2010

Development and alcohol use in college age women : an exploratory study : a project based upon an independent investigation

Megan Burke Willey
Smith College

Recommended Citation

Megan B. Willey
Development and Alcohol
Use in College Age Women:
An Exploratory Study

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of alcohol in college age women along specific developmental transitions. Alcohol use and abuse is rampant on college campuses nationwide yet most students discontinue such use with the onset of adulthood. Given this high period of use in young adults, this research attempts to clarify which areas of development that alcohol may effect and how.

Thirteen women who graduated from a four year college or university within the past 5 years were interviewed regarding their alcohol use and experiences amid specific developmental processes. A structured alcohol use questionnaire assessed participants' typical consumption during college years and open ended questions were used to explore their college experiences.

The findings of the research revealed that respondents connected their use of alcohol with changes in their peer and romantic or sexual relationships. Alcohol was reported to enhance bonding experiences as friendships were initiated and became progressively more intimate. Similarly, participants reported that alcohol use aided to create and foster connections with sexual or romantic partners.

These findings suggest the use of a harm reduction approach to drinking on college campuses, given the important developmental transitions during this life period that are often connected to alcohol use.

DEVELOPMENT AND ALCOHOL USE IN COLLEGE AGE WOMEN: AN

EXPLORATORY STUDY

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

Megan B. Willey

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There exists a vast amount of literature that attempts to understand the reasoning and extent of alcohol consumption on college campuses nationwide. Current research shows that 44% of college students admit to binge drinking (Weschler, Davenport, Dowdell, Moeykins and Castill, 1994). There is ample research available that describes the strong prevalence of binge drinking on college campuses and the negative effects on student life (Weschler et al, 1994; Knight, Weschler, Kuo, Seibring, Weitzman and Schuckit, 2002; Weschler and Nelson, 2001); however, many young people who misuse alcohol during young adulthood and adolescence desist such use with the onset of adulthood roles (Bachman, O'Malley, Schulenberg, Johnston, Bryant and Merline, 2002).

While education and research on the negative aspects of college drinking are important, Schulenberg and Maggs (2002) point out that the large majority of older adolescents and young adults recognize that the college years are a time in their lives when drinking is common, largely acceptable and often expected among their peers. Although some may experience the negative consequences associated with heavy drinking, most make it through these years with less negative experiences with alcohol than positive ones (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002). Carter and McGoldrick (1999) find that young adults drink less as the maturational reasons for substance use have passed. The importance of this research for the safety of college students cannot be overlooked; however, the diminishing behavior post graduation (Bachman et al., 2002; Carter and

1

McGoldrick, 1999; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002) suggests that developmental transitions may play a major role in alcohol use during this time.

Available research includes the use of developmental models to understand the high incidence of drinking during young adulthood, a highly stressful time in life (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999 and Schulenburg, Maggs and Hurrelmann, 1997). Further, Maggs (1997) reveals that alcohol use has both constructive and destructive properties in relation to young adulthood development. While this research alludes to the social lubrication that alcohol provides for young adults, it does not further explore specific areas of development and how alcohol is either constructive or destructive.

This study aims to bridge the gap in this research by exploring the role of alcohol along specific developmental transitions. This study will examine the role that alcohol plays in the development of young adult women in the college atmosphere. This research uses Schulenberg et al.'s (1997) categories of developmental transitions to assess the role of alcohol, which include affiliation transitions (changes in relationships associated with parents, peers, romantic partners and offspring), achievement transitions (for example school and work transitions) and identity transitions (changes in self-definition and ethnic identity formation). The movement toward adulthood in these categories is based on American cultural standards of development which include the development of close relationships outside the nuclear family, financial independence and capability and self-sufficiency (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). This exploratory study used qualitative measures to interview 13 participants 1-5 years after graduation from a 4 year college to assess the role of alcohol among specific developmental processes. A structured alcohol

use questionnaire assessed participants' typical consumption during college years and open ended questions were used to explore their experiences.

This thesis is organized into chapters, beginning with an Introduction explaining the issue, purpose, study questions and scope of the study. The Literature Review chapter follows and provides further explanation of typical development and alcohol use among young adults. The Methodology chapter outlines how participants were selected for the study and how the data were collected and analyzed. Next, the Findings chapter provides a description of the group of participants and presents the relevant findings of the research. Lastly, the Discussion chapter addresses the study's implications as they relate to the central issue, previous literature and to clinical social work practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant to the present project is previous work formulating normal elements in development through adolescence and into young adulthood. After presenting a variety of this extensive literature, studies and formulations about the particular place of alcohol consumption in college age subjects are reviewed.

Normal Development

Freud was the first to design a template for understanding human development as both biologically and psychologically determined. Freud's first model for normal human development focused on sexual and aggressive drives. He believed that inherent unconscious drives in the body become conscious as they seek expression. Freud found that these drives evolve and increase in complexity as the human grows physically and matures. Psychosexual development holds that humans grow and mature along a predetermined guide that describes the normal from the abnormal in stages (oral, anal, phallic, latency and adolescence). Development in Freud's theory requires that the individual conquer the tasks at a certain time in a prescribed sequence. Thus, development in an individual is the outcome of surmounting specific age appropriate tasks. Each new stage of development is reliant on the passage of the previous stage (Berzoff, 2008). Therefore, problems or issues in functioning are due to interruptions in the developmental stages. Although Freud's psychosexual stages of development are

4

considered simplified and rigid, he set the stage for understanding development as a product of both biology and psychology.

A plethora of theories for understanding human development have been created since (and prior to) the inception of Freud's model. A contribution of great importance is that of Erikson, who expanded Freud's idea of development from the first 15 years of life to a model that considered development to be occurring from birth until death. Among many, one of Erikson's other contributions to ego psychology is the notion that development, in this case ego development, is shaped by biological, psychological and social forces. This is the first psychosocial model for understanding development as meeting certain tasks over the entire life span. Erikson moved the idea of development away from the rigidity of Freud's theories to a more fluid definition that takes the social context into account and "emphasiz[es] the adaptive, positive character traits that can emerge when particular developmental tasks are mastered" (Berzoff, 2008, p 102). Clearly, this theory expanded how clinicians understood development as a product of one's social environment, culture and relationships (Berzoff, 2008). Although developmental theories have been disputed and revisited with the advancements of science and technology, most current theories in development continue to understand it as the outcome of a series of transactions between the human and his or her environment (Davies, 2004; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002).

There are multiple theories and frames for understanding young adulthood development. Freud's description of the genital phase includes developmental tasks that are currently understood as tasks of young adulthood, such as separating from the family of origin. The genital stage is a time when sexual and aggressive drives are at their peak.

5

Sexual attraction to peers promotes separation from the family of origin, one of the goals of young adult development. Individuals in the genital phase are known for acting out, rebellious behavior, strong political and ethical beliefs and devaluing authority in general which also aid in separating from parents and/or family (Berzoff, 2008).

Erikson described young adulthood as a fluctuation between intimacy and isolation, with the optimal goal of finding and maintaining love. He described intimacy as the mutual ability to "lose oneself and find oneself in another without losing one's own identity." (Berzoff, 2008, p 112). As young adults strive to find intimacy there can be a tendency toward isolation as his or her identity continues to develop. After this period, Erikson describes the task of adulthood is one of providing care for the following generation. In order to do so, adults must maintain their continuous identities (Berzoff, 2008).

Carter and McGoldrick (1999) describe the 1970s as a time when family therapy authors began to use a developmental view of the family to describe the separation between children and parents as a primary goals for the development of young adults. Bowen (1978) described young adulthood as a time when children must differentiate from their families of origin and form intimate peer relationships. Therefore, to master developmental tasks, the young adult must have relationships with their parents and peers while not experiencing emotional cut off from these relationships. Carter and McGoldrick (1989) describe similar developmental tasks in their description of the single young adult stage of the family life cycle.

Current models of development during the young adult stage include addressing certain tasks that incorporate the theories from the past. These transitions include

affiliation changes in relationships associated with parents, peers, and romantic partners; achievement transitions for example school and work transitions; and identity transitions such as changes in self-definition and ethnic identity formation (Schulenberg, Maggs & Hurrelmann, 1997). The markers of moving onto adulthood include the accomplishments of tasks affiliated with these transitions.

In regards to affiliation transitions, the goals for young adulthood include maintaining differentiated ties to the family of origin with, ideally, continued support and attachment. Carter and McGoldrick (1999, p 215) explain that young adults have the task of "exporting relatedness" from their family of origin to a few select others (peers and romantic partners). Much of literature includes the aspect of marriage or committed relationships as a marker of adulthood; however, developmental trajectories for moving into adulthood in the relationship transitions vary in each individual (Maggs and Schulenberg, 2004). Instead, the quality of relationships in these transition changes as young adults tend to seek out, and be sought by, peers and romantic partners with similar goals, values and behaviors. The quality and quantity of romantic and sexual relationships are clearly influenced by the exploration of sexuality at this age; acceptance and exploration of sexuality is a healthy and normal experience during the young adult life phase. Individual openness and exploration of sexuality clearly varies among different cultural, religious and family beliefs which likely influences the young adult's experiences (Johnson and McNeil, 1998; Markiewicz, Lawford, Doyle and Haggart, 2005; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1997; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999; Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark & Gordon, 2003).

Achievement transitions during this time period include the tasks of becoming productive, whether in an academic setting or in the work force. Success in adapting to and performing well in academic or occupational tasks marks development in this transition. The meeting of these tasks is often exemplified as graduation or earning acceptable grades from colleges and graduate schools, career decisions, entry into the work force, or other decisions/success in regards to one's future (Cohen et al., 2003; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1997; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999).

