

SOCIAL NORMING THROUGH ALCOHOL ADVERTISING
AND BINGE DRINKING ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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DEDICATION

Thank you to everyone who supported me and gave me strength to finish this mammoth of a project! For that, I dedicate this to my family, friends, and loved ones who continued to support and challenge me throughout this process (you know who you are). I could not have done it without you and for that, I am truly grateful!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Definitions.....	2
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
How Alcohol Advertising Corresponds to Drinking Behavior.....	5
How Social Norming Corresponds to Drinking Behavior.....	11
How Gender Corresponds to Drinking Behavior.....	16
How the Third Person Effect Hypothesis Corresponds to Drinking Behavior	21
3. METHOD.....	25
Utilizing Focus Groups.....	25
Recruiting Participants.....	27
Conducting the Focus Groups.....	31
Television beer commercial examples.....	32
Amendments from the Pilot Study.....	33
Collecting and Analyzing the Data.....	33
4. RESULTS.....	36
Alcohol Advertising’s Relatability Factor.....	36
The Need to Feel Included.....	38
Reinforcing Perceptions.....	44

Social Norming’s Connection to Alcohol Advertising.....	55
5. DISCUSSION.....	63
Discussion.....	63
Limitations.....	75
Future Research.....	76
References.....	80
Appendix.....	86
A. Recruitment Script.....	86
B. Consent Form.....	89
C. Focus Group Script.....	91
D. List of Television Beer Commercials to Use During the Focus Group.....	92
E. How the Research Questions and Focus Group Questions Relate.....	93

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Abstract

Binge drinking is a problem on campuses with alcohol related deaths increasing from 1,440 in 1998 to 1,825 in 2005, a 3 percent increase per 100,000 students (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009). It is difficult not to wonder the following question: How do alcohol advertising and social norming correspond to alcohol-related behaviors on college campuses? Through a series of focus groups, obtained from a large, public Midwestern university, I hoped to gain more insight into this phenomenon. From the literature, four empirical generalizations (EG's) emerged. First, alcohol advertising affects consumers from a young age. Second, social norms inspire heavy drinking behaviors. Third, social norming and alcohol advertising correspond to both females and males, social norms are increasingly affecting females and females are then drinking more to fit in with their peers. Fourth, the Third Person Effect Hypothesis depicts to what extent people perceive advertisements relate to others and themselves. Thus, this thesis focuses on the practical aspects of alcohol advertising's effects as well as theoretical implications gleaned from social norming and Third Person Effect Hypothesis research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Nearly every research article about the phenomenon of binge drinking and poor drinking behavior in college supported the idea that it is a serious problem on college campuses. After a review of literature, Hingson et al. (2009) determined that hundreds of thousands of college students are injured or killed in alcohol-related incidents. For example, on average, 1,825 students aged 18 to 24 die from alcohol-related injuries, including drunken driving accidents each year (Hingson et al., 2009). Furthermore, in 2001, students who had been drinking physically assaulted 696,000 students and sexually assaulted 97,000 students or peers. These statistics are staggering and call for a change concerning the use and abuse of alcohol on campuses.

Throughout the following research reviews and articles, four themes emerged. First, alcohol advertising was an influential factor in determining a person's drinking habits. Next, social norming was pertinent in manipulating students' drinking behaviors because they were constantly comparing themselves to their peers. Additionally, as society changes, social norms corresponded to increased female drinking behaviors, but there was a gap in the research here. Last, the Third Person Effect Hypothesis determined the extent to which people perceived advertisements affected themselves versus others. These four themes then begged the question: *How do beer commercials on television relate to binge drinking and subsequent social norming for females on college campuses?*

Much of the literature focused on these four themes separately and there was not a distinct connection between them. While each of these was important in understanding

the overall effects on drinking behavior, it was integral to focus on the overlap between them. In order to glean the indicators from both advertising and social norming on alcohol abuse, I studied these articles through the lens of female college students. This was because I was primarily concerned with the power of alcohol advertising and social norming on this population. Therefore, through this literature review I discerned what other researchers discovered so that I could fill the gap in the research and our society as a whole could move towards healthier collegiate drinking behaviors.

Definitions

It was important to define the Theory of Social Norming as described in each of the following texts. Perkins and Berkowitz (1986) were the first researchers to define social norming through the context of drinking on college campuses. Although other researchers intimated the theory through studies about peer behaviors (Rachal, Maisto, Guess & Hubbard, 1982) and perceptions of peer behavior (Jessor, 1981; Kandel, 1980), Perkins and Berkowitz (1986) were the first to develop it in depth. For their study and subsequent development of the theory, the researchers questioned the personal attitudes of students towards drinking and the effects of these attitudes on “normative perceptions and misperceptions of drinking” (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986, p. 963).

Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren (1990) discerned two types of social norms: descriptive and injunctive. They differed in that one dealt with the perception of how others *are* acting (descriptive) and the other deals with the perception of how someone *ought* to act (injunctive) (Cialdini et al., 1990). Dunleavy (2008) further defined descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms were “perceptions of other’s quantity and/or frequency of drinking (typically observed to be overestimations)...”

while injunctive norms were “assessed as perceived levels of permissiveness (approval) of drinking on campus by student peers” (Dunleavy, 2008, p. 472). Therefore, for a study to accurately examine social norming, Cialdini et al. (1990) concluded that it must first determine which type of norming was occurring in the given setting. Then, according to Cialdini et al. (1990), one must observe how students could conform to or defy the norm in order to predict “norm-consistent” behavior (p. 1024).

The following study also assessed the Third Person Effect Hypothesis and how this affected students’ binge-drinking behaviors. Davison (1983) was the first researcher to delve into this hypothesis, as he contemplated the power of leaflets the Japanese gave African American servicemen during WWII. The leaflets encouraged African American soldiers to stop fighting and ironically they seemed to have little to no effect on the servicemen themselves. Yet, the American leaders feared the leaflets would influence the servicemen immensely and they would desert. Davison (1983) continued to develop the theory and defined it as the prediction that “people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitude and behaviors of *others*” (p. 3). Davison (1983) continued, “Individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to persuasive communication... will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves” (p. 3). This was an important, yet secondary, theory to utilize within this research study because the use of persuasive advertising was prevalent. Thus, the likelihood of Third Person Effect’s influence among college females was high and was questioned and validated throughout the research portion of this study.

In addition to social norming, the focus of this study was alcohol advertising, which is a very complex form of communication that Rodgers and Thorson (2012) described in

their book *Advertising Theory*. The editors described a model where all of the communication components of advertising, like effects and audience, were used to organize the vast array of advertising research (Rodgers & Thorson, 2012). Thus, this new model of compartmentalizing advertising research was a guide to my literature review and shed light on all of the potential factors surrounding the influence of advertising that I described throughout my review.

Furthermore, the following review also examined binge drinking. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) (2013), when a person drinks alcohol over a two-hour period and reaches a 0.08 g/dL Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC), they are binge drinking. Binge drinking is typically achieved after four drinks for females and after five drinks for males (NIAAA, 2013).

Furthermore, this study examined the television commercials from the top beer brands in the U.S. According to Siegel et al. (2013) in the only comprehensive discussion of consumption by brand, beer was the beverage youth consume most. Consequently, beer was also the beverage for which they see the most advertisements (Siegel et al., 2013). Additionally, more than 1,000 youth who were representative of the population participated in this quantitative study (Siegel et al., 2013). The sample was slightly skewed towards females and heavily towards youth in their late teens and college-aged students due to eligibility for the study, where youth must have consumed at least one drink of alcohol in the 30 days preceding the study. Overall, the study concluded that the top brands of beer that youth consume are Bud Light, Budweiser, Coors Light and Corona (Siegel et al., 2013). For the examples in my focus groups, I focused on Bud Light and Corona.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Carlson and Laczniak (2012) used a specific method to review literature on advertising and children, which involves identifying empirical generalizations in a body of literature. Empirical generalizations (EG's) are concrete facts and assumptions drawn from other researchers' conclusions that stand the test of time and have been repeated consistently (Carlson & Laczniak, 2012). EG's are identified by conducting an extensive literature review on a given area and identifying consistent findings over time. Articles with consistent and similar findings are then grouped into EG's (Carlson & Laczniak, 2012). EG's are particularly useful for studies that examine a broad literature or that draw from multiple literatures, as the current study does. Thus, to provide a systematic approach to my literature review, I drew on Carlson and Laczniak's (2012) EG literature review method to examine previous research in the area of alcohol advertising, binge drinking, social norming and gender to determine consistent findings (and, hence, identify missing gaps) in the current literature.

