularly with whom freshmen women form their social networks

during their first few months at college. For example, college women might decide to only associate with others who have similar drinking habits. On the other hand, if they socialize with others who drink much more than they do, they need to stay capable of determining their level of safety.

The routine activities hypothesis also stresses the importance of women forming safe, trustworthy social networks. The hypothesis suggests that the routine activities in which a woman takes part will influence her chances of witnessing or being victim to a crime (Lasley 1989). For instance, if a woman takes part in illegal activities such as drug dealing, she might be more at risk for being assaulted than she would be if she put herself into non-illegal settings.

As previously mentioned, drinking is one of the most prevalent activities of college students and can play a role in freshmen women forming their social networks. Combined with the statistics that show that the first year is the most risky time period for college women to be sexually assaulted (Humphrey and White 2000), many studies have further investigated the linkage between drinking and sexual assault.

Studies have shown that alcohol is a significantly consistent factor for women being vulnerable to sexual assault, particularly college women (Ullman et al. 1999). It has been shown that generally half of sexual assault incidences are alcohol-related (Abbey 2002). Even more dangerously, alcohol works on both parties. A survey by Harrington and Leitenberg (1994) indicated that the completion rate of sexual attacks is higher when the victim has been drinking. On the other side, an increase in alcohol consumption also increases the likelihood of males sexually aggressing towards women (Norris et al., 2002). This synergistic relationship helps explain the fact that in a study by

Columbia University in 1994, 90% of reported campus rapes were alcohol-related. A more detailed study, done by Parks, et al. (2008), showed the rates of victimization between drinkers and nondrinkers: less than 2% of non-drinkers were physically victimized and about 7% were sexually victimized. These numbers jumped drastically for drinkers. For students who regularly drank alcohol, 7% reported physical victimization while 19% experienced sexual victimization.

While alcohol plays a substantial role in the risks of sexual assault, studies have shown that there are also previous factors or predictors that increase the likelihood that a college woman will fall victim to an attack. As previously mentioned, the behavior of heavy drinking is one of the main triggers. Parks and Fals-Stewart showed that on days when women drink, the chances of experiencing both sexual and physical aggression greatly increase (2004). More specifically, both attempted and completed rapes were more prevalent with women who had patterns of greater weekly alcohol consumption and more positive expectations of alcohol, both generally and sexually (Gidycz et al., 1995). These sexual alcohol expectancies have also been linked to sexual coercion. Women who have positive views of sexual behavior while drinking have experienced more acts of attempted sexual aggression (Benson et al., 2007). In addition to increased heavy episodic drinking, an increase in the number of sex partners of a woman has also been linked to a greater vulnerability of that woman to experience sexual coercion (Buddie and Testa, 2005). Further, sexual assault victimization has been shown to happen more to women who are heavier drinkers during consensual sex. Drinking heavily during consensual sex is less common with non-victims (Corbin et al., 2001).

Supporting these statistics is a study by Rapoza and Drake (2009) that focused upon how different types of social networks correlate to drinking and sexual assault. The study identified a “high alcohol/low commitment” cluster of social networks. In this cluster, alcohol consumption was much more prevalent and consumed in greater quantities. These hazardous drinkers showed increased rates of males acting on sexual aggression, sexual coercion, and even threatened and forced sex. Within the same group, women had increased social and sexual expectancies of alcohol (Corbin et al. 2001).

All these studies highlight that college freshmen women’s activities during their transitions to college often affect their likelihood of drinking, which in turn can affect their risk of being sexually assaulted. While these studies provide a solid groundwork of linking the activities, hopefully future studies will provide even more details that will be useful in indicating how to reduce such risks.

Methods

To further examine the transition from high school to college, particularly at Penn State University, a research study was planned and conducted. The study was approved by The Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), thus meeting both Penn State and national criteria to be accepted as ethically appropriate research.

Sample

This study focused on the responses of first-semester females at The Pennsylvania State University during fall semester 2011. Five females were recruited into this study. Four of the females were in-state students from Pennsylvania and one female was out-of-state. Four were Caucasian and one was African American. All of the students were 18 years old and enrolled in DUS, Division of Undergraduate Studies, meaning they had not yet selected a specific major to pursue.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a myriad of ways. Announcements were made in multiple sections of the classes BBH 148S and PSU 014. These classes are the first-year seminar courses for Biobehavioral Health students at Penn State. The script of these announcements is located in Appendix A. Announcements were also made during THON club meetings and fliers were hung in Recreation Hall and the White Building, both gyms on campus. To publicize the focus groups more widely, fliers describing the study were placed in various downtown venues that freshmen frequently visit. Such businesses included McLanahan's store, Starbucks, The Family Clothesline, The Student

Bookstore, Panera, Happy Valley Freeze, and others. Almost all downtown businesses that are not bars (since the goal was to attract first-semester students) were covered. The flier is attached at the end of this paper, in Appendix B. Finally, students living in all of the freshmen dormitory buildings received fliers in their mailboxes and some students were verbally approached by the researcher and some assistants. These buildings included those in East Halls: Bigler, Brumbaugh, Curtin, Geary, Hastings, McKean, Packer, Pennypacker, Pinchot, Snyder, Sproul, Stone, Stuart, and Tener. When students were approached, they were told about the study and given a flier with more detailed information.

Screening

The criteria for participation in this study was that the participant had to be a first-semester undergraduate female student, age 18 years or older. Once a student volunteered to be part of the study, either in person or through e-mail, the researcher screened her by asking her how old she was and if she was a first-semester student. If she was eligible for the study, she was scheduled for an interview time and then given a consent form, attached in Appendix C.