Young adults experience fundamental changes in their identity and self-definition. Through a process of exploration and questioning assumptions, one's own beliefs and values are revealed. Developmental tasks in identity transitions are outlined as an individual's commitment to an integrated set of personal beliefs, values and goals based on exploration of lifestyles, philosophies, relationships and behaviors (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1997; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999).

The movement towards adulthood in these categories is based on American cultural standards of development which include the development of close relationships outside of the nuclear family, financial independence and capability and self-sufficiency (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). Clearly, individuals with values that do not follow typical American values may face different challenges in their transition to adulthood. Some of the described goals and tasks of the developmental transitions may also be conditioned by opportunity; therefore, differences in meeting such developmental tasks may occur.

All developmental transitions in the human life cycle involve some element of discontinuity. Clearly, each transition involves a change in how individuals experience

8

themselves and the world which necessitates experiences of trial and error. Schulenberg et al. (1997, 1) describe how changes throughout these transitions include an element of risk:

> Change involves risk. On our way to transformed selves, we may stumble. Experiencing a transition, regardless of the type of transition or the extent of our past experience, is likely to disrupt our sense of balance and well-being, if only momentarily. Such disruption is particularly likely to occur when one experiences multiple and simultaneous transitions…In addition to the risks to health and well-being that may be associated with the stress of confronting and being confronted with a developmental transition, health risks can occur…through developmental transitions and may even be part of the negotiation process.

As described above, young adults experience multiple transitions at once which, midst an increase in freedoms and relatively little increase in responsibilities, inflate the likeliness of risk. Studies of the prevalence of risky and problem behavior indicate that it is more normative to employ these types of behavior at a certain level than not (Moffit, 1993; Shedler and Block, 1990). The development from adolescence into adulthood *usually* entails some type of experimental risky behaviors, which include substance use (Bachman et al., 2002; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Weschler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens & Castillo, 1994; Knight, Weschler, Kuo, Seibring, Weitzman and Schuckit, 2002; Weschler and Nelson, 2001; Jessor et al., 1997). Similarly, Silbereisen and Noack (1988) conclude from a longitudinal study on adolescent leisure activities that problem behavior plays multiple roles, including constructive and destructive, in adolescent development. This research broadens the conceptualization of risky behavior to understand how such behavior is both helpful and harmful to the young adult.

9

Alcohol use in Adolescence

Given the defined period of increase in risky behaviors in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, much research has been conducted to better understand the role of alcohol use as a risky behavior during this time. The largest research project aimed at gathering longitudinal data for understanding normative trends in and psychosocial predictors of the use of tobacco and alcohol (as well as other drugs) is the Monitoring the Future project. Beginning in 1976, the project surveys 50,000 8th, 10th and 12th grade students, as well as a sample of each graduating class for a number of years. The 12th grade surveys began in 1975 and the 10th grade surveys since 1991 and are continually assessed. The extensive survey allows investigators to examine four types of change among the samples; changes in a given year across all age groups, developmental changes that occur across age groups, differences among age related cohorts and changes related to differing types of environments or role transitions.

Multiple authors have used the plethora of data collected from the Monitoring the Future project to discuss trends and change in youth, adolescent and young adult alcohol use as they relate to development. In Bachman et al. (2002) the trends of alcohol use in young adulthood as they relate to different aspects of development are discussed at length. Bachman et al. (2002) focus on the mediating factors the impact alcohol use during the transition to adulthood. Yet, one of the major findings of this discussion reads "There are different patterns of age-related change, although use of all substances eventually declines by the time young adults reach their late twenties and early thirties" (Bachman et al., 2002, 204). Further, from the survey data, Bachman et al. (2002) find that with each passing year, consistencies between younger (young adult) patterns of

10

alcohol use and current alcohol use grow weaker. Brown (2008), Maggs and Schulenberg (2004) and Schulenberg and Maggs (2002) have drawn similar conclusions in different analyses of the data, supporting the previously described developmental model explaining risky behavior; there exists a normative period of high alcohol use that typically declines in adulthood.

Research on the factors that mediate or prevent high substance use, considering the potential health risks involved, is extremely important; however, even with mediating factors in place, a period of high alcohol use may still occur. The notion of alcohol use being developmentally embedded during young adulthood (as well as adolescence) has sparked the interest in understanding different trajectories of this type of use, as well as the relationship of alcohol use and problems in development.

The Monitoring the Future data set has been assessed through other developmental lenses in regards to the potential health risks involved with the normative instance of high substance use in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In review of the developmentally normative course of alcohol use and abuse that the Monitoring the Future project revealed, Maggs and Schulenberg (2004) and Brown et al. (2008) link common pathways associated with levels of drinking in adolescence and young adulthood. The category of drinkers most closely associated with typical alcohol use previously described (whose heavy drinking spikes during late adolescence and then declines) are known as fling drinkers. In regard to the long term risk associated with this type of drinking, Maggs and Schulenberg (2004) and Brown et al. (2008) find that compared with young people who rarely use alcohol or fling drinkers tend to have equivalent psychosocial adjustment during adulthood. In support of Bachman et al.'s

(2002) analysis of the data, the typical drinking habits of young adults do not necessarily predict long term alcohol abuse or dependence.

Schulenberg and Maggs (2008) correlated six long-term longitudinal studies of all ages from Britain, Finland and the United states to summarize any commonalities in early experiences with alcohol and long term negative outcomes. One finding of the study does describe a correlation, though small, between early drinking habits and problems throughout the lifetime which conflicts with previous research analyses. However, the study correlated multiple studies from different countries and operational definitions varied throughout, perhaps affecting the study. Another issue that may have skewed the findings is the notion that European countries maintain different views and laws on alcohol use than the United States.

In the face of somewhat conflicting research, perhaps a more neutral approach in understanding the increase in alcohol use during the young adult life phase is to accept that there may be both destructive and constructive aspects of use, similar to Silbereisen and Noack's (1988) view on risk and problem behavior. Jessor (1987) takes on this view in a study that gathered data in a six wave longitudinal study of assessing the behaviors of roughly 450 adolescents and young adults from 1969 to 1981, following the same cohorts from ages 13, 14 and 15 until ages 25, 26 and 27, respectively. The study used data collected specific to alcohol use from the questionnaires which assessed behaviors based on the Jessor's previously developed problem-behavior theory. Among multiple conclusions, Jessor (1987) finds that alcohol use may have multiple roles (constructive and destructive) in normal development. Maggs, Almeida and Galambos (1995) take this stance in a longitudinal study of 96 Canadian adolescents. Although the sample is of a

younger group of adolescents (11.6 is the mean age), the discussion of the paradox of alcohol use during this time is acknowledged; it may help and hinder development. Brown et al. (2008) also acknowledge the constructive aspects of alcohol use, stating that alcohol use in young adulthood may function in part to accomplish particular developmental tasks, although states it is not necessarily optimal in light of the dangers of excessive drinking.

Alcohol Use in College Years

The average age range of the young adult stage, based on the narrative description of behaviors roughly falls between 18 and 29 years of age (Carter and McGoldrick, 1999; Cohen et al., 2003). In the past few decades the transition from adolescence to adulthood has lengthened as culturally, people tend to settle into adult roles such as working or marriage later than past generations (Maggs and Schulenberg, 2004; Cohen et al., 2003). With nearly half of all young adults enrolled in a postsecondary institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), the passage into adulthood is slowed as adult roles are typically put off until after graduation (Maggs, 1997). Even when adult roles are initiated prior to college enrollment, the involvement in any postsecondary education delays the transitions into adult roles (Maggs, 1997).

While the average age of the first drink is often in adolescence, some of the early role changes in young adulthood coincide with increase use, for example, becoming a college student (Maggs and Schulenberg, 2004). The prevalence of alcohol consumption is most notorious on college campuses and there is ample research available to understand and implement interventions on campuses nationwide. The exclamation by a

13

21 year old college student exemplifies the cultural attitude toward the college lifestyle; "I'm 21 and in my prime drinking years, and I intend to take full advantage of it" (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002, 50).

The prevalence of drinking on college campuses is widespread and college students have higher rates of alcohol use and binge drinking than their peers not enrolled in college (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002). Weschler et al. (1994) found that 44% of college students responding to a survey were binge drinkers, which is defined as the consumption of a sufficiently large amount of alcohol to place the drinker at increased risk of experiencing secondhand effects (roughly 4 drinks in a row for women), including injuries and engaging in unplanned sex . The College Alcohol Study finds that 20% of binge drinkers meet DSM-IV criteria for alcohol dependence, (Knight et al., 2002). This finding implies that 20% of college binge drinkers are likely to struggle with alcohol problems after college. This period in a young adult's life is an important juncture when initiation and escalation of drinking may set the stage for lifelong difficulties with alcoholism. Clearly, the dangers of drinking on college campuses should not be ignored. Not only could a lapse in judgment have tragic outcomes, this is also a time when alcoholic tendencies may come to the forefront (Knight et al., 2002). Yet current findings on college alcohol use support those of general young adult alcohol use in that most young adults make it through these years of heavy drinking with more positive experiences than negative and become highly functioning adults without alcohol problems (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Park, 2004; Park and Grant, 2005). Despite the previously mentioned link between binge drinking and alcohol dependence (Knight et al., 2002), research findings previously discussed conflict with this notion, stating that trends

in alcohol consumption show decreases at the end of young adulthood, or as an individual takes on more adult roles (Bachman et al., 2002; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Carter and McGoldrick, 1999).