How Alcohol Advertising Corresponds to Drinking Behavior

Advertising has been examined as a potential contributing factor to drinking behaviors for several decades (e.g. Anderson, de Bruijn, Angus, Gordon, & Hastings, 2009; Chen, Grube, Bersamin, Waiters, & Keefe, 2005; Austin & Knaus, 2000; Martin et al., 2002). Such studies focused on the potential effects of alcohol advertising and related this to risky drinking behavior. Studies that attempted to correlate alcohol advertising to alcohol behaviors drew on a broad number of factors including demographics that range from gender, ethnicity/race, age in school (elementary school vs. college students), etc.

What this suggested was that the research on alcohol advertising provided a broad basis upon which to place my research, which focused on college students' consumption of alcohol in relation to their viewing of alcohol advertising. Contrary to earlier studies that used quantitative methods (such as a questionnaire) to make these connections, I drew on a qualitative method, focus groups, to gain deeper and richer insights into the potential connections between college students' viewing of alcohol advertising and their perceptions and attitudes toward the advertising in relation to their own binge drinking and their perception of others' binge drinking. Qualitative focus groups provided a different perspective upon which to understand earlier research that suggested that there is a connection between advertising and drinking behavior and offered a new perspective that related the Third Person Effect to existing research. Next, I reviewed a broad number of studies as an attempt to isolate the various EG's that were relevant to my research.

First, Anderson et al. (2009) performed a comprehensive review of all the literature concerning how alcohol advertising corresponds to youth drinking habits. Unlike most research, the authors looked at longitudinal studies, which are analyses that relate to behavior over time, in contrast to cross-sectional studies, which provide a snapshot in time of certain behaviors. Through their study of 13 longitudinal studies that focused on youth aged 18 years and younger, Anderson et al. (2009) discovered that 12 of the 13 studies supported the notion that alcohol advertising caused the onset of drinking behavior for nondrinkers and increased drinking behavior for youth already drinking. Additionally, Gordon, Hastings and Moodie (2010) performed a comprehensive review of alcohol marketing's effect on youth. According to Gordon et al. (2010), the research was beginning to show there was a correlation between consuming alcohol and

advertising, but there was not enough research on the extent of the exposure to the advertising to fully support this claim. Thus, advertisements had an effect on youth and may have increased the amount and extent to which youth consumed alcohol (Anderson et al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2010).

Similarly, Martin et al. (2002) married many research articles into one resource about alcohol advertising and youth from a symposium at the Research Society on Alcoholism meeting in 2001. The researchers featured in the article drew many conclusions including the idea that alcohol advertisements appeal to youth and that youth can easily recall them (Martin et al., 2002). The researchers discovered aspects of advertisements, like humor, actors and a storyline, were especially attractive to youth because these characteristics were interesting and made these advertisements easy to recall (Martin et al., 2002). In a study with similar results, after showing youth commercials, Chen et al. (2005) discerned that the amount to which students admired an ad directly related to the “positive affective responses evoked by the specific elements featured in the advertisement” (Chen et al., 2005, p. 562). Furthermore, although researchers hypothesized that music and animals would be the most popular, the students responded best to humor and story lines (Chen et al., 2005). Thus, alcohol advertisements were detrimental to youth in that they made drinking seem attractive, inspired poor drinking habits later in life and manipulated how youth view alcohol (Martin et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2005).

One narrow lens to observe the interaction between advertisements and consumption is exposure. Ross, Ostroff and Jernigan (2014a), Snyder, Milici, Slater, Sun and Strizhakova (2006) and Ross et al. (2014b) all utilized this lens. Ross et al. (2014a)

analyzed the impact that targeting of alcohol advertisements had on youth using methods “based on a definition of targeting adopted by courts and applied to tobacco advertising in the United States” in the *Lockyer v. Reynolds* proceedings (Ross et al., 2014a, p. 106). The researchers then concluded that youth exposure to alcohol advertising was expanding due to the increased placement of ads on television targeted at 18- to 20-year-olds.

Furthermore, through a random phone survey, Snyder et al. (2006) discovered that youth who viewed more alcohol advertisements as well as youth living in markets where there was a higher expenditure of alcohol advertising both drank more (Snyder et al., 2006). Interestingly, the researchers uncovered the notion that alcohol advertising related to youth who were underage *as well as* those over 21, in a similar way (Snyder et al., 2006). In other words, the relation of alcohol advertising to consumption did not end when students became legal.

Additionally, Ross et al. (2014b) examined the cross-sectional association between the most popular brands that youth consume and the exposure to alcohol advertisements for these brands. The results of this study overwhelmingly contradicted the self-regulatory codes that alcohol advertisers uphold because the researchers found that the 18- to 20-year-old age group was receiving the most exposure to alcohol advertising in these magazines (Ross et al., 2014b). Additionally, as the researchers hypothesized and confirmed, the brands that youth consumed most were also the brands that were most heavily advertised in magazines. These findings (Ross et al., 2014a; Snyder et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2014b) showed that advertisements had a direct effect on youth by increasing exposure and subsequent consumption.

Another narrow lens of looking at this issue was through the theory of

expectancy, which is when people act in a certain way due to the outcome they *expect* to happen. Austin and Knaus (2000) found a positive correlation between advertising and thinking positively about alcohol. Similar to Chen et al.'s (2005) findings, Austin and Knaus (2000) then discovered that third and sixth grade children had “positive identification with portrayals, [where they] wanted to be like [the characters and story line]” (p. 23). Furthermore, there was a moderate correlation between pre-drinking and future risky drinking behaviors, as well as an increase in the belief that drinking would bring rewards (Austin & Knaus, 2000).

Bridging the gap between the two narrow lenses of exposure and expectancy, Fleming, Thorson and Atkin (2004) had four hypotheses that worked jointly regarding exposure to ads, expectancies and subsequent effects. The result of this study, according to Fleming et al. (2004), showed that “the effects of exposure to alcohol advertising were manifest in shaping the attitudes and perceptions in both [underage and of-age groups]” (p. 22). The researchers also discovered that the indirect function of advertising in predisposing positive expectancies affected youths but *not* young adults (Fleming et al., 2004). Therefore, these studies (Austin & Knaus, 2000; Fleming et al., 2004) examined how alcohol advertising corresponded to children's behaviors before they reached college and implicated future behaviors.

A few contradicting assessments of advertising conjectured that alcohol advertising was not the only factor to blame when discussing problem drinking. Smart (1988) confirmed that in both econometric and experimental studies, there was no strong correlation between alcohol advertising and increased consumption. Instead, Smart (1988) noted that advertising was a “weak indicator” of heavy drinking and instead

researchers needed to focus on external factors as well to understand the totality of effects on people (p. 321). Wilcox and Gangadharbatla (2006) came to the same conclusion a few years later. Similarly, Wilcox, Kang and Chilek (2015) discovered that while consumption remained constant, other factors like demographics and price, influence drinking behavior more than advertising. In this way, Smart (1988) Wilcox and Gangadharbatla (2006) and Wilcox et al. (2015) implied that some societal and cultural factors may have also exacerbated drinking and led many to become heavy drinkers.

Through the assessment and compilation of relevant literature concerning alcohol advertising and its effect on youth, a few overarching themes emerged. First, advertising affected youth and youth consumption (Anderson et al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2010). In relation to this idea, youths who have yet to enter college were impressionable, and advertising that specifically appealed to them, including story lines they related to, heavily affected them (Martin et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2005). In addition, youth exposure to advertisements increased alcohol's likeability and subsequent consumption (Ross et al., 2014a; Snyder et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2014b). Furthermore, advertisements that inspired expectancies created false ideas about drinking, which encouraged poor drinking behavior (Austin & Knaus, 2000; Fleming et al., 2004). Last, a few outliers contradicted the strength of advertising as an influence, but still conceded it affected drinking behavior to some extent (Smart, 1988; Wilcox & Gangadharbatla, 2006; Wilcox et al., 2015). Thus, an EG about advertising and behavior is that alcohol advertisements relate to consumers from a young age and encourages heavy drinking later in life. This EG leads us to the following research question:

RQ1. Do female college students think beer advertisers are trying to persuade them to

purchase their product? And if so, how?