Design/Procedure

The students were asked a series of open-ended questions in conversational style, semi-structured interviews. Depending on the students' schedules, three of them were interviewed in a one-on-one fashion. The researcher used a script of core questions to guide the interviews. This script is located in Appendix D. The questions began by

asking about transitioning to college, making friends and going out. They then transitioned to topics such as experiences with parties, positive and negative experiences with drinking and socializing, before moving on to asking about hooking up sexually and unwanted sexual experiences.). “Hooking up” is defined as an act “when two people agree to engage in sexual behavior for which there is no future commitment” (Lambert, et al. 2003). Throughout the interview, changes within the students’ social networks were explored. All questions were asked to analyze this phenomenon qualitatively.

To protect the students’ identities and put them at ease for answering the questions, the females were only asked to fill out a basic demographic sheet before the interview. This information included age, gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin, major, and contact information (name, email and dorm address). During the interviews, the students were given blank nametags and asked to come up with fake names. These false identities were the ones listed in the transcription pages. Refreshments of pizza and soda were available for the participants during the interviews. Additionally, the students were offered extra credit, if they were recruited through a class, or a chance to win a \$10 gift card as an incentive to participate in the study. Each session lasted approximately an hour and was recorded with a small voice recorder. The students were aware of the recording and agreed to it before the interview began. The recordings were then transcribed word-for-word and analyzed qualitatively.

Qualitative Analysis: Use of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was used to analyze the data collected from the interviews. This analysis has four main stages. First, creating codes allows for the identification of

main anchoring ideas, which then form the basis to gather key data points. Secondly, collecting these codes of similar content allows the data to be grouped into bigger themes, called concepts. Next, similar concepts are gathered to generate a theory. This final theory gives the overarching explanation of the research topic (Martin et al. 1986).

Grounded Theory was used for this study because it allowed for a thorough analysis of the interview responses. Once the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, the response scripts were read with an open mind and no previous bias, because no data measurements had been previously planned. Instead, codes and concepts were formed after thoroughly studying all of the results. Collecting and organizing them allowed for a more comprehensive examination of such underlying themes.

In order to analyze the themes, the transcripts were read and reread. While thoroughly dissecting the transcripts, distinct themes appeared clearly. First the axial codes were identified. These codes represent the main domains of thoughts collected during the focus groups. In this study, the axial codes are: fitting in, everyone drinks, hooking up is quick and easy, unwanted sexual experiences happen, and safer drinking strategies used for protection. These served as the anchors to gather the dialogue into an organized manner. Using the process of open coding, the rest of the information was congregated into open codes. Each open code supports an axial code and represents a subtheme from that axial code. All of the open codes are listed below. Some include making friends, pressure from friends to drink, and staying with someone you know while drinking. Once the axial and open codes were organized, a concept map was sketched. After sketching and studying the map, the core theme was evident: the fast-

paced transition of first-semester women to college. The concept map is displayed later, in the Results chapter.

Results

The primary focus of this study was to investigate how first-semester women at Penn State make the fast-paced transition to college life. This transition time incorporates many changes in behavior, including forming an entirely new social network. Making new friendships in a college setting often includes drinking alcohol. Other students experience the world of hooking up in college, which is usually much different from that in high school. This study and the interviews concentrated on discovering the links between these issues and how they can lead to sexual assault.

When analyzing the data collected from the interviews, the transcripts were evaluated qualitatively, using grounded theory. Certain repeating themes were evident when reading through the records. The core theme emerged as the “Fast-Paced Transition” that college first-semester women experience when moving into and adapting to college. Further analysis dissected this core theme into five main axial codes. These axial codes were composed of other open codes as follows:

1. Fitting In
 - a. Making Friends
 - b. Going Out
2. Everyone Drinks
 - a. Making Friends Through Drinking
 - b. Pressure from Friends to Drink
 - c. Drinking is Inevitable
 - d. Not Drinking is Weird

3. Hooking Up is Quick and Easy
 - a. Hooking Up is Common/Acceptable
 - b. Drinking Facilitates Hooking Up
4. Unwanted Sexual Experiences Happen
 - a. Drinking Leads to Bad Judgment
 - b. Alcohol Increases Male Aggression/Female Vulnerability
5. Safer Drinking Strategies Used for Protection
 - a. Sticking with Friends
 - b. Being with Someone You Trust
 - c. Knowing Your Limit
 - d. Drinking Water and Eating
 - e. Leaving an Uncomfortable Situation

These subthemes, along with dialogue evidence from the transcript, are discussed below. The following figure illustrates how the themes fit together.