Research similar to Silbereisen and Noack (1988); Jessor (1987); and Maggs et al. (1995) which take more neutral approaches to understanding risky behavior and alcohol was conducted specifically to assess the role of alcohol use in college students. Maggs (1997) addresses the constructive side of this argument in a study that surveyed 344 college students to assess the extent to which psychosocial adjustment, personal goals and beliefs about alcohol predicted alcohol use and binge drinking. Findings included that alcohol use during the transition to college helps to achieve valued social goals, such as making new friends, but may also threaten safety and short term health and well-being. Maggs' (1997) findings support previous arguments that risk behaviors play a constructive role in adolescent and young adult development, including Jessor (1987) and Silbereisen and Noack (1988).

As Maggs (1997) points out that alcohol use can be both constructive and destructive to the young adults' developmental movement, further research has been conducted to understand how college students perceive their use as negative or positive. Park and Grant (2005) and Park (2004) take on this task by surveying college students on their consumption of alcohol and the consequences they perceive as a result of drinking. Park (2004) finds that college students report their encounters with positive consequences of drinking as being more extreme and more frequent than their encounters with negative consequences. The positive consequences of drinking reported were tension reduction, social performance enhancement, activity

enhancement, and social lubrication, which support Maggs' (1997) findings that alcohol use during the transition to college helps to achieve valued social goals, such as making new friends. Park and Grant's (2005) findings support those of Park (2004) as well as indicate differences between genders; men report more negative consequences which likely relates to others' perceptions of more visible negative consequences, such as fighting. Park (2004) and Park and Grant (2005) focus on the college student's perceptions of negative and positive consequences offers a voice to young adults' experiences with drinking.

Brown et al. (2008) discuss the importance of exploring the meaning of substance use from the young person's perspective, specifically, to consider substance use in relation to the developmental tasks young adults are expected to accomplish. As previously described, research has been conducted to understand the constructive and destructive roles for alcohol use in young adult development, and to give voice to young adults' perceptions of such use, albeit in separate studies. Additionally, even in the available studies that attempt to understand different roles of alcohol in college student's development, little attention has been given to understand exactly which areas of development are specifically linked to constructive and/or destructive use.

This current study attempts to remedy the missing link in research in a qualitative project that aims to understand the role of alcohol in relation to developmental transitions in young adulthood in women while giving voice to the participant and her experience. Hopefully, such narratives will begin to reveal which areas of development alcohol may play constructive and/or destructive roles. Participants, 12-15 women graduates of a four year college in the past 1-5 years, will be asked to describe their college experiences

16

based on the developmental transitions presented in the literature (Schulenberg et al., 1997), as well as how alcohol use may relate to such transitions. Categories include affiliation changes in relationships associated with parents, peers, and romantic partners; achievement transitions for example school and work transitions; and identity transitions such changes in self-definition and ethnic identity formation. Changes in these categories, as described by the literature, will determine whether more adult roles were achieved throughout the participants' years in college. Whether alcohol was constructive or destructive in these changes will be examined by neutrally asking whether alcohol relates to any of the changes participants describe. This study will also assess drinking habits during college based on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders and Monteiro, 2001). Scores of this test will be used to assess the participants drinking habits (which indicate whether a person's drinking style was hazardous or not) and determine whether the participant's drinking style in college is categorized as binge drinking.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study is an attempt to answer the following question: What role does alcohol use play in relation to certain developmental tasks during college years in women. Alcohol may serve constructive and destructive functions in young adults moving through development during college and this research attempts to clarify which areas of development that alcohol may effect and how.

This study used a qualitative, exploratory design. An exploratory study was an appropriate method to use in order to understand the phenomenon from the participants' points of view. Due to the scope of the study area, a qualitative design was appropriate.

The data collection instrument was a structured interview that included demographic questions, an alcohol use disorders identification test (AUDIT) questions and open ended questions used to explore participant's understanding of the role of alcohol along developmental transitions. The AUDIT was an appropriate choice because of its already established reliability and validity. The AUDIT concurred with the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test and the MacAndrew Screening Tests, previously established alcohol use tests (Bohn, Babor and Kranzler, 1995). The open-ended interview question style was an appropriate method of questioning because it allowed participants to explore their own experiences and ensures each participant addressed the same questions. This section measured change and development during college years based on three different areas of typical developmental change in young adulthood; relationships; academics; and identity (Maggs and Hurrelmann,1997). Maggs and

Hurrelmann's (1997) developmental categories were an appropriate choice because the transitions are operationalized into three clear categories.

Structured interviews were used to collect data from thirteen women that graduated from an undergraduate program between 2003 and 2008 and drank alcohol in college. The sample for this study was a non-probability sample of convenience as this research relied on interested, available participants. The collected data were then analyzed thematically. No changes were made to the design during the course of the study.

Sample

Inclusion criteria for participants were: 1) females; 2) graduates from a four year undergraduate college or university between 2003 and 2007; 3) between the age of 23 to 29, roughly matching the second half of Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) age range of the young adult stage in the life cycle; and 4) who reported that they drank alcohol during their college years. Thus participants were all women that graduated from a four year undergraduate program within one to five years and of the average age expectancy for that time period. The age specifics were required because this study aims to provide insight on the typical college drinking and development experiences in women. The participants must be graduated at least one year in order to ensure enough time to provide a reflective discussion on their experiences in college years.

Thirteen women participated in this study. All women identified as White and reported ages ranging from 23 to 25. Two of the participants graduated from a four year undergraduate program in 2006, seven graduated in 2007 and four graduated in 2008. Six

participants classified the socioeconomic class of their family of origin as upper-middle

class, six reported middle class and one reported working class. Four participants

identified as Catholic, three did not identify with a religious or spiritual belief, two

identified as Christian and other responses included agnostic, Unitarian Univeralist,

Episcopalian, Greek Orthodox, spiritual and agnostic. Eight of the participants reported

that they were employed, three identified as students, presumably at the graduate level,

and one reported that she was unemployed.

Data Collection

The design for this study was approved by the Smith College School for Social

Work Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix A). Recruitment procedures

included flyers, snowball method and word of mouth. Flyers (See Appendix B) listing the

inclusion criteria were passed out at local coffee shops, bus stations, restaurants and other

places of business. These efforts were unsuccessful. Colleagues and acquaintances were

sent emails and facebook messages with the flyer information and necessary contact

information. These methods succeeded in gathering a snowball sample. The sample for

this study was a non-probability sample of convenience. Potential research participants

were screened by phone or email (Appendix C) to insure that they met this study's

criteria; the first thirteen women to meet inclusion criteria were used as participants.

Informed consent forms (see Appendix D) were given to the participants at the time of

the interviews or prior to the interviews when conducted over the phone. The informed

consent form details the risks and benefits of participation along with the purpose of the

study and inclusion criteria.

Data collection was accomplished through the use of in-person structured interviews that lasted approximately 25 to 50 minutes with thirteen women who met selection criteria for this study and who signed the informed consent form prior to the interview. In order to increase reliability in the study, the questions were tested on a volunteer prior to the interviews, which helped to clarify any unclear wording (Rubin and Babbie, 2010).

The interview guide for this study (see Appendix E) began with demographic questions including age, year of college undergraduate graduation, gender, race/ethnicity, current job/education status, socioeconomic status of the participant's family of origin and religion/spiritual affiliation. Participants were then asked a series of questions related to alcohol use during their four college years per the AUDIT.

The AUDIT is used to describe and assess the alcohol consumption of participants during their college years. It is a ten item questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization, used internationally, to determine whether a person's alcohol use may be harmful. Items 1-3 assess levels of alcohol consumption, 4-6 relate to dependence and 7-10 assess harmful use. The multiple choice responses form ordinal scales. Most items have 5 responses and some have only 2 levels. The sums of the participants' answers are then used to understand reported alcohol use. A score of 7 or more in women indicates a strong likelihood of harmful alcohol use and a score of 20 or more suggests alcohol dependence. The following are examples of questions from the AUDIT; 1) How often did you have a drink containing alcohol in your four college years, 2) In your four college years, how often did you find that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started

and 3) How often in your four college years did you have feelings of guilt or remorse after drinking.

The next interview section addresses changes in the three domains of development in young adulthood as described by Maggs and Hurrelmann (1997): relationships; academic work; and identity formation. The section also explores how the participant may or may not relate their use of alcohol to the changes they described. The following are examples from this section; 1) When you look back at your four college years, do you notice any changes in your friendships? 2) After talking about your academics and/or work, can you speak to how your use of alcohol may or may not relate to those changes you just described?

The interviews were tape recorded with a digital recording device. The narrative responses were transcribed in order to facilitate the analysis of the data. This also allowed for identification of useful quotations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done in two parts; scoring the AUDIT results and thematically assessing the narratives. The AUDIT responses were scored numerically and assigned the corresponding result; no harmful alcohol use, harmful alcohol use or alcohol dependence. The data were analyzed thematically and coding was applied to derive meaning from the participants answers. Transcripts were analyzed first to assess the specific responses to the interview guide. The transcripts were reanalyzed and organized categorically based on apparent patterns and themes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This qualitative study explored the extent and the role of alcohol use among female college graduates along prescribed developmental transitions. Structured interview questions entailed the use of the AUDIT to assess participant's alcohol use in terms of non-harmful, harmful or dependence. Eighteen open ended questions were used to explore participants' reflective experiences of developmental transitions in relationships, academics and identity during their four college years. Participants were also asked to reflect on how their use of alcohol related to different developmental transitions. Basic demographic data were also collected which included participants' age, year of college graduation, gender, race/ethnicity, current job/education status, socioeconomic status of family of origin and religion/spiritual affiliations. Thirteen women participated in the study; this chapter contains the description of the relevant findings. The interviews were transcribed and fifteen major findings were revealed.

