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All we do is Drink: Impact of Alcohol Culture on First-Year Experiences at a Private University

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**Title**: Drink: Impact of Alcohol Culture on First-Year Experiences at a Private University

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**Abstract**

The alcohol culture at higher education institutions create and perpetuate unrealistic expectations regarding the collegiate experience for many incoming students. First-year students assimilate into college with various external factors impacting their decisions; among these is whether or not to participate in high-risk alcohol consumption. The research for this study focused on connections that students made between environment, peers, and personal development as it relates to alcohol use and abuse.

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**Introduction**

Factors impacting first-year alcohol consumption

- Students develop through four phases: 1) following external formulas, 2) crossroads, 3) becoming author of one’s own life, and 4) using internal formulas.
- Most students entering into their first-year of college are believed to be absolute knowers: experience impacted by external environment (Magolda, 2001).
- Shift of influence where the peers start to make the biggest impact on one’s alcohol consumption, rather than parents (Borsari & Carey, 2001).
- Peers can directly and indirectly influence decisions through providing opportunities or bullying.
- As first-year students continue to attend college campuses, habits are often “particularly vulnerable to perceived pressures to drink and typically consume more than their older students peer groups” (Kies & Riley, 2000).
- Student drinking rates follow a typical pattern where consumption rises in the summer before arriving at university and increases, substantially after arriving on campus: this trend is known as the “College Effect” (Carroll, 2011).

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**Methodology**

- Phenomenological Qualitative Study
- Seven Female Students/ One Male
- Five First-Year / Three Sophomore

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**Findings**

Perceptions of Peers/Family

- Early Alcohol Educational/ School’s enforcement
- Behavior
- Mantra

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**Future Research and Limitations**

Following students throughout their college experience utilizing findings from the current study to identify year to year use of alcohol and its impact on student's experience

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**Conclusion**

- Maturity/Independence contingent on relationship with parents
- Students are impacted by the initial exposure to university’s alcohol culture
- Student’s personal values influenced by referent group
- Early education establishes norms for first-year students

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**Selected References**


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**Acknowledgements**

First off, I would like to say thank you to my wife Morgan, if it was not for her support and encouragement I would have never been able to make it through these last two years. I would also like to say thank you to my family, they have been here for me for all of my life and have always encouraged me to follow my dreams. I would like to thank my professors (Molly, Michelle and Nasser), you all have encouraged, challenged and pushed me further than I ever thought I could be pushed. Finally, I would like to say thank you to my supervisor, Zach. Zach has been my biggest support throughout this entire experience. I feel that I have grown exponentially because of the time and guidance he has given to me.

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