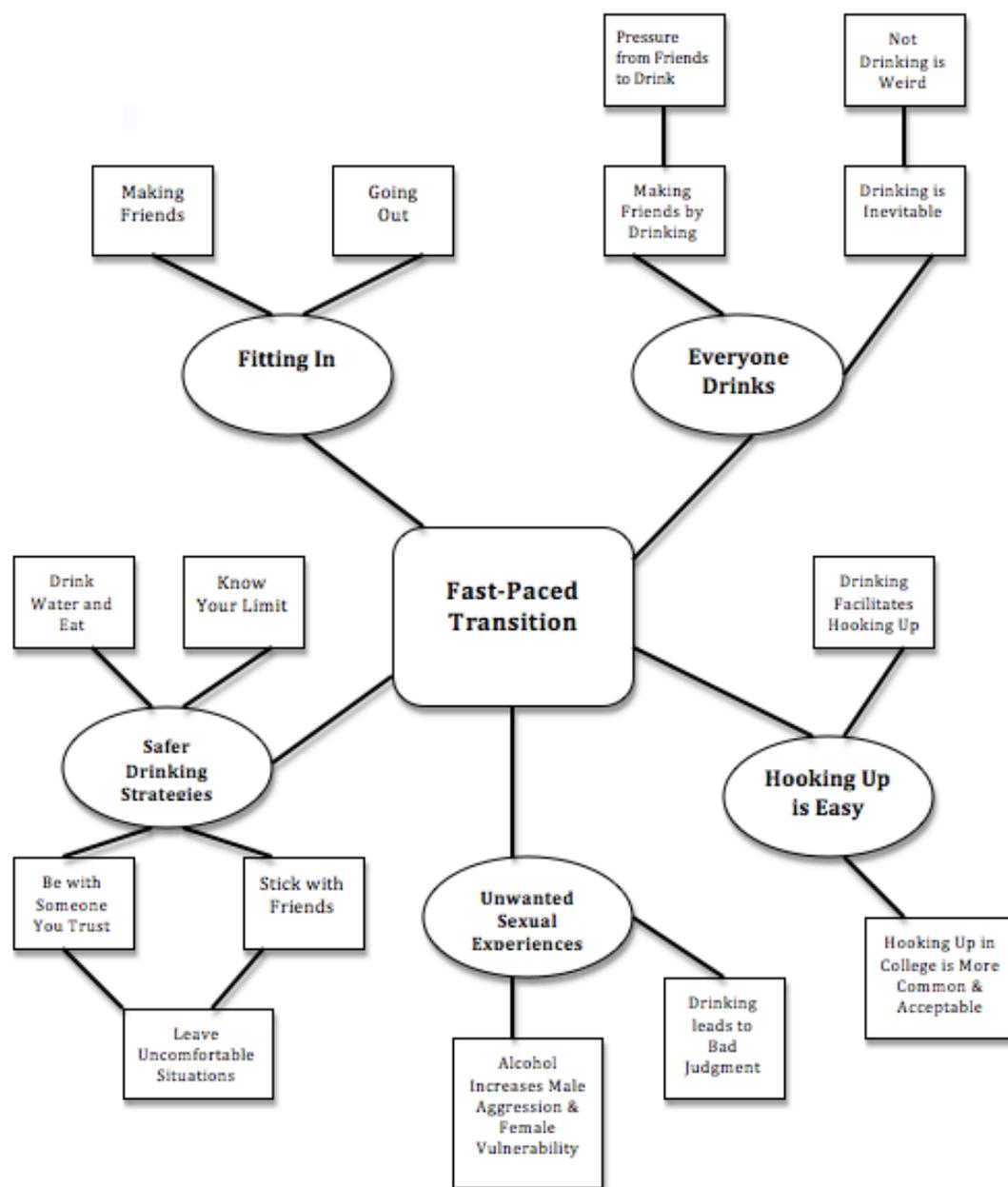


Figure 1: A concept map that explains the connections between the various concepts and themes of this study's research.

Fitting In

From a young age, peer relations and fitting in with friends starts to be a trend that lasts for years (Lashbrook 2000). This study showed that this is an issue even when people arrive at college. Feeling cohesive with a group of friends can greatly help one's emotional psyche, particularly in such a time as transitioning to college, which can be overwhelming for students (Indiana University Health Center 2004). Such a sense of belonging can often help reduce students' stress and ease the transition. The examples of dialogue below show first-semester Penn State students' thoughts on fitting in:

Making Friends

Patti: I would say I have my group of friends and then there's you know, like you said, friends of friends. There's a lot I know like oh, she's friends with a friend on my floor. It's like that we know each other but we really wouldn't hang out. And then there are girls who I wouldn't even call my friends but I know that we would say hello and that's like pretty much it.

Kristen: If I feel like I'm not liking the people I'm around then there's so many other people that I can hang out with. It's like so big I didn't think I would like how big it was at first. Like my first week I was like, this isn't right for me, but I've so quickly adjusted I met like a lot of nice people so... I like it.

Patti: We have movie nights and stuff. We pretty much always go in one person's room and everyone just sits around we're always in each other's rooms talking, like I said watching movies, watching tv shows, like certain

people have certain shows in common. And on the weekends we go out but we haven't really found much to do, really, but we try to go to like apartment parties.

Going Out

Kristen: A lot of people go out

Katie, Kristen: uh huh

Kristen: very frequently

Sara: Everyone is very friendly; I haven't met any snobby people.

Everyone is really outgoing, and definitely shares a common interest in going out and drinking.

Everyone Drinks

Whether it's from watching college-themed movies, or walking around downtown State College on a Saturday night, it is evident that partying is prevalent throughout the majority of college settings. Alcohol is often a central key to the world of partying and socializing. It brings a myriad of diverse people together through relaxed settings that often include drinking games.

Making Friends Through Drinking

Patti: ... And also, this probably sounds bad but it does kinda make things more fun like everyone knows... if people are going to be drinking then like, maybe the night's not going to be that bad.

Jess: I feel like for some people it makes it easier for people - like my boyfriend's roommate - I know he drinks and he gets to be a lot more open after he's had a couple drinks and he makes friends.

Sara: To loosen up...it's messed up but people can be awkward if they're not drunk because they're so used to being in another mindset when they're out.

Katie: I guess like it shows if you go out with a friend and if you end up getting too drunk, if they watch over you and make sure you get home safely then that could make the friendship even better because then you're like, "Oh they care about me."

Sara: I think they're definitely related. I know I've had experiences where there have been times where new friends and I went out and got drunk together for the first time and it's just something to bond about the next day... like, "Oh my god we were so drunk last night... remember what happened?" It definitely can connect people.