Fourteen findings emerged from the interview questions and one finding emerged during the analysis process, not included in the interview guide. The findings from the interview questions will be presented as follows: 1) demographic data; 2) AUDIT scores; 3) participant's characterization of their college experience; 4) changes in friendships; 5) changes in parental relationships; 6) changes in sexual and romantic relationships; 7) changes in academic achievement; 8) planning for life after graduation; 9) changes in alcohol consumption; 10) changes in identity; 11) learning experiences; 12) alcohol use

23

and changes in relationships; 13) alcohol use and changes in academic work and; 14) alcohol use and changes in identity. Lastly, findings from the analysis process will be presented.

Demographic Data

The demographic data reveal group norms among the sample of the women recruited for this study. Although efforts for a diverse sample were made through broad advertisement, the sample is a homogenous White group of women that attended colleges in the Northeast region of the United States. The majority of participants reported coming from middle and upper middle class family backgrounds, with only one reporting a working class background. Sixty- two percent of participants identified within a Christian religion and 12 out of 13 were employed or students at the time of the interview. The homogeneity in this sample is likely explained by the primary method of recruitment used; the snowball method. Colleagues and acquaintances were sent emails and facebook messages with the flyer information and necessary contact information and asked to pass on the information. Groups of friends were likely targeted by this method and this may explain the commonalities revealed in this sample.

AUDIT Scores

The mean score of the AUDIT was 13.85, ranging from 6-22. This score classifies participant's average use of alcohol as harmful during their college years. Participant's AUDIT scores imply typical harmful alcohol use during their college experiences with some sample variability. Outliers include two participants whose AUDIT scores revealed

non harmful alcohol use and two participants who's scored revealed alcohol dependence. Participants were also asked how their consumption of alcohol related to that of their peers'. Three participants stated that they viewed their own consumption as less than their peers group, nine participants felt their consumption was average with their peer group and one reported her consumption was considerably more than her peer group during her college experiences.

Participant's Characterization of Their College Experience

Participants were asked to provide a general overview of their college experience and several themes emerged from their response. Most participants graduated in four consecutive years (n=11) and all reported positive college experiences. Seven participants referred to their academic experiences in college, describing specific classes, levels of difficulty, major changes and their own success at these challenges. Although academic experiences were included and described in most responses, the overall depictions of the college experiences reveal social experiences as most significant. Participants typically depicted a time of high socialization, with all thirteen referring to some social aspect in their responses. Overlaps in participants' responses included the importance of friendships and a focus on having a good time. In comparison of social and academic experiences, one participant stated;

> "…looking back, I would say that my overall experience is much more social than academic. I mean I did well in school and took lots of classes and enjoyed the academics, but thinking about college, I tend to think more about the social experiences than I do the academics."

Another participant similarly reflected "I would say I was more focused on the social aspect than the academic aspect." Certainly the four years spent in an undergraduate

25

program entails academic work, but participants describe a time period during which social experiences are among the top priorities.

Changes in Friendships

Multiple themes emerged from participants responses to questions regarding changes in their friendships during college. Responses typically included experiences in forming new friendships and subsequent changes to those friendships and three themes were revealed. The findings in this section will be organized into the following three subsections: formation of new friendships; changes in friendship groups; and participants' view of their friendships.

The Formation of New Friendships

Participants described the formation of new friendships in college as friendships of convenience. These initial friendships were developed based on proximity to one another. Eight participants described initial friendships that formed out of living situations; people that lived down the hall, roommates and other housing related connections. Five participants cited athletic opportunities that allowed for quick forming relationships. Friendships also developed in the classroom, as three participants identified in their responses.

These participants describe an environment in which friendships are initially formed out of convenience and proximity – on the residential hall, in the classroom or through an athletic team. One participant describes this experience, "…in the beginning, it is the social [environment]. I'm a freshman and I need friends so you made friends that did not end being important over time." Another participant stated similarly "a lot of my

friends were from my hall and some of their friends that maybe they knew from high school that also went to school with us. So I really started out with a group that was very different from the group that I ended up being closer with."

One participant discussed the difficulty in forming friendships, especially those that are significant. She stated "I think part of what was so hard about my first year was that I didn't really find a core group of friends."

Changes in Friendships and Friendship Groups

Changes among friendships and friendships groups generally related to common, shared interests. One participants describes this phenomenon; "As time progresses, you actually find people that you have things in common with and once you find those people you really bond with them over the next three and a half years." Another participant similarly describes the movement from convenient friendships to those based on common grounds; "It was a matter of getting used to learning how to meet people…not just out of the circumstances that you are in… meeting people because you have shared interests or shared aspirations."

Friendships were described to both dissipate and/or strengthen based on similarities in interests, academics, sports and experiences. One participant stated "in terms of my immediate social circles, it changed with the activities I got involved with…Folks that were in [my major] and into…all the stuff I was doing…became my core friends." Seven participants referred to athletic teams that provided opportunities for friendships to strengthen based on the mutual interest and time spent in the sport. Academic classes also served as a platform for friendships to strengthen based on the mutual interests in the classroom. One participant describes how both classes and

athletics provided a means for deepening friendships; "Friends changed in terms of interest, so friends that I was in classes with I became better friends with…and…friends that I played field hockey with I became better friends with."

Common interests also served to help weed out friendships that were not as significant. Participants describe friendships that weakened which typically related to a lack of common interests or shared values. One participant stated "I had a falling out with a couple of friends just because we never agreed on anything, we just sort of met through living situations…and I mean [we] just had more differences than similarities." A few participants described an initial large group of acquaintances that morphed into a smaller group of close friends. One participant stated "we were all in the same kind of circle but then…a couple joined sororities and we were not so close anymore." Another participant similarly stated "freshman year everyone was friends and everyone would go out together and then you could kind of tell that people would distance themselves and associate with other groups."

Participants' View of Friendships

A theme emerged from participants' description of their view of their relationships and friends. As the years progressed and bonds strengthened, a deeper connection and understanding of these friendships emerged. Four participants describe such changes that typically involve deeper feelings of respect, trust and appreciation. One participant describes this change; "I got to learn more about [my friends] and their decisions in life and I think if anything, I grew to respect them for the type of person they were and appreciate them more."

Changes in Parental Relationships

Participants' relationships with their parents during college typically involved an increase in appreciated, support and closeness. Another theme that emerged detailed the previous relationship with parents as argumentative and distant, specifically more so with participants' relationships with their mothers. The findings in this section will be organized into the following subsections: development of closer parental relationships; and past strained relationships with mothers.

Development of Closer Parental Relationships

Participants described a change in their parental relationships as they moved away from home and reflected on their experiences. A great overlap in participants' reports involved descriptions of change that included an increase in appreciation of and support and closeness with parents during college (n=11). One participant described this change: "as I got older I got much closer with my parents and really saw them as confidants and people I could always rely on. I think I had taken them for granted when I was younger and as I got older I really appreciated them more." Some participants reflected further on the reasons for these changes which included participants' acknowledgment of: sacrifices made by parents; parent's commitment to child's happiness and success; parent's emotional support; and importance of family. One participant describes this awareness: "I started to truly understand how much they worked and sacrificed for me." Participants' increase and awareness of their parent's support facilitated a closer, more supportive relationship between parent and child.

Two participants describe contrasting developments in relationships with parents. In these two instances, participants stated that parental relationships became more distant

and separate. For these participants, extenuating circumstances such as divorce and stress in parent's lives likely related to an increase in distance as opposed to closeness.

Past Strained Relationships with Mothers

A theme was also revealed from participants' (n=4) description of their past (high school) relationships with their parents as argumentative and distant. These participants particularly describe difficulty and strain in their relationships with their mothers. One participant stated "I did not get along well with my mom at all. We butted heads a lot." Another added "I had a bad relationship with my mom in high school and [the distance] made me definitely appreciate her when I went home and miss [her]." In each of these descriptions of distant and argumentative mother-child relationships (n=4), participants reported a change that included an increase in appreciation for their mother.

Changes in Sexual and Romantic Relationships

Most participants (n=11) described changes in their romantic and sexual relationships that revealed multiple themes. The participants explored the changes that took place during their four college years which included an increase in partnerships and changes that allude to a movement to maturity in relationships. Two participants reported no changes which included one who maintained a long term relationship.

Increase in Partnerships

Four participants reported an increase in sexual and romantic relationships. In discussing an increase in such relationships, participants referred to an increase in their own comfort with sexuality and experimentation. As participants became more comfortable with the idea of being a sexual person, their sexual and romantic experiences

30

increased. One participant stated "I think I became more confident in myself, I was just sort of, okay with being a sexual person."

In addition to a sense of confidence and comfort, participants also described frequent short term sexual relationships. One participant stated "I was not looking for 'the one,' [I] was just kind of realizing I am young [and] it does not have to be forever, it can just be something that is fulfilling right now." Such descriptions of sexual relationships, coupled with an increase in confidence and comfort, reveal a typical pattern of experimentation. Participants referred to the weekend environment as commonly flirtatious and described their own casual make-out tendencies (n=2).

Movement toward Healthier Relationships

Aside from an increase in sexual and romantic behaviors, participants also described changes in such relationships that revealed a typical movement towards more mature and healthy relationships (n=8). Participants described learning from past relationships and a general clarity of their own needs and desires in romantic and sexual relationships that allowed for healthier and more serious romantic relationships. One participant describes this general process;

> [My relationships] became a lot healthier I think. I had sense of what I wanted in relationships and what I needed in relationships [from not] having those things fulfilled a few times. [That] can teach you a lot about how painful that can really be…I guess what we are talking about is self-awareness, just having an awareness of myself and knowing what it is that I need to take from relationships. And [I was then] able to set higher priorities because each relationships set a higher standard for the next.

The movement to healthier relationships for this participant included a learning process that she developed from her experiences in less healthy relationships. Four participants described detailed experiences in relationships they deemed unsatisfactory as they

31

realized their needs were not being met. Other participants (n=6) echoed a desire for change in future relationships based on their previous experiences.