How Social Norming Corresponds to Drinking Behavior

In addition to the first EG gleaned from the literature, it was important to also express how other researchers have studied social norming in the past. A few broad strokes showed similar trends to the advertising literature because the following research studies also examined a variety of ages, genders, races and ethnicities from all over the country. The following studies used a variety of quantitative methods and a few qualitative methods to further understand social norming's effects on drinking behaviors. In contrast to the studies about alcohol advertising, these studies only examined college students from a variety of public, private, large, small and geographically varied universities and colleges. This section inspected the literature gathered about social norming and how it affected drinking behavior in college.

Social norming, as defined above by Perkins and Berkowitz (1986), occurs when personal perceptions of peer behaviors affect drinking behavior. Perkins, Haines and Rice (2005) explored social norming further by examining the misperceptions surrounding social norms on college campuses, how this affects heavy drinking and, in turn, prevention programs. They discovered that students believed the drinking norm on their campus was much higher than it actually was (Perkins et al., 2005).

Park, Klein, Smith and Martell (2009) also aimed to determine whether different types of norms (subjective; injunctive and descriptive university-level norms; and US-level norms) worked in tandem or separately to determine drinking behavior (Park et al., 2009). Interestingly, the researchers found the following information:

Although the U.S.-level injunctive and descriptive norms explained only 2 percent

of the variance in intention, the fact they still contributed significantly even after subjective norms were already included in the model may indicate small but not negligible effects of injunctive and descriptive norms in the domain of undergraduates' moderate drinking. (Park et al., 2009, p. 750)

This represented the correlation between injunctive and descriptive norms on drinking on college campuses. This variance in intention was sizeable when compared with the larger student population.

Furthermore, Borsari and Carey's (2003) meta-analysis examined all literature concerning social norms and college drinking and was a comprehensive look at social norming theory. Through the course of their study, Borsari and Carey (2003) found that there were five variables that stimulate self-other discrepancies and subsequent social norming: "norm type... gender... reference group... question specificity... [and] campus size" (p. 332-3). Borsari and Carey's (2003) analysis confirmed the existence of social norms and the power social norms have on drinking behavior in college. Thus, the researchers (Perkins et al., 2005; Park et al., 2009; Borsari & Carey, 2003) all confirmed because students consistently believed their peers were drinking more than in reality, this created a norm from a misperception, which further supported the theory.

Furthermore, a few researchers focused on specific behavioral and external attributes and their effects on social norming (Hustad, Pearson, Neighbors, Borsari, 2014; Glazer, Smith, Atkin, & Hamel, 2010; Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007; Testa, Kearns-Bodkin, & Livingston, 2009; Maggard, 2007). Hustad et al., (2014) looked specifically at students on the brink of entering college and how a variety of societal and behavioral attributes contributed to the proven rise in drinking that a majority of college

students experienced first hand. Similar to other research articles (e.g. Perkins et al., 2005), Hustad et al. (2014) outlined the research already performed to confirm that descriptive norms were the strongest indicator of alcohol abuse, yet perceptions on drinking differed from these norms and were a whole different indicator. The authors concluded that the personality traits of sensation seeking and impulsiveness contributed indirectly to heavy alcohol consumption and worked hand-in-hand with descriptive norms, injunctive norms and overall perceptions of drinking on campus.

Next, Glazer et al. (2010) aimed to examine how sensation-seeking behaviors interacted with social norming and misperceptions about how much peers drink. In this way, Glazer et al. (2010) had five hypotheses, but one main idea: “Sensation seeking, perceptions of moderate peer alcohol consumption... the believability of social norms messages and the interaction of [these would] significantly predict alcohol consumption” (p. 830). Glazer et al. (2010) found that students misperceived the amount their peers consume, and the misperceptions affected individual consumption rates.

Neighbors et al. (2007) assessed variables like gender, alcohol expectancies and Greek affiliation to determine additional influential factors in addition to social norming. Through their data, the researchers found that, in regards to weekly consumption, social norms were a direct correlation to consistent drinking behaviors (Neighbors et al., 2007). Furthermore, according to Neighbors et al. (2007), two factors linked expectancies with social norming: First, “positive expectancies were positively correlated to both drinking and problems [and second,] negative expectancies were positively correlated only to problems” like overdrinking, accidents and injuries (p. 562).

Furthermore, Testa et al. (2009) questioned whether indirect factors like

environment and gender would correspond to women in particular, or whether social norms during their first semester dictated these behaviors (Testa et al., 2009). The research found was two-fold: On the one hand, precollege drinking led some people to find social groups that condoned heavy drinking behavior; on the other hand, the perceived social norms of college, including peer pressure and perceived drinking norms, altered women's drinking behavior (Testa et al., 2009). Additionally, Maggard (2007) discussed the variables that contribute to academic success among freshman, specifically at-risk freshman football players, and confirmed previous research that outside factors like environment of the college itself do influence college students, especially young ones. Although not directly related to alcohol consumption tendencies, his research confirmed the influence of outside factors beyond social norms (Maggard, 2007). Nonetheless, social norms were the main stimulus on drinking behavior with expectancies, gender and other external aspects as a lesser power (Hustad et al., 2010; Glazer et al., 2010; Neighbors et al, 2007; Testa et al., 2009, Maggard, 2007).

Next, Dunleavy (2008) as well as Real and Rimal (2007) both utilized theories as supplements to the Theory of Social Norming within their research. Dunleavy (2008) examined the Theory of Social Norming, the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior, to determine what precisely drove college students to drink excessively. The results supported the notion that students perceived a "permissive drinking culture" (Dunleavy, 2008, p. 481). However, there was not a significant link between behavioral intention and social norming theory, but instead there was a correspondence to the Theory of Reasoned Action's subjective norm of close friends. Therefore, in-group identity could displace group identity (Dunleavy, 2008). In other

words, students' perceptions of their specific social group affected them more than their campus drinking culture overall.

Supplemental to other research, Dunleavy (2008) examined social norm's relation to the intention of students to get drunk. The researcher discovered "the data also revealed that an overestimation in perceptions of excessive alcohol (descriptive norm) consumption by other students existed for both men and women," but this did not directly correspond to intentions to get drunk (Dunleavy, 2008, p. 481). This contradicted research by both Neighbors et al. (2007) and Glazer et al. (2010), which both found a direct connection between social norms and the intention to overdrink. In sum, Dunleavy's (2008) conclusions were important to my research because they focused on the influential factors of social norming as well as related theories, which provided context and perspective.

Another research project that assessed a theory supplemental to the Theory of Social Norming was Real and Rimal's (2007) study of the Theory of Normative Social Behavior. The researchers were fascinated by how it corresponded to peer communication and its effect on alcohol consumption on college campuses. Real and Rimal (2007) hypothesized that descriptive norms and peer communication would be positively correlated with alcohol consumption. The research concluded that there were additional factors, besides descriptive norms, that affected alcohol consumption, and the frequency of communication about drinking also heavily related to students' intent to drink (Real & Rimal, 2007). Real and Rimal (2007) also gleaned information on students' perceptions of other students. Overall, students believed that other students drank much more than they did; "however, further analysis revealed that self-identified

drinkers' perceptions of others' drinking were significantly higher than nondrinkers' perceptions of others' drinking" (Real & Rimal, 2007, p. 178). Additionally, Campo et al. (2003) discovered that social norms heavily influence college students' consumption. Through a study of college students' perceptions, Campo et al. (2003) confirmed other researchers' findings that college students misperceived how much they believe their friends and peers are drinking. Therefore, students who drink perceived others to be drinking much more than them, which could lend itself to excessive drinking.