Pressure From Friends To Drink

Kristen: I think it depends on your friends.

Sara: If all my friends are going or if I know it's a place that has really fun parties it makes it worth going.

Patti: Umm yea. Because if you don't, I mean, its not that I met people that are gonna be mean but they'll pretend nag you kinda like, "Ohhh, come on! Like you're really not going to come out tonight?" I've got that a lot

on Thursdays but my hardest class I have Friday morning an 9 am. I mean, everyone understands but I still get nagged like, “Ohh you can come back early come on come on come on.” So it’s like you know, there’s definitely pressure.

Patti: Umm, it’s just like the people you hang out with. It’s like if you’re not, first of all everyone wants you to. Like if they’re your friends they want you to come out and you not staying in or not doing what they’re doing, like everyone wants you to join in like they want you to come out with them.

Patti: And it’s like I feel like partly if you’re not drinking, everyone has that slight guilt like, “Ohh they’re making a good decision and now we all feel bad.” So they’re kind of like pushing that person like, “Just do what were doing.” You know what I mean? Like “Don’t make this so complicated.” So yeah, but like definitely just from the friends you hang out with is who you get the most pressure from to do that.

Drinking is Inevitable

Jess: I think because of PSU’s reputation as a party school I think that has a lot to do with it... people think, “Oh I go to a party school I’m going to end up drinking eventually.” So people think, Oh ok.”

Kristen: Yeah I think being put in a house with upperclassmen, if you put yourself in a situation like a frat or anything like that I think most people just think it’s inevitable that you’re going to drink.

Not Drinking is Weird

Sara: I think a lot of people do drink, I've only met a few who don't drink at all in my classes and other people find it strange.

Sara: Yeah, pretty much people wouldn't be mean about it but they scratch their heads and are confused.

Sara: ...Like a boy will always try to make you drink or say take a shot with me and if you're like, "No," or if you say, "I don't drink," they'd be so confused. They'd think you were talking another language but I think boys are like that at all colleges.

Hooking Up is Easy

Although many students hook up in high school, this increases for most students when they reach college (Grello, et al. 2006). Students no longer live under the same roof as their parents and no longer need to keep their parents informed on their every move. Socializing, particularly partying, is more common and less confined in college. Further, the increased availability of alcohol can decrease students' inhibitions. The transition to college often represents the time period in young adults' lives in which they explore their newly discovered independence, including sexual experimentation (Grello, et al. 2006). "Hooking up" is defined as an act "when two people agree to engage in sexual behavior for which there is no future commitment" (Lambert, et al. 2003). The definition of "hooking up" broadly encompasses all sexual behaviors from kissing to

having sexual intercourse. This study's interviewees explained how the definition of "hooking up" usually depends on the individual.

Alcohol Facilitates Hooking Up

Sara: Definitely.

Sara: Alcohol just loosens you up, and say someone's not that cute, that you wouldn't normally hook up with, maybe you convince yourself he's cute or he's nice because you're intoxicated... it could be anyone.

Patti: Yeah, at least for me because I came from a small high school, like a graduating class of maybe like 120 people or something so it was decently small. Like if at my high school if you just wanted to hook up, I don't even know where the opportunity would come about... like there really were never that many parties and most of the guys were your friends, and there's the select guys that it could be something more and it would come about, I guess. But up here I could go out and hook up if I wanted to. It's not hard, like especially with the frat guys and if everyone's drinking it is easy to happen.

Patti: Yeah, like I said in apartment parties, where it's kind of more socializing drinking games, maybe some music, but like its people hanging out. In frats you can do like whatever you want. So that's like where hooking up happens... that's where I would say, at least.

Hooking Up in College is Common/Acceptable

Kristen: I think people take it so lightly like when you're in college... it's just there are so many people, the chances of seeing them again - it's not a big deal. People don't realize how diseases spread so easily especially when they're under the influence of anything.

Jess: It's so much more dangerous but people think it's less of a big deal.

Jess: I've seen lots of walk of shamers on campus, up early going to practice. There are a lot of them.

Jess: And the environment almost makes it more acceptable, like depending on where you are.

Kristen: Like if you're in an environment with 75 other people and it's only 2 of you going into like a room upstairs where no one else is, no one's going to stop you or anything like that. Or if you're in a small group of people or if you're just in your dorm with your roommate there are obviously things that are going to stop you.

Sara: ... Like no one really judges you, which is cool.

Sara: It definitely goes a lot faster. You go out a lot more so you have more nights to hang out with that person but at the same time it's college so no one really judges you... like everyone says this is the time to do whatever you want. Like in high school if you had sex with someone within the first two or three weeks of starting to hook up then you'd definitely get judged but here it's the norm like if you made out with

someone it's like, "Oh did you have sex with that person? Okay cool."

Like no one really judges you, which is cool.

Sara: There's alcohol, frat houses, no parents, people just bring people home - no one cares.

Unwanted Sexual Experiences Happen

Although no one wants to think sexual assault could happen to him or her, it is much more prevalent than people believe – across all college campuses (Rape Crisis 2012). The spectrum of unwanted sexual experiences is broad; it includes unwanted sexual advances as well as completed rape, and everything in the huge area in between (Womenshealth.gov 2005). Sexual aggression is more likely to occur in settings of partying and alcohol, where both males and females exhibit lowered inhibitions (Rapoza, et al. 2009).

Drinking Leads to Bad Judgment

Kristen: ... Like people lose their values in a way because they're not necessarily thinking of the consequences of what they're doing. It's just like they're here for the moment.