<div align="center">*Changes in Academic Achievement*</div>

Themes emerged from participants' reports of changes in their academic achievements. Responses revealed a typical struggle with the transition into college level academic work and a movement toward seriousness and interest in major specific academic work. This section is organized into the following subsections: the transition to college classes; and interest and commitment to relevant course work.

The Transition to College Classes – "I've never written a paper over two pages – What is this?!"

Many (n=6) participants described difficulty in the transition to college level academic work freshman year. In this transition, participants reported poor grades as a result of feeling unprepared for the intensity of a college work load. Participants reported dissonance in what was expected of their work and the quality of it, difficulty with time management and a lack of full appreciation for academic work in light of social opportunities. One participant summarizes the transition to college level work: "I think I went into freshman year thinking I could just skate through, kind of like I did in high school and never really try that hard…and my GPA showed that. I think it was just because I thought I could not try and do fine." Another participant describes a similar academic struggle: "I went to college and it was all of the sudden like, 'oh my God, I need to do homework every night and I need to study for this test and I have never written a paper over two pages – What is this??" Although this transition certainly proved

difficult, and GPAs may reflect that, these participants also described a change in their

commitment and interest to academics as their classes became more salient to their

interests.

Interest and Commitment to Relevant Course Work

Nine participants described an increase in their commitment to their work as their

classes became more focused on their interests. The commitment entailed a deeper

appreciation and level of seriousness that participants applied to academic work that they

felt passionate about. After describing a difficult freshman year in terms of academic

work, one participant stated "I got into course classes which made me try even harder and

it was much easier for me to do well because I liked the content…It changed with what

my interests were, I think I needed to be into something to do well." Multiple

participants' responses resonated with this description. As the course work became more

interesting for participants, they became more serious about their success in college. One

participant describes this phenomenon:

> It took me a good year and a half to figure out that I should not just waste my four
> years doing nothing and that I should actually take my classes seriously. I think
> probably part of that was the classes you are taking initially. You are taking so
> many of the introductory classes [and] some of them are really boring, not that
> interesting. So once I started getting into more specialized course work and was
> really focusing on my major, I became more invested in my academic progress.

Clearly, an interest in the course work is important for academic achievement, but it also

increases a student's commitment and appreciation of such work.

Planning for Life after Graduation

In preparation for life after graduation, participants stated that they had no idea

what they wanted to do (n=5), had a general plan as to what they wanted to (n=4) or had

secured enrollment in graduate school or a job (n=4). The range of these descriptions seems to reveal general trends in whether these participants were able to harness and/or access their career interests while in college.

Clearly, four participants were able to access their interests in depth and made plans to pursue them in further, whether academically or in the work force. One participant stated "I had applied to graduate school and I started right away." Other participants graduated college with a general idea of their career interests; however, no plans were made prior to graduation as to how participants would pursue their interests in the future. One participant reported "I had ideas about where I wanted to be. I think I was kind of open to the possibilities, but I did not really have a clear course of action." Lastly, five participants graduated from college with no hold on their interest for the future. Although these participants graduated without a future plan, or ideas for a plan, they likely considered careers and ideas that did not work for them or allow them to narrow future goals. One participant stated "I had no plan…no idea…Well, I will tell you that I did not know what I wanted to do when I went in and I did not know what I wanted to do when I got out. But I definitely had varying opinions when I was there."

Changes in Alcohol Consumption – "I would not say it was healthy, but it was the normal type of binge drinking that you do in college"

Changes in participants' alcohol consumption varied somewhat and three participants reported general fluctuations in their alcohol consumption. Responses from ten participants revealed a theme that explains changes in consumption (some as a decrease) as a result of learning one's limits with alcohol. Three participants described a

34

decrease in their use and while seven did not, a similar change was noted in terms of how they viewed their drinking behaviors. One participant described her initial alcohol consumption behaviors: "in my freshman year I would drink to black out every single Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, every night." Another participant described similar initial drinking behaviors related to her comfort within social settings: "freshman year I was not very socially secure. And I think that I thought if drank a lot it would make me seem really cool and fun." After this initial drinking behavior, participants stated that the novelty of drinking alcohol wore off. Some stated that their drinking habits decreased after this realization; however, others used the realization to better understand their own drinking limits and apply them to their level and type of consumption. One participant describes her own process: "well I definitely learned how much I can drink and what I can drink. You think it is okay to go out on a Tuesday night and then not go to class in the morning. It may be okay, but you realize that it takes a toll on your education." Another participant describes her similar process as it related to her behaviors while intoxicated: "I notice certain behaviors on nights where I did drink too much, when I was out of control. I think that taught me to not do that. I would see negative consequences and pull back and think that cannot happen again." Participants learned their limits and altered their drinking style accordingly. This did not necessarily follow in a decrease of alcohol use as one participant explained: "I would not say it was healthy, but it was the normal type of binge drinking that you do in college."

Changes in Identity

Participants' responses to questions that evoked a reflection on changes or understanding of their identity revealed a broad range of narrative. This section of questions proved difficult for participants to reflect on. Five participants reported outright difficulty in answering questions about themselves. Others struggled in pinpointing exact changes and most described broad and general changes. The personal and broad changes that participants described all related to clarity and a firmer commitment to personal goals and values. Coinciding with the realization of personal goals and values, participants reported an increase in comfort within the self.

The clarification and dedication of personal values and goals for the future evolved from participants learning what is important to them (n=13). Specific interests, passions, people and activities that bring joy were referenced as important to participants to feel committed to. Examples include specific relationships, physical activities, career goals, family, understanding difference, social justice and political interests. Other responses referenced a general acknowledgment of change in this area. For example, one participant stated, "I think I just learned who I was as a person. Like, what made me tick, what I appreciated in my friends and what I wanted out of relationships." Another participant described these changes; "I think it's a lot of just learning what our real interest and values are and how you think you can be true to those interests and values."

Participants (n=5) described stronger commitment to living a healthier lifestyle. This commitment involved learning from previous unhealthy experiences in college. For some (n=4) this included a decrease in their consumption of alcohol. One participant stated, "I'm just trying to take care of my body and skin more – and my internal organs

and just trying not to drink and damage them. I'm just more aware of living a healthy lifestyle." As opposed to their college experiences, these participants now prioritize the health of their bodies.

In addition to a feeling connected to certain values, participants (n=10) also described an increase in their confidence and comfort within themselves. One participant described this change in personal comfort: "I think freshman year I was so scared and not really sure of myself and not really sure where I fit in. Where as senior year, I was totally happy and [I] did not want to leave…I mean I just feel like I found my place." Another participant describes their development of comfort and confidence as it relates to a commitment towards certain values; "[I was] developing a certain sense of competence in myself as [the] person that I am defining myself as, as opposed to the person that I…grew up being defined as."

Learning Experiences

In recalling learning experiences from in college, whether positive or negative, twelve participants described experiences that they learned from. Examples of learning experiences included certain friendships, romantic relationships, alcohol induced scenarios and academic failure or success. One participant describes her appreciation for learning from negative life experiences; "It's good to learn from the things that do not work for you and what does not make you happy. Like having a boyfriend that did not treat me well and having friendships that did not reach my standard of what a real friendship should be. I mean, I got a lot from that." While participants' responses were personal and broad, most participants (n=12) recalled a significant learning experience.

Alcohol Use and Changes in Relationships

Responses describing the relationship between alcohol use and changes in relationships revealed a group norm typical for this group of participants. Ten participants related their alcohol use to changes in friendships and nine described a connection to romantic and sexual relationships. All responses denounced a connection between parental relationships and alcohol use (by stating so or omission).

Alcohol and Friendships – "…there was some serious bonding that went down…"

Relationship changes associated with alcohol typically revealed a bonding experience for participants. As friendship evolved in the social environment, alcohol was likely involved and/or contributing to both the changes and the environment. One participant reflected "to be social with my friends, it usually involved alcohol…it was just sort of the social norm." While alcohol was typically rooted in the social environment, participants described an added benefit in its ability to strengthen friendships. The bonding experiences that participants described included the act of getting ready to go out, the experiences together while socializing, typically out at night, and in reflecting on their experiences together. One participant describes this experience; "With my friends there was some serious bonding that went down…because it was not only the actual act of drinking together, but it brought everybody together. We would all [drink] and progressively get ready together to go out in the world. And the next day you can laugh about what happened."

Alcohol and Romantic/Sexual Relationships

Responses regarding romantic and sexual relationship changes related to participant's alcohol use reveal two norms. Seven participants found that alcohol helped them to create connections and foster connections with sexual partners. One participant describes this connection; "[In my sexual relationships,] I think alcohol just gets you a little brave so you take some risks that might not have, but you always wanted to do." This participant references an increase in bravery, another added feeling more daring. These responses reveal a clear connection between alcohol use and sexual experiences. Another connection between participants' alcohol use and their romantic relationships, specifically, is the increase in arguments while drinking. Five participants described an increase in the likelihood of fighting with a romantic partner while drinking. One participant stated, "I would say that a lot of the arguments I got in with my college boyfriend were fueled by alcohol. And as I got older I just realized it's so not worth it."

Alcohol Use and Changes in Academic Work

Two themes emerged from participants' responses to questions regarding changes in their academic work in relation to their alcohol use. Seven participants found no connection to academic work changes and their alcohol use; however, six participants found that their alcohol use in the earlier years of college negatively affected their academic work. These participants describe learning to find a better balance between social (thus, alcohol involved) experiences and their academic workload. One participant describes this change "I think that there were points freshman year when I was a lot more interested in the social life than I was interested in my academics. But [by my] junior

39

year I really learned to balance my social life, drinking life, with my academics…then my grades improved."