Overall, many studies focused on the Theory of Social Norming and its impact on college students' drinking behaviors. From the articles above, a few general themes appeared. First, there was a focus on supporting the Theory of Social Norming (Perkins et al., 2005; Park et al., 2009; Borsari & Carey, 2003). Also, social norms were the main factor that affected drinking behavior with expectancies, gender and other external aspects as a lesser power (Hustad et al., 2010; Glazer et al., 2010; Neighbors et al., 2007; Testa et al., 2009; Maggard, 2007). Last, supplemental theories further supported the Theory of Social Norming (Dunleavy, 2008; Real & Rimal, 2007; Campo et al., 2003). From all of these themes an EG presents itself clearly: Social norming corresponds to college students and encourages heavy drinking. Then, from this EG, the following research question presents itself:

RQ2. Do female college students feel that their peers' drinking habits are affected by social norming? Why or why not?

How Gender Corresponds to Drinking Behavior

In addition to the EG's scholars concluded concerning both alcohol advertisements' and social norming's direct and indirect relation to youth consumption,

there was a wide range of research that discussed how gender affects alcohol consumption. Broadly, all of the following studies examined a small section of demographics that included college and post-college adults. In addition, both genders were analyzed as representations of the population because both were affected by advertising and norms in different ways. Therefore, the research covering this area of study was comprehensive and gave immense insight into the area of gender's effect on heavy drinking behavior.

Biologically, there are differences between the male and female body makeup and metabolism that cause the genders to process alcohol at different speeds. In fact, many authors (Ham & Hope, 2003; Hummer, LaBrie, Lac, Sessoms, & Cail, 2012; Piane & Safer, 2008; Schulte, Ramo, & Brown, 2009) examined how social interactions manifest when females want to match males, drink for drink. Through a review of the literature on heavy drinking in college, the authors reviewed all of the aspects that contribute to heavy drinking (Ham & Hope, 2003). Within their literature review, Ham and Hope (2003) discovered the following information:

College women may be approaching male college students' level of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems as gender drinking norms change with... evolving gender norms. These findings illustrate the importance of other sociocultural factors in relation to gender's association with drinking behavior. (p. 726)

Therefore, while females historically had been lighter drinkers in comparison to males, females were beginning to 'catch up,' so to say. Additionally, after surveying social norms as a part of the study, Ham and Hope (2003) noted "it may be that previous literature has not considered these gender differences in alcohol norms" (p. 745). Ham

and Hope (2003) further exposed this gap by reviewing many studies that focused on men instead of women in social drinking situations where social norms were involved.

Therefore, alternatives like focus groups, may shed some light in a different context because the information would not be self-reported in the sense that there would be other people around to encourage truthful reporting.

Additionally, Hummer et al. (2012) examined males' and females' perceptions of how much the opposite sex 'wanted' them to drink. This concept was an extension of social norming called reflective opposite sex norms. Hummer et al. (2012) discovered through their literature review that females believed males wanted females to be able to keep up with them and, in turn, believed males found this attractive. Sadly, the researchers found females repeatedly overestimated how much alcohol they should consume in order for men to find them attractive (Hummer et al., 2012). Furthermore, there was a strong correlation of how many females became heavy drinkers to meet this perceived norm.

Similar to Hummer et al. (2012), Piane and Safer (2008) aimed to determine the differences between expectancies and perceived norms between males and females. First, females reported fewer binge-drinking episodes, which supported previous research in this area that Piane and Safer (2008) cited in their literature review. Second, females did not have as many misperceived norms as males (Piane & Safer, 2008). Interestingly though, these lower norm perceptions were not consistent with Caucasian females who were just as likely to drink as much as their peers and even Caucasian males, making them an at-risk group (Piane & Safer, 2008). This attempt to 'catch up' to males, which the Caucasian females seemed to be displaying within this research study, directly

paralleled Ham and Hope's (2003) findings.

Furthermore, Schulte et al. (2009) discovered that "increased or problematic [consumption] is marked by social, affective, and biological factors that operate differently for males and females" (p. 544). Instead of differences in gender, it was the socialization and even stereotyping that adolescents went through from high school and into college that brought about these erroneous perceptions about consuming alcohol (Schulte et al., 2009). Schulte et al. (2009) discovered similar findings to the above stated research that showed how norms relate to males more, and therefore, males tend to drink more to be perceived as masculine. Additionally, Schulte et al. (2009) confirmed that "teens often overestimate the quantity and frequency with which other adolescents consume alcohol[;] moreover, misperceptions about the collective norm have been shown to influence age of drinking onset and the escalation of use" (p. 542). Therefore, each of the researchers (Ham & Hope; Hummer et al., 2012; Piane & Safer, 2003; Schulte et al., 2009) found that social norms and socialization affected females to an extent and even encouraged females to try to 'keep up' with males.

In contradiction to the above researchers, Yankelevitz, Mitchell and Zhang (2012) found discrepancies in the effects of social norms on the genders. Yankelevitz et al. (2012) examined the disparities of impact that perceptions between genders may have. Yankelevitz et al. (2012) concluded that males were much more likely to be affected by social norms than females. While this deduction confirmed past research, it also contradicted research that concluded females did indeed conform to social norms to an extent (e.g. Ham & Hope, 2003; Hummer et al., 2012). Therefore, there were clear discrepancies in the literature when researchers attempted to make generalizable and

overarching statements concerning the extent to which social norms corresponded to female college students. Again, focus groups could shed a different light on this subject and close the knowledge gap.

Other researchers focused on alcohol advertising and its effects on the genders (Kohn & Smart, 1987; Ross et al., 2014b). Kohn and Smart (1987) directly examined alcohol commercials to test the effect of advertising, specifically commercials, on female consumption. By presenting different groups of women with programming that showed zero, three or nine wine commercials, the researchers concluded that women responded positively to the alcohol commercials when they viewed many of them, but they responded negatively when they only viewed a few commercials (Kohn & Smart, 1987). Thus, Kohn and Smart (1987) showed that females responded positively to alcohol and consumed more when alcohol advertisements were frequent.

In addition to studying the correlation between advertisements and consumption (in the previous section), Ross et al. (2014b) also analyzed the coded data by gender. The alcohol brands that the researchers determined as the top 25 that underage females consumed were also the brands that spent the majority of their advertising dollars in magazines with large numbers of younger readers (Ross et al., 2014b). Thus, Kohn and Smart (1987) as well as Ross et al. (2014b) found that alcohol advertisements affected females differently than males.

Overall, the research concerning gender and alcohol consumption and social norming was broad and at times contradictory. A majority of the researchers agreed that, historically, women had adopted the female stereotype of virtue, and this translated into females drinking less than males (Ham & Hope, 2003; Hummer et al., 2012; Schulte et

al., 2009). With that said, these researchers also found that women were attempting to match the amount that males consumed and both genders were affected by social norms and socialization (Ham & Hope; Hummer et al., 2012; Piane & Safer, 2003; Schulte et al., 2009). Additionally, Yankelevitz et al. (2012) found a few disparities in the social norm and gender research. Last, a few authors concluded that alcohol advertisements affected females and males differently (Kohn & Smart, 1987; Ross et al., 2014b).

Although there were contradictions within the research and there were still many gaps left within this area of study, there is a clear EG: Social norms relate to females, and this predisposes them to drink more to try to fit in with their peers. This EG, leads us to the following research questions:

RQ3.A. What does binge drinking mean to female college students? Do female college students believe they overdrink in certain situations? Is there a different standard for men and women when it comes to 'overdrinking'? Why or why not?

RQ3.B. Do females in college think beer advertisers promote overdrinking? Do the depictions in the beer commercials on television promote overdrinking or not? Why or why not?

RQ3.C. Do female college students feel that television commercials affect their own drinking? Why or why not?

How the Third Person Effect Hypothesis Corresponds to Drinking Behavior

In addition to the EG's scholars synthesized about alcohol advertisements', social norming's and even gender's effects on youth consumption, and there was much research that discussed the Third Person Effect Hypothesis' impact on consumption. The following studies employed a variety of methods and public health issues but broadly

focused on the Third Person Effect Hypothesis. Unlike previous studies, the following researchers used a variety of age groups and they did not separate males and females; instead, the researchers defined everyone outside of the study as the ‘other.’ This helped the following researchers determine how the media corresponded to peoples’ perceptions of how public health issues influenced the ‘others.’