Sara: Doing something you don't want to do at that time.

Sara: Like say having sex when you only meant to make out with a guy... poor judgment kind of.

Sara: Um just like impaired judgment and you take risks you wouldn't ordinarily take, which could be good or bad... like going into someone's

room or approaching the person when you normally wouldn't, or flirting too much.

Sara: ... I definitely I have some friends who drink too much and might not make the best decisions because they are drinking.

Alcohol Increases Male Aggression/Female Vulnerability

Patti: ... I would think that if it's that same person sober, like if you get the least bit rejected, any normal person is going to feel uncomfortable and back off. But it's like so different when they're drunk.

Patti: Ummm pretty much... just like the guy can say anything. The guy's pressure mixed in with you being so drunk is just like a given that you cannot say, "No." I honestly just think I've never been in that position, at least not yet and I hope not to be. But you see how like I've just seen girls that are so gone and I can see how it just happens - like the guy can so easily take advantage of someone who has no idea what's going on in their mind.

Patti: It's just like no awkwardness there. I guess it's like, if both people are sober then it has potential to be like really uncomfortable if you don't really know them. With drinking its like anything that happens, anything weird, awkward, uncomfortable, like instead of feeling all like, "What should I say now?" it's like you're both drunk so it doesn't matter. It's like oh you know, "Maybe this person isn't going to remember this." You

know what I mean? So it's like so much more comfortable I guess, so it doesn't even matter.

Safer Drinking Strategies Used for Protection

While avoiding alcohol completely may seem like the safest, most foolproof strategy to avoid any uncomfortable situations or unwanted sexual experiences, this is not a very practical plan for most college students. Socializing at the majority of college campuses across the United States often involves alcohol (Arnett 2000). Rather than encouraging students to completely disassociate from alcohol, developing safe drinking strategies might prove more effective. During their interviews, the Penn State first-semester students shared some drinking strategies that they had already started using.

Sticking With Friends

Katie: Buddy system.

Kristen, Jess: Yeah.

Jess: Make sure to stay with your friends.

Patti: ...But keeping safe while drinking - a lot of people don't even think about keeping safe while drinking, but definitely sticking with a group of people.

Patti: I mean I don't know if anyone else has certain strategies to what they use for being more safe but the one thing is definitely staying with friends because I feel like when you have a girlfriend or two girlfriends

around, like you're so much at less risk. And also drinking less and if you are drinking too much you need a friend to be around.

Being with Someone You Trust

Kristen: I think it's important to be with at least one person. But if you can have a guy with your group as well, that's good reassurance if you trust the guy.

Jess: As long as you trust him and you know that they wouldn't take advantage of you, if you got to the point that you completely didn't know what you were doing.

Katie: Going with someone you trust.

Katie: Not somebody who will pressure you to drink or would get drunk with you or encourage hooking up or something with somebody you don't know - like a true person you trust.

Kristen: Yeah, not going with people who would pressure you to do things.

Knowing Your Limit

Kristen: I think that's another thing - to know your limit, like don't go to a party and drink more than you should.

Katie: Yeah I think it's like a level like I know what I want to do and what I don't want to do because I'm not going to do something I don't want to do...

Drinking Water and Eating

Sara: Eat before, definitely. Like I knew I was gonna be drinking one night last week and I literally had two dinners and I should have thrown up from the amount I was drinking but I didn't because I ate so much before. So you can eat dinner, stay hydrated. Obviously they say drink only one drink per hour but it doesn't usually work that way; it's usually pounding shots in 15 minutes.

Patti: I know for myself I try to drink water in between drinks because I don't want to get sick. And I don't know if that's true but my sister told me that it prevents you from getting sick. And I know it also doesn't get you drunk that fast.

Leaving an Uncomfortable Situation

Sara: ... If it's a boy who is really creepy, just get away from them or just say, like I said, "I have to find my friends," or something.

Patti: There have been times where like if I wanted to leave, I leave but it's not even like alcohol effects that decision; it's just I want to leave and I can get to a bus stop so I do...

Patti: ... If you don't wanna be there in my opinion just leave, you know. I don't see why you would stick around if the guys are weird.

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Using Grounded Theory allowed for a thorough analysis of the transcripts of the interviews that were held. As the previous dialogue illustrates, certain themes emerged regarding the socialization experience of first-semester women. The five themes including fitting in, everyone drinking, hooking up being easy, unwanted sexual experiences happening, and safer drinking strategies were evident in the first-semester interviewed women at Penn State.

Everyone Drinks

Many of the students' responses support research previously highlighted in the literature review. As mentioned, drinking is greatly connected with the socialization aspect college life. Johnston, et al. reported that 80-85% of college women drink in 2001. Wechsler, et al. (2000) actually found that 39% of college women engage in heavy episodic drinking, defined as consuming more than four beverages in one sitting. Additionally, Knight, et al. (2002) showed that almost 38% of 4-year college students exhibit symptoms of alcohol abuse or alcohol dependency. Binge drinking is considered to be a symptom (Wechsler, et al. 2000).

More specific to first-year college students, when drinking begins or expands it includes the availability of alcohol. The volunteers in this study's focus groups support the research in 2001 that showed that half of college students who are under 21 years old find it easy to obtain alcohol (Wechsler et al.). The women's replies in this study state that they can simply walk to downtown State College to go to apartment or fraternity

parties to drink if they don't have specific connections with older students to buy them alcohol.