Alcohol Use and Changes in Identity

Just as the question evoking a reflection on changes in identity proved difficult, participants' reflections upon their use of alcohol in relation to changes in their identities did not reveal any overarching themes. Responses were broad, personal and most did not directly relate to identity changes previously mentioned. Two participants stated that no connection existed between their alcohol use and changes in their identity. Five participants described the connection between alcohol use and friendships that helped them to grow as an individual. Two participants discussed learning from mistakes that they made while drinking, which helped them to identify certain behaviors that they wanted to refrain from. A few responses vaguely connected to previously mentioned identity changes that participants experienced. Reported identity changes included a movement towards feeling more confident and four participants described feeling confident, outgoing and comfortable in social situations while drinking alcohol. Similarly, participants previously reported newfound commitments towards personal goals and values and three described changes in their alcohol use in order to increase the likelihood of abiding by these goals and values.

Assessing the Role of Alcohol among Changes in Identity

In the process of analyzing the data, a finding was revealed that there is a limited extent to which participants' alcohol experiences had previously been examined or

organized. The question that asked participants to relate their alcohol use to the changes in their identity and self awareness that they had previously described in the interview process proved the most difficult for participants to address. The results of this question revealed an inconclusive group norm.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study sought to answer the following question: What role(s) does alcohol use

play in relation to certain developmental tasks during college years in women. The

literature identifies some specific goals and direction for movement along developmental

transitions. Further, the literature reveals that alcohol may serve constructive and

destructive functions in the developmental process. While suggestions have been made as

to the roles of alcohol use in specific areas of development, a lack of clarity in the

literature remains.

This study aims to learn more about areas of development that alcohol may affect.

This chapter will relate key findings of the study to the literature. Some findings support

the literature and others provided new areas for further study. This chapter will also

outline implications for clinical social work practice and training, as well as offer a

discussion of the strengths and limitations of this research.

Findings in Alcohol Use

Results of the AUDIT classified the average participant's use of alcohol during

college years as harmful. According to Babor et al. (2001, p 6), harmful use "refers to

alcohol consumption that results in consequences to physical and mental health. Some

would also consider social consequences among the harms caused by alcohol." This

definition is similar to that of binge drinking, which is classified as the consumption of a

sufficiently large amount of alcohol that increases the likelihood that the drinker will experience secondhand effects such as physical injury and experiences that affect mental health (Weschler et al., 1994). Thus, participants' reported alcohol use during college years may reflect typical college drinking styles.

In comparison to a previous study using the AUDIT as a primary method of measurement, participants in this study scored slightly higher than their peers previously studied. Faulkner, Hendry, Roderique and Thomson (2006) found the average AUDIT scores for 139 female college students at a particular university was 12.1. Another study assessing a random sample of participants walking near a large university found the mean AUDIT score of 9.8 (Hustad & Carey, 2005). Hustad and Carey's (2005) sample, however, consisted of mixed gender participants and not all participants were college students. The mean score of this sample may reflect slightly higher than typical female college student's alcohol use. Although these results may not be generalized to the typical female college alcohol use, they certainly describe a prevalent pattern among these participants.

Results of this study reveal that while participants drinking changed over the course of their college years, a decrease in use was not universal. Instead, participants described changes that reflected a learning process from overuse. As a result of negative experiences with alcohol, participants reported that they learned their limits with alcohol and altered their drinking style accordingly. Three participants reported that this realization resulted in decreased use of alcohol, supporting Brown et al. (2008), Maggs and Schulenberg (2004) and Schulenberg and Maggs' (2002) theory of young adult alcohol use; there exists a normative period of high alcohol use that typically declines in

43

adulthood. The literature suggests that participants in this study who did not report a decline in their use of alcohol may do so once they definitively reach adulthood.

This result highlights the importance for college students to learn from experiences that occurred while drinking. Participants reported learning about their drinking habits as they relate to their comfort in the social environment, ability to complete academic work and the consequences of their own behavior. This result challenges Brown et al.'s (2008) discussion of alcohol use in young adulthood. Brown et al. (2008) state that while alcohol use in young adulthood may function in part to accomplish particular developmental tasks, it is not necessarily optimal in light of the dangers of excessive drinking. While Brown et al.'s (2008) acknowledgment of the dangers of high alcohol use is critical; experiences with alcohol in college are likely (Weschler et al., 1994). Therefore, in light of the vast amounts of alcohol use on college campuses, learning from experiences with alcohol may be unavoidable and, in fact, necessary for development in individuals who choose to drink. One participant stated "I mean, drinking was definitely a common interest between all of us [friends]. And I think that I would have missed out on so many laughs, good food, good talks and chats and just crazy things, running around and having fun [if I chose not to drink]." Given that her social environment included alcohol use, had she chosen not to participate, significant experiences would have been missed.

Findings in Development

Multiple findings of participant's experiences with development support the literature. Schulenberg et al. (1997) outline developmental transitions in the young adult

life stage into three categories; affiliation changes in relationships associated with parents, peers, and romantic partners; achievement transitions for example school and work transitions; and identity transitions such as changes in self-definition and ethnic identity formation. Findings from this research support the literature in the described goals and movement towards adulthood along these defined developmental areas.

Affiliation Transitions

Carter and McGoldrick's (1999, p 215) description of the goals of young adulthood include a need to "export relatedness" from the family of origin to a few select others, whether peers or romantic partners. Young adults aim to differentiate their ties with their family of origin with, ideally, continued support and attachment. Findings from this research support these described goals for affiliation transitions with participants' family and peer relationships.

Results of this study supported the young adult changes in parental relationships. As the young women physically separated from their families to attend college; participants described an increase in appreciation, support and closeness with their parents. Participants maintained an attachment with their parents that typically included support and mutual respect. Additionally, four participants described previously strained relationships with parents, particularly mother, during high school. These relationships, too, changed as these participants attended college and felt an increase in appreciation for their mothers.

In terms of exporting their ability to intimately relate to others from the family of origin to peers, the findings support this achievement as participants typically described eventually finding a small intimate group of close friends. The process of finding such

peer groups that participants described is consistent with Carter and McGoldrick's (1999) description of developmental movement in young adult's peer relationships. Carter and McGoldrick (1999) state that the quality of peer relationships change as young adults tend to seek out peers with similar goals, values and behaviors. Participants described initial friendships of convenience in college based on proximity of living spaces and superficial common interests in the classroom or through athletic opportunities. The norm includes subsequent changes in friendships as participants found a deeper connection with friends that shared common interests and goals. Similarly, this finding describes a strengthening in core friendships based on these mutual interests and behaviors; as participants found more meaningful friendships, the larger friendship groups of convenience morphed into smaller and intimate groups.

Results of participants' described changes in romantic and sexual relationships are consistent with changes described in the literature. This finding revealed a typical movement towards more mature and healthy relationships. In learning from past experiences, participants gained clarity about their own needs and desires in romantic and sexual relationships that allowed for healthier and more serious romantic relationships. As previously mentioned, Carter and McGoldrick (1999) state that romantic relationships in young adulthood typically change as individuals seek relationships that are based on mutual goals, values and behaviors. As participants clarified their own needs, which are likely based on personal values and goals, their romantic relationships evolved.

Achievement Transitions

Results of this study are congruent with theories presented in the literature that describe the developmental tasks in academic transitions in young adulthood. These

experiences include success in adapting to and performing well in academic tasks, such as graduating, earning acceptable grades, making career decisions or other decisions with regard to one's future (Cohen et al., 2003; Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1997; and Carter and McGoldrick, 1999).

The findings in academic transitions revealed commonalities among the group in the development of interests and commitment to their relevant course work. Participants became increasingly committed to their academic success as their course work reflected their interests. Findings also revealed that the transition into college level work from high school proved difficult for many participants. Higher expectations for the quality and quantity of their work, coupled with a typically general and broad course load, challenged the participants early in their college careers. Participants described the necessity of learning to adapt their own learning style in order to succeed. This process, along with declaring a major and/or taking courses of interest, allowed participants to navigate the academic system with relevant ease and success.

Results also revealed general trends in participants' ability to harness and/or persue their career interests while in college. All participants graduated from college, a requirement for participation in the study. Five participants graduated without a plan for the future or career goal. The remainder of participants maintained a general plan for post graduation life or had secured enrollment in graduate school or the work force. Although five participants graduated without a future career plan, they did process previous areas of interest in which they chose not to pursue a career. Certainly, college provides opportunity to take classes in subjects that interest students and students subsequently decide whether or not to pursue the subject further. Therefore, while some participants

47

had not decided on a career prior to graduation, they may have made multiple decisions in regard to their future along the way, for example careers they were not interested in, an important task for this time period.

Identity Transitions

The literature outlines specific tasks in the transitions in young adults' identity which were addressed by each participant. Tasks in identity transitions include a commitment to an integrated set of personal beliefs, values and goals based on exploration of lifestyles, philosophies, relationships and behaviors (Schulenberg and Maggs, 2002; Schulenberg et al., 1997; and Carter and McGoldrick, 1999). Participants' responses mirrored these tasks as the findings state that the clarification and dedication of personal values and goals for the future evolved from participants learning what is important to them. Participants referenced specific interests, passions, people and activities that brought joy as important to feel committed to. Most participants recalled a specific experience which they learned from and provided details about the lesson learned. Further, the findings state that participants experienced increased comfort and confidence within themselves as they felt increasingly connected to certain values and goals. The identity transitions for these participants reflect an ability to integrate personal values and beliefs as a result of exploring and learning from different life experiences.