To begin, Davison (1983) was the primary researcher to start to question the perceptions of people exposed to different types of communication. After finding inconsistencies in how servicemen and officers reacted to communication targeted directly at the servicemen, Davison (1983) hypothesized that “people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitude and behaviors of others” (p. 3). Davison (1983) continued to develop the hypothesis and discovered that “individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to persuasive communication... will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves” (p. 3). This was an important, yet secondary, theory to utilize within my research study because the idea that ‘others’ were more affected and therefore drinking more was implied in many previously cited research articles (e.g. Glazer et al., 2010; Real & Rimal, 2007). Therefore, college students continually overestimated how much alcohol their peers consumed and then underestimated how much they personally consumed. These inconsistencies in reporting consumption amounts were intriguing because they further supported the Third Person Effect Hypothesis.

Additionally, Liu and Lo (2014) quantitatively examined the comparisons between media exposure, perceived personal impact and the Third Person Effect Hypothesis. Although Liu and Lo (2014) were interested in the H1N1 swine flu virus as

opposed to binge drinking, the Third Person Effect was pertinent and generalizable to public health issues overall. After a thorough review of the literature, the authors conducted a survey at a Midwestern university to test the hypothesis concerning the effects that media portrayals had on consumers (Liu & Lo, 2014). The researchers' findings expanded the Third Person Effect Hypothesis further because they determined that the more people were exposed to public health issues in the media, the more they tended to believe the public health issue had a stronger effect on themselves and others (Liu & Lo, 2014). This conclusion was particularly alarming when compared to the amount of alcohol advertisements targeted directly at young people (e.g. Snyder et al., 2006) and in such abundance (e.g. Ross et al., 2014b).

Within the literature, it was important to include studies that mirror my own but may vary in certain ways. Begin's (2005) master thesis examined many of the same aspects of college drinking culture and alcohol advertising. Her focus was to observe the drinking culture solely through the lens of Third Person Effect Hypothesis (Begin, 2005). By focusing this lens, Begin (2005) utilized a quantitative survey to gauge how alcohol advertisements related to students' understanding of how they drink and how others drink. The results confirmed the Third Person Effect Hypothesis and Begin (2005) even concluded the third-person effect on perceived consumption was actually stronger than the first-person effect. This meant students believed that alcohol advertisements had a larger effect on others' consumption habits than their own. The implications of this study were far reaching and extended into different studies, especially those concerning perceptions of alcohol advertising.

In sum, the above research articles (Davison, 1983; Liu & Lo, 2014; and Begin,

2005) all emphasized the importance of the hypothesis. All of the researchers confirmed that consumers consistently believed they were not affected by advertisements and the media, especially concerning public health issues, as much as ‘others’ are. Thus, a valid EG is that the Third Person Effect Hypothesis encourages consumers to perceive that advertisements relate to others more than themselves. This review of the literature and subsequent EG lead us to the following research questions:

RQ4.A. Do female college students feel that beer commercials that use social norms affect other female college students’ drinking? Why or why not?

RQ4.B. Do females believe that other female college students, who they know, pay attention to social norms being perpetuated in television beer commercials?

Conclusion

Through this exhaustive review of the literature, it was apparent that alcohol advertising and social norms both affected drinking habits for college students. From a practical standpoint, alcohol advertising had implications on behavior and related to consumers from an early age. On the other hand, there was a clear theoretical insight in that social norming theory was supported on all accounts by various research articles. Additionally, gender played a large role in how we understood social norms, especially in social drinking situations. Even the Third Person Effect Hypothesis skewed our perceptions because we tended to think other people were more impressionable than we were. With that said, there was a clear gap in that not one researcher looked at both alcohol advertising and the perpetuation of social norms, especially through a qualitative lens. Thus, the pervasiveness of alcohol advertising must be studied more as I believe it strongly relates to social norming and subsequent risky drinking behavior in college.

Chapter 3: Method

I held focus groups on a large, Midwestern university campus, during both the spring and summer semesters of 2015. Over the course of 10 weeks, I held five focus groups in the college town, in neutral locations. Four of the focus groups were with my target audience of college females in their junior and senior years. There was a total of 18 participants, 13 of whom are females and five are males. I showed the participants two beer commercials (I originally intended to show three, but the pilot study altered that idea). After showing both of the commercials, I asked a list of operational questions about the commercials, social norms and the Third Person Effect Hypothesis.

Utilizing Focus Groups

I chose to utilize a focus group setting to gain insight not only into the subject area concerning binge drinking, advertising and social norming, but also into the group dynamic afforded by a focus group. I agreed with those who deviated from Morley's (1980) survey approach to focus groups where each individual member was seen as a number and not a part of the whole. Therefore, it was important to not only take note of insights gleaned from the conversation, but to also observe how people acted when thrust into a group setting and encouraged to interact with one another (Jordin & Brunt, 1988). It was also imperative to observe how the group made meaning of the situation.

Along a similar vein, I was interested in utilizing Farr and Moscovici's (1984) method of analyzing the focus group. Farr and Moscovici (1984), one of many teams of researchers that Lunt and Livingstone (1996) cited as composing different methods of analysis, believed focus groups were a representation of everyday interactions and thus

should be studied as conversations and interactions, not simply answers to questions. Farr and Moscovici's (1984) analysis was also important because it allowed the conversation to grow naturally and for important vernacular, explanations and other forms of communication to emerge. As I was most interested in these social and communication aspects because social norming drove my research questions, this was incredibly useful.

Overall, focus groups were the best outlet to begin to understand this phenomenon because they “reveal both the meaning people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 96). To fully understand how college students perceived others, perceived actions and made sense of these perceptions, all as a part of the social norming theory, I needed to lead focus groups on a college campus. According to Wolburg (2001), who led multiple focus groups in addition to in-depth interviews and essay-writing exercises to discover more about perceptions of risk and drinking on college campuses, focus groups gave preliminary background information on the subject and later supported the facts gleaned from the in-depth interviews and writing exercises. Furthermore, the researcher performed four focus groups comprised of five students each and was able to reach theoretical saturation, which, according to Morse (2004), “is the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed.” This concept was how I determined when no additional data was needed and all concepts had been fully explored and verified. With Wolburg's (2001) research study as a guide, I performed five focus groups, four of which were with women and were used to complete the results and discussion sections below. The fifth focus group comprised of five men shed light on many of the assumptions the

other focus groups made. I originally had not planned to interview any males, but this opportunity presented itself and lent itself to interesting insights that I will discuss in the 'Future Research' sub-section below.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), smaller numbers of participants are advisable for discussing sensitive topics. Thus, I aimed for three to five members per group, for a total of 12 to 20 participants, as this could be a sensitive topic, and I wanted to ensure all participants were comfortable speaking. In the end, three of the four focus group consisted of three women and one focus group had four participants, for a total of 13 female participants.

Recruiting Participants

College students were the focus of this research for many reasons. First, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) survey from 2012, approximately 60 percent of college students drink with 55 percent of those students participating in binge drinking and heavy drinking. While these numbers may not be startling to some, these heavy drinking behaviors resulted in more than 696,000 alcohol related physical assaults, 97,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults and, more strikingly, 1,825 deaths due to alcohol in 2001 alone (Hingson et al., 2009). To compare, in a study performed on the effects and results of alcohol on working adults aged 20 to 64, excessive alcohol consumption was responsible for 9.8 percent of all deaths from 2006 to 2010 (Stahre, Roeber, Kanny, Brewer, & Zhang, 2014). While the percentage of deaths for the working adults age group is much higher, the age range and time span are much more spread out, making the college student range much more compressed and potentially detrimental. In turn, these behaviors led to working adults' excessive alcohol

consumption behaviors and subsequent deaths. Thus, uncovering the root of the problem on why college students comprised such a large portion of the binge drinking population would help prevention efforts and future behaviors.

I was further interested in studying females because Schulte, Ramo and Brown (2009) discovered that “increased or problematic use is marked by social, affective, and biological factors that operate differently for males and females” (p. 544). More specifically, though, the authors mentioned a gap in research concerning women because many studies focused on the effects of alcohol on men instead of women. This was because males have a higher rate and prevalence of alcohol use disorders. Additionally, I focused on Caucasian students because of Piane and Safer’s (2008) findings that this particular group of females was the most heavily affected by social norms. In this way, I aimed to close this research gap by studying Caucasian females.