The interviewees' input supported that drinking is prevalent in socialization at Penn State. Parks, et al. (2008) found that of those first-year college students who drank before college, over half of them increased in their drinking habits from the previous year. Penn State is a large university and has a diverse student population. Within the thousands of students attending there is a varied and diverse history of drinking alcohol. Therefore the students who come to Penn State have experiences ranging from no or little alcohol to having gotten drunk while still in high school. Parks, et. al (2008) showed that while 27% of college students abstained from drinking the year before college, only 12% of the students continued to turn down alcohol during their first year in college. Sara and Patti during focus group discussion suggested this is due in part to peer pressure. The findings by Homish and Leonard in 2008 state that a social network with many drinkers increases the likelihood of an individual within that group to drink. When interviewed, Kristen explained that some students are able to decide if and when they want to drink, often with the help of their close friends. The women also described how drinking patterns could depend on pressure from friends, yet again working its way into the socialization of college students in their social networks. Unfortunately, one interviewee described how some Penn State students view drinking as "inevitable" and that those students who try to fight the drinking bandwagon are sometimes viewed as "weird", a further indication that peer pressure and social perceptions of one are important to students' initial socialization in college and that perception is that everyone drinks.

Hooking Up is Quick and Easy

When it comes to hooking up, the women discussed the ambiguity of the term and how they discuss it with their friends. This supports Wolfe, who explained that college students use the norms of their peer groups to help them navigate their own sexual lives (2000). In her book, Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus, Kathleen Bogle explains how students use their classmates' behavior to help define their own sexual experiences. She also studied how college men agree with the stereotype that most college men are driven by sex, while many college women agree with the stereotype that college women are looking for relationships. This gap in stereotypes might contribute to the roller coaster the hooking up world can become. As Kristen pointed out, many people take hooking up in college lightly and simply view it as another regular facet of college socialization. However, as she pointed out, this can sometimes lead to awkwardness later, if the hook up was between two people in the same social network.

The women also unanimously agreed that sexual encounters are much more likely to happen in college. This supports the research done by Miller and Gordon (1986), which showed that many college students view college as their time to "party" or "let loose." Such an outlook on a limited time in an unsupervised setting might contribute to the increase in sexual promiscuity. As Jess described, "The environment almost makes it more acceptable." This can play a huge role in first-semester students' socialization experiences, as this is usually different from a supervised high school environment. Even if certain individuals do not view college in such a partying way, those individuals are still affected by the number of students surrounding them who have that sentiment (Bianchi, et al. 2000). Walking around downtown State College on almost any night of

the week guarantees finding someone who is already drunk or willing to drink. This big party atmosphere and reputation of Penn State likely contribute to such sentiments of students.

Questionable decision-making might also be partially attributed to lowered inhibitions caused by drinking alcohol. In the interviews Sara specified how friends in college do not judge others for hooking up often, even with strangers. Such observations support those done by Schulenberg, et al. in 1996. That study reported that the time in which young adults move to college often includes increases in drug and alcohol use, as well as risky sexual behavior.

Unwanted Sexual Experiences Happen

The interviewees also discussed sexual assault. A few described situations in which they had felt uncomfortable or had seen someone else being vulnerable. Most of these situations took place in socializing party settings with alcohol, supporting Harrington's research. His study, in 1994, showed that the completion rate of sexual assault was higher when alcohol was involved. He also showed that alcohol limits a woman's ability to recognize dangerous situations and decreases both her perception of and response to the threat. Buddie et al. (2005) showed that binge drinking is correlated to severe sexual aggression (2005). The interviewees' reports concur with the aforementioned author when they stated they often felt or had seen others as vulnerable in larger drinking parties, with fraternity parties being specified. Being aware of such situations is crucial for one's safety, as 25% of adult women reported that they have experienced some form of sexual victimization (Ullman, et al. 2000). Such awareness is

especially key for first-semester women, as the women interviewed explained that many of them explore parties downtown, where most of the drinking occurs. Humphrey et al. (2000) published that the greatest risk for women to be victims of sexual assault is in their first year of college. This could be for multiple reasons. One might be that women are much more familiar after their first year of college. Another could be that after one full year women are able to gather a solid, trustworthy social network. House, et al. described how social networks develop so that different members have different roles (2008).

Discussions by the interviewees of unwanted sexual experiences led to talking about drinking strategies that allowed students to be safe. The students agreed that sticking with friends who are trustworthy is the most important strategy. However determining who is “trustworthy” when people are drinking is a difficult task that takes time to get to know the person.

Because the literature repeatedly shows a correlation between heavy episodic drinking and sexual assault, one safety suggestion could be that women stay away from socializing with men that often drink heavily (Buddie, et al. 2005). Another recommendation is that women control their own drinking levels. Abbey, et al. (19996) showed that in general, alcohol is a consistent factor to increase the risk of sexual assault. As Sara and Patti explained, they perceive eating and drinking water can often help control the effects of drinking alcohol. This can greatly increase one’s safety, as alcohol limits a woman’s ability to recognize dangerous situations (Harrington, et al. 1994). Also, Parks, et al. (2004) showed that on days women drink, their odds of experiencing both physical and sexual aggression greatly increase. By decreasing one’s intake of

alcohol, or at least practicing safer drinking strategies, as many of the women described, it is possible to reduce one's risk of being sexually assaulted. Other safety drinking strategies are also easy to practice in a socializing environment. Such strategies include drinking non-alcoholic beverages in between alcoholic beverages, keeping track of the number of drinks consumed, and not accepting drinks from any strangers. One should also always have a back-up plan to get home as well as let someone sober know where the party will be and an expected time of arriving home (Canadian Public Health Association 2006).