The Effects of Alcohol Use on Developmental Transitions

As discussed, previous research reveals an acceptance that alcohol use may have both constructive and destructive roles in the development of young adults (Jessor, 1987; Silberiesen and Noack, 1988; Park, 2004; and Park and Grant, 2005). Some findings

from this study are consistent with previous research that alludes to certain constructive aspects of alcohol use. Other findings provide new information and offer the participant's perspective on the relationship between their alcohol use and developmental transitions.

Participants reflected on the role of alcohol in their affiliation transitions. Participants recalled connections between their alcohol use and changes in their friendships and sexual or romantic relationships, but no connection to their relationships with their parents. The findings from this study support Maggs' (1997) findings that alcohol use helps to achieve valued social goals such as making new friends in college. Participants reported initial friendships of convenience that were often initiated in a social environment involving alcohol.

This study provides further insight as to how alcohol relates to changes in friendships that participants experienced. Previous results discussed participants' reported changes in friendships during college as progressively moving towards increasingly intimate friendships based on mutual interests and behaviors. Most participants recalled the progression of this intimacy and discussed the bonding experienced with friends in the alcohol induced social environment. The bonding experiences described included the personal details involved in a night spent with friends, typically drinking alcohol. These included the act of getting ready to go out together, the shared experiences while socializing, typically out at night, and the shared experience of reflecting on the night's previous events. One participant describes these bonding experiences:

> …A lot of our time spent together, you know rather than studying or doing things like that, were with my friends getting ready to go out. And the most fun times were when we were…getting dressed, singing fun songs, dancing around and we were always drinking when that was happening. And I feel like that was a bonding experience for us. Looking back…we would have more fun hanging out

in our dorm room getting ready and blasting country music and singing…It was so much fun and I think…drinking definitely enhanced those times.

This participant clearly finds that alcohol use, in these intimate moments, enhanced bonding experiences with her friends.

Results provide new insight into the participant's view of their alcohol use and its connection to sexual and romantic relationships. Findings reveal a group norm that alcohol aided to create and foster connections with sexual partners. These results support Park's (2004) theory that alcohol offers social performance enhancement and social lubrication for college students. Schulenberg et al. (1997) state that acceptance and exploration of sexuality is a healthy and normal experience during the young adult phase. While acknowledging the risk of unwanted sexual experiences that alcohol use may foster, it also provides a sense of confidence and bravery to initiate and/or accept wanted sexual advances with a partner. These findings offer examples of the constructive aspects of alcohol use in affiliation transitions in development of college women.

In discussion of the role of alcohol in academic transition, results revealed two norms; six participants found that their initial alcohol use negatively affected their academic work and seven reported no connection. The former of these norms offers new insight to the destructive role that alcohol may play in relation to academic work. Participants discussed learning to balance their alcohol use with their academic work. While this relationship may begin as negative, changes occurred as success in academics becomes more significant.

Participants could reflect on some questions with more ease than others. Questions that proved most challenging are those that required participants to discuss the relationship between their alcohol use and changes in parental relationships, academics

50

and identity. This result reveals the limited extent to which participants' alcohol experiences had previously been examined or organized. Participants were willing to attempt to verbalize how alcohol related to their experiences; however, the role of alcohol in relation to parental relationship, academic and identity changes likely still remained fugitive. Participants graduated from college between one and five years ago which is likely not substantial time to truly reflect on or integrate one's experience. However, the questionnaire provided participants an opportunity to further reflect upon and process a generally unexamined experience with alcohol.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the lack of diversity among the sample. The homogeneity of the sample is likely explained by the recruitment method used: the snowball method which tends to elicit a homogenous sample. All participants were White female who had graduated from a four-year college. Nearly all reported middle class status and employment or graduate school, offering a highly functioning group of women. Certainly commonalities were revealed among the sample that offered rich results and findings; however, the homogeneity among the participants decreases the ability to generalize these findings outside the sample characteristics. And although findings may not relate to the general population, they certainly revealed patterns and prevalent norms.

The study attempted to gather information on participants' experiences that may not have been previously examined or reflected upon. This reveals both a strength and a limitation of the study. Participants were offered a new opportunity to begin reflecting on

51

their own experiences by participating in the interview. This is a strength of the study as it provides participants with a framework for gaining new insights on their experiences. This is also a limitation as the study assumed that these experiences had already been examined, thus revealing inconclusive findings.

Another strength in this study was the use of the structured survey (AUDIT) and the open ended questions. The AUDIT was previously used to measure college age drinking behaviors that allowed for comparisons among this study's sample to previously studied samples. The open ended questions provided rich narrative data while offering voice to the participants' experiences.

Implications for Clinical Practice

This study reveals implications for clinical social work practice, especially on college campuses. Given the extent of available research and ongoing programs devoted to exploring the rampant use of alcohol on college campuses, this study maintains a relevant and interesting focus for those involved in higher education. Although it is important to consider the harmful effects of binge drinking on the college student, this study supports previous research that drinking is not only typical (Weschler et al., 1994), but students may find that it aids in fostering friendships and relationships. This finding suggests the use of a harm reduction approach to drinking on college campuses, given the important developmental transitions during this life period. Harm reduction approaches to drinking entail interventions that aim to reduce the problematic effects of alcohol use, which is likely a reasonable goal for the college student as compared to abstinence. Logan and Marlatt (2010) report that multiple harm reduction approaches to college

52

alcohol use have proven effective as reported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Interventions include, but are not limited to, cognitive-behavioral skills, clarification of norms and web-based surveys. Thus, Logan and Marlatt (2010) find that the practical goals and unbiased attitude offered by harm reduction interventions are effective in lowering the negative effects of alcohol use among college age populations.

Future Research

This study certainly offers suggestions for future research. Future research is certainly feasible as there are ample potential participants who are willing to participate in this research. This study revealed a sample of participants who were easy to access and were open, reflective and good informants about their experiences.

This study stimulated self-reflection on experiences for participants that were previously unexamined. While the open narrative method was useful in revealing preliminary perspectives, further pursuit would be valuable. Future research should address these specific transitions (parental relationships, academic changes and identity changes) to gain further and more detailed results. In order to do so, researchers should allow an extended time period between the date of participants' graduation from college and the date of the survey. Further research should also address whether participants gain further insight into their experiences with time. If the same cohort were examined in the future, would their responses differ from this study?

Conclusion

This study aimed to bridge a gap in the literature by examining the role of alcohol along specific developmental transitions by examining the participants' perspective. It was revealed that alcohol use holds constructive properties in the attainment of developmental tasks as they relate to peer and romantic or sexual relationships, as reported by the participant. Similarly, initial alcohol use in the college environment was reported to have a destructive relationship with academic attainment; however, participants also reported changes in this relationship with time. Further, results proved inconclusive as to the role of alcohol in relation to parental relationships and identity changes and future research is indicated. Lastly, by offering voice to the participant, it is clear that drinking alcohol on college campuses is not only typical, but it may foster the attainment of certain developmental goals salient during this time period. Therefore, attention should be given to clinical interventions that acknowledge the significance of alcohol use for this population, such as harm reduction techniques.

REFERENCES

Babor, T.F., Higgins-Biddle, J.C., Saunders, J.B. & Monteiro, M.G. (2001). The alcohol use disorders identification test; Guidelines for use in primary care. World Health Organization, Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence.

Bachman, J.G, O'Malley, P.M., Schulenberg, J.E., Johnston, L.D., Bryant, A.L. & Merline, A.C. (2002). Literature Review: Conceptual and Empirical Overview of Issues. In *The decline of substance use in young adulthood; Changes in social activities, roles and beliefs.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Berzoff, J. (2008) Psychosocial Ego Development. In J. Berzoff, L.M. Flanagan & P. Hertz (Eds.). *Inside out and outside in; Psychodynamic clinical theory and psychopathology in contemporary multicultural contexts.* Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Berzoff, J. (2008). Freud's psychoanalytic concepts. In J. Berzoff, L.M. Flanagan & P. Hertz (Eds.). In *Inside out and outside in; Psychodynamic clinical theory and psychopathology in contemporary multicultural contexts*. Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishishing Group, Inc.

Bohn, M.J., Babor, T.F. & Kranzler, H.R. (1995). The alcohol use disorder identification test (AUDIT): Validation of a screening instrument for use in medical settings. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 56*(4), 423-432.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice.* New York: Jason Aronson.

Brown, S.A., McGue, M., Maggs, J., Schulenberg, J. Hingson, R., Swartzwelder, S.... Martin, C.(2008). A developmental perspective on alcohol and youths 16 to 20 years of age. *Pediatrics 121*(S4), 290-310.

Carter, B. & McGoldrick, M. (1999). Becoming an adult: Leaving the home and staying connected. In *The expanded family life cycle: Individual, family and social perspectives, 3rd Ed* (215-230). Boston : Allyn and Bacon.

Cohen, P., Kasen, S., Chen, H., Hartmark, C. & Gordon, K. (2003). Variations in patterns of developmental transitions in the emerging adulthood period. *Developmental Pscyhology, 39*(4), 657-669.

Faulkner, S., Hendry, L.B., Roderique, L. & Thomson, R. (2006). A preliminary study of the attitudes, triggers and consequences of hazardous drinking in university students. *Health Education Journal, 65*(2), 159-169.

Hustad, J.T. & Carey, K.B. (2005). Using calculations to estimate blood alcohol concentrations for naturally occurring drinking episodes: a validity study. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 66*(1), 130 – 139.

Jessor, R. (1987). Problem-behavior theory, psychosocial development and adolescent problem behavior. *British Journal of Addiction, 82*, 331-342

Jessor, R., Turbin, M.S. & Costa, F.M. (1997). Predicting developmental change in risky driving: The transition to young adulthood. *Applied Developmental Science 1*(1), 4-16.

Johnson, P. & McNeil, K. (1998). Predictors of developmental task attainment for young adults from divorced families. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 20*(2), 237-250.