Additionally, I believed the junior and senior classes were the best to contact because Snyder et al. (2006) discovered that alcohol advertising corresponded to youth who were underage as well as those over 21 in a similar way. In this way, so many studies focused heavily on underage drinking and there were still negative consequences for binge drinking after one was of legal drinking age. Thus, the effects of alcohol advertising did not end when students turned 21, and it was just as important to see the negative effects (in the form of binge drinking and poor decisions) that college students of all ages made. Also, a majority of the junior class is 21 by May, so there was a mix of ages when I performed my research at the end of the Spring 2015 semester and into Summer 2015.

Furthermore, there was much research and hypothesizing about heavy drinking, alcohol advertising and social norming with college students, but a majority of these studies was quantitative. Thus, my aim was to fill the gap in research and learn more about the thought processes of college students when encountering advertisements and when perceiving ‘norms’ that surround them. Another gap within the research fell under the overlap between alcohol advertising and social norming. There were not many studies that focused on both of these aspects within the same research, so I hoped to fill at least a portion of the gap.

Moreover, I focused on the top beer manufacturers that youth were exposed to and drank the most. According to Siegel et al. (2013) beer was the highest consumed beverage for youth. The sample was slightly skewed towards females and towards older youth and college-aged students. The top four brands of beer were Bud Light, Budweiser, Coors Light and Corona (Siegel et al., 2013). For the examples I showed in the focus group, I focused on one Bud Light commercial and one Corona commercial because they exemplified social norming and drinking. I showed both of the commercials, in succession, at the beginning of the focus group and then I asked the operational questions concerning the commercials [Appendix C and Appendix D].

As for gaining access to college students, Wolburg (2001) utilized a few different methods for reaching college students at a large Midwestern university in her study. These included recruiting from residence halls and placing ads around campus as well as providing a small monetary incentive for participants. I built off of these methods and utilized Facebook recruiting as well as in-person recruiting through extended circles of my own. Since participation was voluntary and I performed qualitative research, I utilized

criteria/purposeful and snowball sampling. According to Creswell (2014), purposeful sampling was the best choice for qualitative research because it allowed the researcher to focus solely on the group of interest as well as best “understand the problem and research question” (p. 189). In my case, this group was females in the junior and senior classes from a large Midwestern university. From my pilot study, as I wanted to gain access to more students from all over campus, I encouraged the snowball sampling method to acquire a more diverse group of students that fellow students identified as potential interested participants (Yia, 1994). To do this, I focused on a criteria sample, which built on a sample of acquaintances I already knew both inside and outside the journalism school for the pilot study. Then I utilized a snowball sampling method by asking each participant from the pilot focus group for the name of a friend and snowballed the sample from there. As an incentive, I entered all participants in a drawing for one \$25.00 gift card to Starbucks. I asked that they write down their PawPrint as a means to perform the drawing and then used it to get in touch with the winner. But I ensured this identifying information was in no way connected with his or her responses in the focus group and was kept in a password protected Excel document and the original pieces of paper shredded so as to have no connection to the participant and his or her responses.

To perform the drawing, I entered each PawPrint into an Excel document and randomly assigned each PawPrint a number, one through 14, since that is how many participants were interested in being entered in the drawing. Then using an online random number generator (<http://bit.ly/1mM8p5q>), I then “drew” a random number and contacted that participant as the winner of the prize.

Conducting the Focus Groups

Utilizing a focus group leader that was similar in age and situation to the participants was important in encouraging students to reveal the truth, gaining maximum disclosure, as well as studying these truths, proving validity (Fallon & Brown, 2002). I both led the focus group as well as took notes on the body language and group dynamic, since that was an important reason to perform focus groups. As a part of the focus group, I hoped to assess not only the body language and the quick agreement or hesitation that arose, but also the 'insider language' the participants might have. This jargon will afford a look into the college culture surrounding their decisions and influences. Because of this, I was able to ensure the operational questions [Appendix C] were answered effectively and in full. The following questions are a few examples of the operational questions I asked:

- After watching these commercials, what do you think the company was trying to achieve with its commercial? Why?
- What are your expectations about drinking/alcohol in commercials? Where did you get these ideas? After seeing this commercial, are you more inclined to go purchase that product? What about your friends? Is there a time you can think of where a friend or sister of yours acted like the women in the beer commercial? What about the guys in the commercial? Tell me more.
- How would you describe binge drinking? Does anyone you know binge drink? Do these commercials encourage binge drinking?
- Missouri College Health Behavior Study from 2014 found that 76% of students say they drink on a regular basis. Do you fall in this 76%? Do your

friends? Do you feel like you have to “keep up” with people to stay a part of the 76%?

Galarneau and Balbach’s (2001) Tufts University Alcohol Study inspired these questions and the format of the script [Appendix C]. Additionally, I inserted questions that began to answer my research questions and attempt to uncover the thought processes behind heavy drinking behaviors on college campuses [Appendix E].

Television beer commercial examples. A broad sweep of existing commercials was used to determine examples for the focus groups. It was preferable to use actual brands because my research attempted to tap into female college students’ reactions to social norming in actual commercials. After viewing approximately 15 beer commercials, I selected the final two for a few reasons. First, the other commercials were not all the top beer brands represented in Siegel et al.’s (2013) analysis. Also, the two commercials chosen most aptly embody social norming, story lines and other factors previous researchers found appealing and persuasive [Appendix D]:

First, Bud Light created a “Girls Night” commercial in February 2014. It showcased a group of girls out on the town, drinking Bud Light throughout the night. This commercial portrayed social norming because the girls were all drinking and by showing them having a great night drinking Bud Light, other women could be encouraged to do the same and ‘match’ these actresses. The commercial was found at the following link: <http://bit.ly/1B2Hvdp>

The second commercial was titled “Football Trick” from Corona Extra and was created and aired in August 2010. It showed a woman on the beach simply enjoying the view of the ocean as men dropped footballs and ‘showed off’ in front of her. Then

another woman walked up to join her with a bucket of Corona Extra and they were then inundated with footballs and men. This portrayed social norming in that the women were living carefree lifestyles and were very desirable for men as they sat confidently by themselves and drank. The commercial was found at the following link:

<http://bit.ly/1BXLxIX>

Amendments from the Pilot Study

After I performed a pilot study on April 30, with a few acquaintances as outlined above, there were a few changes the participants suggested I implement into the actual focus groups. First, I originally planned to show three commercials that showcased social norming and drinking and then discuss each commercial separately. Instead, I only showed two commercials at the beginning and then jointly discussed them. The reason for this change was to have multiple examples for the participants to reference and because the “Girls Night” and “Football Trick” commercials complimented each other well. Next, concerning the script, the participants suggested changing “catch up” in Question 4, Part A to “keep up” because it was much more relatable and made more sense to them. Furthermore, I removed Question 4, Part B concerning the 70.8 percent of students who have drunk in the past month because it was repetitive, and Question 4, Part A sufficiently addressed my social norming research questions. With these slight changes, I was able to then begin my focus groups.

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

Before collecting the data formally, I pre-tested the script with a pilot group (above) to ensure it fit within the allotted time. If the script began to go longer in the first focus group, I ensured those questions that were not fully answered originally were

answered during the next focus group to make sure my research questions were adequately answered. In this way, all of the questions were addressed sufficiently in at least a few of the focus groups.

To gather the data in an effective manner, Wolburg (2001) suggested audiotape recording the sessions and then transcribing the results so that the data was complete and without holes from the conversation. Furthermore, Demant and Järvinen (2011) used anonymity when transcribing the videotapes of their focus groups. To ensure both confidentiality and anonymity so that I complied with IRB specifications, I recorded only the audio of the sessions and did not have the participants introduce themselves or use any self-identifiers. In this way, participants remained completely anonymous within the transcript and were in no way connected to their responses or the data. I also obtained verbal consent by reading the risks and benefits of the study to them before we began [Appendix B]. Then, I transcribed the tapes myself to ensure the participants' anonymity within my results.