Contributions

This study contributes to a better understanding of the proposed research question by showing, in detail, the different facets that contribute to the socialization experience that first-semester women experience when coming to Penn State. The women's discussions indicate that the trends shown in the literature review, including increases in drinking alcohol and sexual experimentation, are still key players into today's college world. Although this study's sample size was small, the qualitative fashion of collecting of data allowed the women to give multiple specific examples of drinking and sexual behaviors. Quite possibly the most important contribution of this study is the demonstration that women, when gathered in comfortable settings with an age and gender-appropriate facilitator (in this case another young woman), will open up to talk about such sensitive subjects.

Recommendations

In a world where universities across this country are experiencing increases in students drinking and women are experiencing unwanted sexual experiences which can often be linked to drinking, it would behoove universities such as Penn State to expand this study to produce a much larger-scale study. Interviewing more women would allow for the gathering of even more specific examples and facets of freshmen stresses. To gather data that would quantify large numbers of students' responses would provide administrators with information that would allow them to generate information sessions to students, thus educating them to help prevent future destructive behaviors. To make interviewing a large sample size more plausible, Penn State might take the axial and open codes identified in this survey, and use them to create quantitative surveys based on a Likert scale. This could be distributed widely across the campus for incoming freshmen. To ensure responses, the surveys would be mandatory and completed at dormitory floor meetings held by Resident Assistants. Additionally, the same type of survey could be given to students at the end of their freshmen year for a comparison of how freshman behaviors change related to the specific items.

Based on the results and an analysis of a larger study, Penn State could develop a mandatory session for all first-semester women at Penn State. Just like all freshmen must currently attend a Race Relations session, this session could be held just once, for a couple of hours, in a group setting to open discussion. The facilitators of the groups could be older students, who could use the codes from this study to spark dialogue, as it is important that the women feel comfortable enough to speak and ask questions openly. At such meetings the facilitators could elaborate to the first-semester women tangible

resources in dealing with freshmen pressures. For example, one possibility would be to give the students a height/weight card chart, showing how many drinks a person of a certain BMI can have before exceeding the legal limit. While this would not be a concrete definition of “drunk” or “sober,” it might be able to provide students who have had no previous experiences with alcohol at least an idea of how to begin finding their safe limits.

Although all the recommendations thus far have been suggested for women, it is important that young men entering college are also knowledgeable about drinking alcohol and the possible consequences. Just as alcohol can increase women’s vulnerability, it can also increase male aggression (Parks, et al. 2004). Because alcohol acts on both sides of assault, both genders need to be made aware of its effects. The same resources, such as small group discussion and BMI/alcohol chart cards should be used for males. However, the small groups should be gender-divided in order to make sure all participants are as comfortable in the setting as possible.

In addition to warning students about the risks of alcohol abuse, educating them on the possible effects of unprotected sex might hinder both intoxicated sexual experiences and sexual assault. While several biobehavioral health classes teach the details of many sexually transmitted infections, it is usually only health field-related students who take such courses. However, implementing such a lesson (even if it be only one day) into general first-year seminar classes would greatly spread the knowledge across campus.

Finally, possibly the most important resource is to advertise the counseling center and services that the university provides. While some students only utilize such services

after a traumatic event has occurred, if students are encouraged to maintain their mental and physical health from the start, including their safety, such events might never occur.

Appendix A

Hello, my name is _____. I am working on a study that looks at the social transition into college and am looking for participants. This study is being done for research purposes specifically informing a graduate students' dissertation. The graduate student is in the Biobehavioral Health department at Penn State and she is interested in how freshman students transition into the college environment. You are being asked to participate in a short research study where you and 8-10 other freshman students in a group will talk about what it is like to be in college. Areas of questioning include meeting new friends in college and social life, including going out, parties, and dating. You must be at least 18 years or older to participate and be a freshman student. Refreshments are provided during the group and a drawing will be held to win a \$10 gift certificate to a restaurant downtown. If you are a freshman student and would like more information or are interested in participating please email Brea Burger, at BDB5168@psu.edu. I am going to pass a few flyers around please take one if you are interested. Does anyone have any questions?

Appendix C



The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Social Transition for U.S. and International Freshman Students in College

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GRP OFFICE USE ONLY
 DO NOT REMOVE OR MODIFY
 IRB # _____
 The Pennsylvania State University
 Institutional Review Board
 Office for Research Protections
 Approval Date: _____
 Expiration Date: _____

Dear Participant,

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Pennsylvania State University.

If you decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. A copy of this form will be given to you for you to keep.

- Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this focus group (where a group of people discuss a particular topic) is to explore the social transition into college from the perspective of a freshman college student. Various aspects of this social transition will be used to guide questions asked to you in the focus groups. These include making friends in college, alcohol use, and attitudes towards college dating/sexual behavior. An additional line of questioning will include how these three aspects of college life influence unwanted sexual experiences. This research will address important areas concerning the ways freshman students' socially transition into the college culture and environment.
- Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to participate in a focus group with 8-10 other freshman students of the same gender. The researcher will ask the group questions about the social transition in college. These questions will mainly focus on making friends, alcohol use, and dating/sexual behavior in the college environment. The focus groups will be audio taped for transcription purpose/data analysis and the tapes will then be destroyed. The only people who will have access to these tapes are Dr. Koch the Advisor, Brea Burger, the PI and Gilliam Love, the research assistant under the supervision Dr. Koch or Brea Burger. You will also be asked to complete a demographic form with some basic information about yourself. Your confidentiality will be maintained as described in section #6.
- Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. However some of the questions are about sensitive subjects and might cause some discomfort. You may contact the researcher about any concerns, or feelings that you have about the study. You may also contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 814-863-0395.
- Benefits:** The benefits to you include having the ability to discuss in a safe and confidential environment what the transition into college is like for a freshman student. As a participant, you will also help a doctoral student complete a research project that will inform a larger study.