Knight, J.R., Weschler, H., Kuo, M., Seibring, M., Weitzman, E.R. & Schuckit, M.A. (2002). Alcohol abuse and dependence among U.S. college students. *Journal of Studies of Alcohol, 63*(3), 263-270.

Logan, D.E. & Marlatt, G.A. (2010). Harm reduction therapy: A practice-friendly review of research. In *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 66*(6), 201-214.

Maggs, J.L. (1997). Alcohol use and binge drinking as goal-directed action during the transition to postsecondary education. In *Health risks and developmental transitions during adolescence* (345-370). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Maggs, J.L., Almeida, D.M. & Galambos, N.L. (1995). Risky business: The paradoxical meaning of problem behavior for young adolescents. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 15*(3), 339-357.

Maggs, J.L. & Schulenberg, J.E. (2004). Trajectories of alcohol use during the transition to adulthood. *Alcohol Research and Health 28*(4), 195-200.

Markiewicz, D., Lawford, H., Doyle, A.B. & Haggart, N. (2006). Developmental differences in adolescents' and young adults' use of mothers, fathers, best friends, and romantic partners to fulfill attachment needs. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(1), 127-140.

Moffit, T.E. (1993). Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review, 100*(4), 674-701.

Park, C.L. & Grant, C. (2005). Determinants of positive and negative consequences of alcohol consumption in college students: Alcohol use, gender, and psychological characteristics. *Addictive Behaviors, 30*(4), 755-765.

Park, C.L. (2004). Positive and negative consequences of alcohol consumption in college students. *Addictive Behaviors, 29*(2), 311-321.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2010). Measurement in quantitative and qualitative inquiry. In *Essential research methods for social work ,* (79-92). Belmont: Brooks/Cole.

Schulenberg, J.E. & Maggs, J.L. (2002). A developmental perspective on alcohol use and heavy drinking during adolescence and the transition to young adulthood. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol Supplement, 63*(2), 54-71.

Schulenberg, J.E. & Maggs, J.L. (2008). Destiny matters: Distal developmental influences on adult alcohol use and abuse. *Addiction, 103*(S1), 1-6.

Schulenberg, J.E., Maggs, J.L. & Hurrelmann, K. (1997). Negotiating developmental transitions during adolescence and young adulthood: Health risks and opportunities. In *Health Risks and Developmental Transitions During Adolescence* (1-19). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shelder, J. & Block, J. (1990). Adolescent drug use and psychological health: A longitudinal inquiry. *American Psychologist, 45*(5), 612-630.

Silbereisen, R.K. & Noack, P. (1988). On the constructive role of problem behavior in adolescence. In N. Bolger, A.Caspi, G. Downey & M.Moorhouse (Eds.), *Persons in context: Developmental processes* (152-180). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2008* (NCES 2009-020), Chapter 3.

Weschler, H., Davenport, A., Dowdall, G., Moeykens, B. & Castillo, S. (1994). Health and behavioral consequences of binge drinking in college; A national survey of students at 140 campuses. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 272*(21), 1672-1677.

Weschler, H. & Nelson, T.F. (2001). Binge drinking and the American college student: What's five drinks? *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 15*(4), 287-291.

SMITH COLLEGE
School for
Social Work

Smith College,
Northampton Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950
F (413) 585-7950

December 21, 2009

Megan Willey

Dear Megan,

Your amended materials have been reviewed. You have done an excellent job with their revision and all is now in order. We are therefore now happy to give final approval to your project.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with this interesting project. The use of alcohol by college students has been of growing concern and it will be most interesting to see what these participants have to say about it and their views of its effect.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Roger Miller, Research Advisor

College Graduates…

Did you play drinking games with friends in college? Was drinking a large part of your social experience in college?

If you are a woman who graduated from college between 2003 and 2008 and are English speaking, I need your help:

My name is Megan Willey and I am a social work graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of gathering information for a research study. This study aims to better understand the relationship between alcohol and developmental transitions in college in women and I want to learn from you and your experience.

Participation entails an interview lasting 45 minutes to an hour. **A $5 gift card to Dunkin Donuts will be offered in appreciation for participation!**

Please contact me if you are interested!
Megan Willey
collegedrinkinginterview@gmail.com

59

Phone or Email Screening Questions

Hi_____.

I just need to go over a few questions with you in order to make sure that my research interests are a good fit with your experiences.

Did you graduate from a four year college?

What year did you graduate?

And how old are you?

Did you drink alcohol during your four years in college?

Appendix D
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you for considering this interview. My name is Megan Willey and I am a social work graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of gathering information for a research study. This study aims to better understand the relationship between alcohol and developmental transitions in college and I want to learn from you and your experience. The information I gather will be used in my master's thesis and in possible professional publications and presentations.

I am looking for women research participants who graduated from a 4 year undergraduate college between the years 2003 and 2008. Your participation entails answering a brief questionnaire about your drinking experiences and a face to face interview to reflect on your college experiences. The interview will take about 45 minutes to complete.

A $5 gift card to Dunkin Donuts will be offered as appreciation for participation. This interview may provide a chance for you to share your experience and further explore your own personal development in college. The results of this study may benefit the field of social work by providing insight into college experiences and suggestions for the helping professionals who serve college campuses. Participation in the interview may include some minimal risk of emotional discomfort as you reflect on your personal experience. A list of resources will be provided at the end of the interview should you need any additional support.

Confidentiality will be maintained to the fullest extent possible. All identifying

information will remain separate from interview answers and all names will be disguised.

Demographic information will be used in the analysis of the data; however, names will

remain confidential. My research advisor will have access to the data after all identifying

information has been removed. In publications or presentations, the data will be presented

as a whole and when brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, they will be carefully

disguised. All data, including notes, tapes, transcripts and questionnaires will be kept in a

secure location for a period of three years as required by Federal guidelines and data

stored electronically will be protected. Should I need the material beyond the three year

period, they will continue to be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when no

longer needed.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer

any question in this interview may choose to withdraw from this interview by March 1,

2010. Your answers will be immediately destroyed should you choose to withdraw from

participation within the stated time period. You may contact me if you have any other

questions. If you have any other concerns about the interview or your rights, please

contact me or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects

Review Committee at (413) 585- 7974.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND
UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD
THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR
PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

_____   _____

Signature   Date

       I will provide a second copy of the consent agreement which you may keep for

your records.

       Thank you for your interest and participation.

       Megan Willey

       Smith College School for Social Work

       Master's Degree Student

Demographics Questions

1. Age

2. Year of college undergraduate graduation.

3. Gender

4. Race/Ethnicity

5. Current job/education status

6. Socioeconomic class of your family of origin

7. Religion or spiritual affiliation

Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test interview version.

1. How often did you have a drink containing alcohol in your four college years?
   (0) Never – skip to questions 9-10.
   (1) Monthly or less
   (2) 2 to 4 times a month
   (3) 2 to 3 times a week
   (4) 4 or more times a week

2. How many drinks containing alcohol did you have on a typical day when you were drinking during your four college years?
   (0) 1 or 2
   (1) 3 or 4
   (2) 5 or 6
   (3) 7, 8, or 9
   (4) 10 or more

3. How often did you have six or more drinks in one occasion during your four years in college?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly
   (3) Weekly
   (4) Daily or almost daily

4. In your four college years, how often did you find that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly
   (3) Weekly
   (4) Daily or almost daily

5. In your four college years, how often did you fail to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly
   (3) Weekly
   (4) Daily or almost daily

6. In your four college years, how often did you need an alcoholic drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly

(3) Weekly
(4) Daily or almost daily

7. How often in your four college years did you have feelings of guilt or remorse after drinking?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly
   (3) Weekly
   (4) Daily or almost daily

8. How often in your four college years were you unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?
   (0) Never
   (1) Less than monthly
   (2) Monthly
   (3) Weekly
   (4) Daily or almost daily

9. Were you or someone else ever injured as a result of your drinking during your four college years?
   (0) No
   (3) Yes

10. Was a relative or friend or a doctor or another health worker ever concerned about your drinking during your four years in college or suggest you cut down?
    (0) No

    (3) Yes

Developmental Transition Questions

1. In overview, how would you characterize your college experience?

    a. Did you graduate in four consecutive years? Did you ever take time off? And ask for explanations if necessary.

"I'm going to be asking you questions in three different areas in which you may have experienced changes during your college years. I'll be asking you questions about changes in your relationships, in academics and in your own identity;"

Relationship Questions:

2. When you think back to your four college years, did you notice any changes in your friendships?

3. Did your group of friends change at all? How if at all did your view of your friends change?

4. How did your view or understanding of your parents change at all over your four college years?

5. Was there any transition in this from when you entered college to when you graduated?

6. Thinking back, how did your romantic or sexual relationships change, if at all over the course of four college years.

7. After talking about all of these relationships, were any of the changes you just described connected to your use of alcohol during that same period?

Academic Questions:

8. When you think back, were there any changes or adjustments in your academic or work achievement(s) over the course of your four college years that you can speak to?

9. Did you know what you wanted to do after graduation? What was your plan for moving on?

10. After talking about your academics and/or work can you speak to how your use of alcohol may or may not relate to those changes you just described?

Identity Questions:

11. How did your use of alcohol change over the course of your college years?

12. How would describe your consumption of alcohol in relation to your peers in your social environment? Did you drink more or less than your friends?

13. Thinking back, how have you changed throughout and since college?

14. How have your own ideas about self identity changed? How have your perceptions and view of yourself changed?

15. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself throughout college?

16. Thinking back, were there any particular experiences that you learned from (good and/or bad) during your four college years?

17. After sharing about your own identity, is there any connection with your use of alcohol and those changes you just described?

18. Are there any questions that you feel like I should have asked you?