Then, after gathering all of the data from the focus groups, I analyzed the data using the constant comparative method. As outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method was a successful method to analyze focus group data because its aim was to determine potential categories and themes that began to answer the research questions. In addition, I used selective coding to determine the overarching concepts and subsequent categories of the data so that I could fully understand what exactly participants meant and how these themes drew conclusions about the phenomenon. Also, as a guide to analyzing and discussing my results, I referenced

Hinnant and Hendrickson's (2014) focus group analysis. This allowed me to fully organize my results and see the implications beyond the results themselves.

Although qualitative data were not easily reproduced and were not generalizable to the public, my research was valid. My hope in utilizing this method to analyze the data was to show this validity as well as the truths and themes concerning how alcohol advertising corresponded to social norming and subsequent heavy drinking behaviors.

Chapter 4: Results

Alcohol Advertising's Relatability Factor

To answer the first research question, which examined how female college students believe beer advertisers are trying to persuade them, I looked at how female college students viewed commercials that featured strong, independent women, aged closely to the target young adult age range. These commercials showcased these women performing activities that could be perceived as ones similar to what current college students do. Through the first two operational questions of the focus group, the participants addressed an overarching theme throughout all four focus groups: relatability. This is the idea that commercials mirrored the participants' experiences and resonated with them.

As one of the opening questions for the focus group, it was clear some of the girls were still a bit uncomfortable and not completely forthcoming with their answers. Therefore, the answers to the first question (about what the company was trying to achieve) and the second (about who the commercials targeted) were both met with short answers. Nonetheless, one main concept came out of this discussion: Through drinking, one can have an enjoyable social life. Many of the participants, mostly referencing the "Girls Night" commercial, from the Bud Light Living campaign, talked about the relatability of the commercial and how it was "every college girl's life," one participant noted. One participant viewed the commercial as Bud Light's attempt to "make you feel like you were watching you and your friends." Another participant noted the Bud Light Living commercial aimed to connect with its female audience on another level.

I think they want to show that drinking and going out and having fun is something that you do for you, not for everybody else. And it was more focused on the fun that you were going to have and not the creepy guy in the corner of the bar.

The second question focused on the intended targeted audience. The participants answered this question in very similar ways because they all noted the similarities between themselves and their own actions and those seen in both commercials. One participant noted that the Bud Light Living commercial was “intertwined throughout their [the girls’] entire night and it was like speaking to younger generations’ language,” she said. “Speaking throughout the entire commercial was something that my parents would not relate to, or my mom would not relate to. It’s us.”

Interestingly, though, one participant answered “men” as the intended target audience and further explained that the commercial,

Was showing girls drinking it [the beer], so it was obviously making men want to watch the commercial because it was a group of attractive women [in the Bud Light Living commercial] and girls in bathing suits in the second one [the Corona commercial]. So it was I guess more appealing to men.

Additionally, another participant noted the Corona commercial could be geared towards men, simply by showing that “hot girls drink this.”

Overall, the theme that addresses the relatability of these commercials to their intended target audience shows that both companies were attempting to persuade college-aged and young adult women to purchase their product. In fact, one participant said she might go buy some Bud Light that night after seeing the commercial!

The Need to Feel Included

The second research question addressed if college females thought their friends' drinking habits were influenced by social norms. I used the Missouri College Health Behavior Study, which found that 76 percent said they drank on a regular basis, as the opening of my line of questions. These operational questions afforded the most details about how the women dealt with social norming and the social scene of drinking. Although there were a few questions covering different aspects of college drinking culture, the main concept that came out of the discussion was constant need to feel a part of the large group, scene, culture, etc. This led to the next overarching theme, which was inclusion.

We first discussed what a 'regular basis' meant to each group, and while all the answers ranged from once a week to seven days a week, each group came to a consensus. It was interesting to then hear how the females' perceptions of drinking and alcohol transformed over their four years of college. One participant explained that freshman and many times sophomore year, "You don't have to really focus on your career, that's coming up very much around the corner. You're living close to where the parties are at the frats, which are happening non-stop. Like there is always something going on."

Another participant said,

It might be like that freedom thing, freshman year. Where you're out of the house, you don't have to come home at the end of the night or check in and be like, 'Oh I am spending the night here.' So if you're drinking and like, 'I can go ahead and drink as much as I want and no one is going to check in on me.'

Another participant agreed, "I remember freshman year, there was always a party

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and then even sometimes Mondays and Tuesdays... And that phrase, 'I am gonna get messed up tonight.' And you're like, 'Why are you planning that?'" It was startling to hear how many of the participants had friends that planned to blackout and to drink a lot during their first two years of college. This was also a view into the insider language the participants used with one another that was apparent throughout the focus groups. She did not have to explain what getting 'messed up' meant because everyone already knew her meaning. In another focus group, one participant explained why attitudes changed concerning alcohol towards the end of college. "You're thinking about jobs and where you're going to move to and all this stuff and you're kind of looking at freshmen going, 'Look how you're acting right now,'" she said disdainfully.

Another factor that affected drinking behavior freshman year through graduation was the overarching need to fit in. One participant said,

I think when I was a freshman and sophomore, it was more unacceptable almost for me to want to stay in or not want to go and be blacked out every time I drank, and so that's why every time I drank, I drank a lot. Now I think it's more to the point where I decide, if anyone buys a round of shots and I say, 'No, I don't want a shot,' it's more acceptable now... But when you're younger it's the opposite because you don't have that standard set yet, so you do assume that everyone else's standard should be yours, and so that's when you do have to 'keep up' with everybody.

This showed the need to fit in and based one's decisions and perceptions on what everyone else was doing. Furthermore, another participant explained,

I think a lot of the activities you see at frats freshman and sophomore year are communal activities, like slapping the bag or playing beer pong or taking a pull in a circle. If you're that one person in a circle that doesn't contribute to that, it's awkward for you.

Another factor influencing younger girls was older girls they knew through Greek Life, classes, etc. One participant explained,

At the very beginning of freshman year, if we went to frat parties and there were older girls there, like in your sorority or I don't know just older people too, and you saw them doing it [drinking a lot] and like them having fun, you just kind of want to get to know them more.

"It's like an unspoken thing," another agreed. "It's not anything they do or say to you, but there is an unspoken thing that you need to keep up with them." This was another example of the importance of insider language and actions. Many of the participants seemed to agree that these 'unspoken acts' existed for them and dictated a lot of their decisions. All of these explanations summed up how influential friends and environment really were to shaping one's perceptions of how much alcohol was being consumed.

Unfortunately, as much as the participants wanted to make it seem like their friends' behaviors had changed over the past three or four years, their comments reinforced the power of social norming and this inherent need to fit in in social situations. Even as a rising senior, one participant explained,

It's like if you don't go out at least once, you feel like you're missing out and stuff, like everyone is having so much fun without you... The only reason I would

go out that many times a week would be because I feel like I was missing out....

Or feel like I'd be like the loser that's laying around at home.

In another focus group, the participants explained this notion of still feeling peer pressure and social norms. One mentioned,

Even when you're 21 and going to the bars or going to the bars at the same time as other people and your friends will like count how many beers you've had compared to them, and they'll either call you out on not drinking enough or call you out on drinking more than them. Because I have had friends that are like, 'Oh you're only on like beer number two, I am on four.'

Another participant agreed, "It's playful, but I guess it's like the mature version of you sitting there and not slapping the bag and getting made fun of."

As upperclassmen, all of the participants noted various degrees of peer pressure and touched on the different aspects of social norming, even at the bars. From friends buying drinks and not wanting to turn them down to feeling honor and pride when they were able to drink a lot, these norms did not go away as these women matured through their college careers. The notion of "catching up" or "keeping up" with friends presented some of the most stark answers. One participant explained,

It's just like you want to catch up because you want to be on the same level as everyone too... They are all probably looking like they're having a great time, dancing, jumping around, screaming and you're like standing there, like, 'Ok... I would be doing that, but not right now.'

Along a similar vein, another participant said,

I've been in that situation where I've been drinking the same thing as my friend

and I'll look at them and they're already almost done and I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, I gotta be at the same level as them.' So I'll start drinking faster because I'm like, 'Oh no, I don't want to be *that* girl.'

In this case, she meant an unsociable girl, but she did not have to explain this. All of the participants nodded in agreement, knowing exactly what her language meant. In response, one participant admitted,

In some cases... I'll have like one [drink] to appease my friends, but I don't really want to, but it's like I am doing it almost to literally just to fit in, which sounds so awful... But I think it's just definitely focused on who you're with, who you're surrounded by, what the status of the night is going to be.