The benefits to society include having a better understanding of what it is like for a freshman student during this transitional period. These focus groups will bring to light some of the connections between alcohol use, hooking up, and making friends in college and how these aspects contribute to unwanted sexual experiences for freshman college students. This can inform current interventions and resources available to Freshman Students at Penn State.

5. **Duration/Time:** The focus groups are anticipated to last approximately 1.5 hours. The completion of the focus group and survey is a single session and will take place in the late afternoon after the majority of classes on campus are finished.
6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential but not anonymous. However, no individually identifiable information will be released without your prior consent or unless required by law. To avoid any violations of privacy, specific precautions will be taken to guarantee the safety of records and data and to ensure your confidentiality. You will be randomly assigned a participant number for the demographic sheet and asked to create a "pseudo-name" for your participation during the focus group. Also, no individually identifying information will be contained on the demographic sheet. Identifying information will be known only to the researchers. The data will be stored and secured at the researcher's office in a locked filing cabinet and password protected file on the computer. The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Also, if you choose to speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individual participants said.
7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Dr. Patricia Koch at (814) 863-0190 with questions or concerns about this research. You can also call this number if you feel this study has negatively affected you. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant or would like to offer suggestions on this topic, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections (ORP) at (814) 865-1775. The ORP cannot answer questions about the specific research procedures of this study. Questions about research procedures can be answered by the research team.
8. **Payment for participation:** While you are not receiving monetary compensation for participating in the study you will be provided with food and drink (pizza and soda) during the focus groups. You will also have a chance to win a \$10.00 gift certificate for a restaurant in the downtown PSU area. A drawing will be held after all the focus groups are completed and you will be contacted via email if you have won the gift certificate. You will also receive 1% extra credit in your class for participating in the research study. There is an alternative assignment available if you would like to receive extra credit in class without participating in the research study. You will read a research article posted on your ANGEL website and email the PI a 1-page written response. The written response should be about college transition and how it relates to the article. The alternative assignment is expected to take 1-1.5 hours.
9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is totally voluntary. You can end your participation at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D

General Transition and making friends in college

What is your impression of college students at Penn State (like your classmates, roommates, other students in your dorm/living environment)?

How are these people similar/different to you?

What is the hardest part about being at Penn State?

What is the easiest part about being at Penn State?

How do people make friends when they first come to Penn State?

Who do people make friends with when they first come to Penn State?

How long do you think it takes for a student coming to Penn State to find a solid group of friends?

How do you know when you have found a solid group of friends?

What do people do for fun with their friends when they are at Penn State?

How do you learn about fun things at Penn state?

How do you decide what activities to participate in?

What motivates you to go to certain activities versus others?

Alcohol

What are the reasons that new students at Penn State drink?

Do a lot of people at Penn State drink or does it feel like a lot of people drink?

Is there pressure for students to drink?

What is that pressure like, where does it come from?

When is drinking fun versus not being fun?

What do these types of drinking look like (fun versus not fun)?

What is the role that drinking has on socializing and being a new student at Penn State?

How do you think drinking alcohol and making friends or socializing at Penn State are related?

How do you think friendship circles change when people drink, if at all?

Where do students under the age of 21 drink, how do you hear about these places?

Are many other freshman there or are the other people mostly older students?

What are some strategies students use to keep safe when they are drinking?

What are some things students do when they are drinking?

Hookup

What is hooking up?

How does hooking up in college compare to hooking up in high school?

Is it easier or more difficult to hookup at Penn State then when you were in high school?

Do a lot of people in college hookup or does it feel like a lot of people in college hookup?

Is there pressure for students to hookup? What is this pressure like?

How do students deal with these pressures?

Is it easier for a person to hookup when they are drinking?

What makes it easier?

Are college students hooking up with the friends, people that they know, and/or other people?

How do you think a friendship circle changes once someone has hooked-up with a friend?

Is hooking up positive, negative, or a neutral experience?

What are examples of each?

Does the ambiguity (definition) of hooking up serve a purpose?

What is the purpose of the ambiguous definition?

Unwanted sexual experiences

What do you think unwanted sexual experiences are?

Does hooking up lead to unwanted sexual experiences?

How does it lead or not lead to unwanted sexual experiences?

How do you think drinking leads to unwanted sexual experiences?

Do you think being a freshman you are at risk for these types of experiences?

Have you seen people in your network (friends or acquaintances) at risk for these experiences?

What have they done that puts them at risk?

What strategies have they used to avoid these experiences?

Do you think people that you know, like acquaintances or friends, are more likely to initiate unwanted sexual experiences with a friend or acquaintance rather than someone they don't know? Why (for what reasons)?

If someone in your social network (friend or acquaintance) initiated an unwanted sexual experience with a friend or acquaintance, how would your social network (social group) change?

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Related Experience

Mashavu Telemedicine Project

- January – June 2010
- Conducted interpersonal comfort research
- Held focus groups with Kenyan women to discuss health aspects
- Interviewed rural Kenyans about their access to healthcare

Weill Cornell Global Health Curriculum Intern

- June – August 2011
- Helped study and develop curriculum for global health medical school curriculum
- Interviewed students and physicians

Awards

Schreyer Honors College Scholar 2008 – present

Dean's List

Eberly School of Science Scholarship – Fall 2010

Schreyer Honors College Ambassador Travel Grant – 2009, 2010, 2011

Presentations/Activities

Clinton Global Initiative University Conference

- Miami, May 2010
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