In another group, one participant explained the differences between catching up and people egging her on.

I think it's part of you wanting to catch up and then other people, also... Being like, 'Here you go! Oh my god they just got here.' Trying to get you to drink more because, 'You haven't been with us this past hour.'

Buying friends drinks and accusing them of having a "nursing degree" because they were nursing their beer were all the "mature" ways of making these women feel awkward and like they needed to drink more. She continued,

If someone buys you something, like if someone buys you a bomb or a shot, you are probably going to take it... I could be done for the night and someone buys me a bomb and I'm like, 'Ok, I am going to take it.'

The last portion of these questions addressed social norming directly and I inquired about the influence of friends and other groups of men or women when the

participants went out. One participant explained her three levels of thinking,

Sometimes you'll be sitting there and thinking, 'Why are we not having fun, but everyone else is?' And then you're like, 'Guys, come on we have to have more fun! Then other times you're like, 'Well these are the people I am actually hanging out with, so if they're not going to drink, then I am not going to.' Then sometimes you find yourself on a different level from your friends and you're like, 'They're [another group] having fun, I am going to go over there.'

This showed how social norming through the people who surround the women at bars, fraternities and house parties influenced their drinking habits. In another group, a participant noted,

It would depend on what they're [another group] doing. I mean, if we're like sitting down at a bar and this group of girls are out dancing, I might be like, 'Oh my god, let's go dance!' Because I saw them. But if they're doing kind of the same thing of what we're doing already, then no, I wouldn't be influenced by changing what we're doing to act in a similar way. It'd be like if they're doing something way different that looked fun also.

This line of questioning afforded an interesting look into the drinking culture at the large Midwestern university and how these women perceived the culture around them. The overarching theme of inclusion was very influential in their decisions and transcended age and maturity. This constant need to feel included in group activities at fraternities freshman year and to not be left out of activities junior and senior years drove their drinking habits. This perception that one must be on the same level as those around her was a stark reality that none of the participants had mastered. Whether it meant

catching up or keeping up, these women perceived those around them were consuming a certain amount of alcohol, when in reality, social norms were driving those perceptions.

Reinforcing Perceptions

The third group of research questions focused on drawing comparisons between what the participants viewed as binge drinking and whether or not that was portrayed in the commercials. I was hoping to learn whether or not females thought the commercials affected their drinking habits. I asked operational questions where main concepts like beliefs, habits, bandwagon and double standards all led me to the theme of reinforcement.

I began the line of questioning broadly, inquiring about the participants' expectations of drinking and alcohol in commercials. Each group took this question and answered it in a different way. Nonetheless, similar answers came out of the discussion and lent themselves to two main concepts when it comes to expectations about drinking and alcohol in commercials. First, the concept of beliefs included beliefs about alcohol commercials promoting a good time by showing the actors enjoying themselves and drinking the product. One participant said, "It was just kind of like these girls are so fun and that's what they drink, you should do that and you'll be fun too." In another focus group, one participant recalled another Budweiser commercial referencing the 'Grab Some Buds' campaign and how Bud Light was "really associated with going out with your friends and [is] a friend drink." This concept also included expectations before the participants even started drinking and when they first became aware of the commercials. One participant said,

I guess I only ever paid attention to them when you started to get teenage age because then... It was cool to drink. That sounds stupid to say that I guess, but

you paid attention more when you got older because it was more appealing to you then when you were 10 years old.

In this way, for many of the participants, these types of alcohol commercials shaped expectations of drinking and alcohol. In many ways, the sense of fun and enjoyment by the people in the commercials became a model to mirror in the women's personal lives.

Similarly, the second concept that came out of these discussions focused on reinforcement. The participants agreed that, since coming to college and gauging the drinking scene, commercials reinforced experiences they already had concerning drinking and being in social settings with alcohol. One participant noted her personal experiences shaped how she viewed alcohol and the commercials simply "added" to her perceptions. Another participant agreed, "If you go out for the night, you are expected to drink... It's uncomfortable if you're with a group of people and you don't drink... The commercials make it seem that way too."

Some participants also noted that alcohol in commercials reinforced their decision-making process, even if subconsciously. One participant said, "I was never looking at alcohol commercials thinking, 'Oh God, I wish I could go out.' It was, 'Oh God, I wish I could try that specific beer.'" In the same group, another participant agreed, "You don't like think about the commercials when you're like at the grocery store, I feel like, looking for what you're going to choose." Another participant said she could not say she bought something specifically because of the commercial, but she remembered commercials and they stuck with her. In that way, commercials reinforced these decisions because, as one participant noted, "I have already formed an opinion based on a

commercial [before I even go to the grocery store].”

Next, I aimed to hone in on the persuasion in the commercial by seeing if any of the participants were more likely to go buy that product. Many of the participants viewed their decision-making as habitual as well as their friends’ decision-making. Many of the women already bought Bud Light or frequently saw it on special, so were already intending to purchase it. In fact, one participant candidly claimed, “I might go buy some Bud Light tonight to be honest.” All joking aside, many of the participants noted commercials associated certain fun situations with the drink. In fact, one participant said, “[If] I want to be partying with my girls or on a beach... I kind of associate that beer with that situation.” Additionally, in a different focus group, one participant noted, “I think they [other girls] would be more influenced by going out and emulating the actions and not necessarily the drink.” Thus, females wanted to reenact the situations in the commercials, but not necessarily buy the product.

A few participants made an interesting point that perhaps consumers could have those fun and enjoyable experiences with *any* beer. Then it became the situation, *not* the beverage that drove the decision-making process. Another participant said,

I feel like that’s definitely true that the Bud Light commercial did not influence me to drink Bud Light. Now Corona might if I was on a beach, especially in Mexico or something. Then I would be like, ‘I need a Corona.’

Furthermore, the repetition of commercials made one feel familiar with the product, making it a habitual purchase before a consumer had even tried it. As one participant put it, “You’re familiar with it even if you aren’t familiar with the taste.” Another participant said, “It’s just like when you see commercials from the same

company over again, their name gets in your head. So when you're at the store, you're like, 'Oh, I have heard of that a lot, so it's probably good.'" Similarly, in a different focus group, a participant explained,

If you're seeing lists of stuff... and if you see a commercial and you recognize the title [of the beer]... I feel like if you don't recognize the other ones you're going go with that one because it sticks out in your mind.

On the flipside, commercials reinforced the preferences consumers already had about a product. "I feel like if you already like that beer a lot and you see a commercial, you're like, 'Oh man, that does sound good and maybe I will go get it.'" In other words, the commercials were reinforcing perceptions women had about these beers and affecting their habits and purchasing decisions on some level.

Similarly, friends' preferences, which tended to be habitual as well, influenced decision-making. Yet, friends tended to drink the same thing out of simplicity and almost groupthink. As one participant said, "It's about what your friends drink. I think if my friends all drink like PBR, I'd probably drink PBR, even though it didn't taste good. But all my friends drink Bud Light, so that's why I drink Bud Light."

I then delved straight into binge drinking and what that meant for the participants. My intention behind the discussion on binge drinking was to see how the women perceived binge drinking. This led to the main concept of the bandwagon, where 'everybody seemed to be doing it.' Many had heard the literal definition through alcohol awareness programs and education through the university's various departments. Nonetheless, the answers ranged from two drinks an hour to four drinks over the course of the entire night. Some interesting responses concerned the females' seeming disbelief

and almost disdain for these low numbers. As one participant put it, “It’s defined as more than two drinks an hour or something stupid, right?... I thought it was a weirdly low number.” This response prompted a discussion between herself and another participant. “When I think of binge drinking, I think like you drink for the purpose to get drunk and... to blackout, to be at like another level,” the first participant said. “Yes, to blackout,” another responded. “To be incoherent.” The first participant then said, “Which I feel like is so bad to say, but I feel like that’s the only point [of drinking], you know what I mean?” These were startling realizations and paralleled answers given by other groups concerning the drinking culture on college campuses. There was a need for students to “drink to get drunk” because, otherwise, “What’s the point of even taking those calories if you’re not going to get anything out of it?” one participant asked rhetorically.

In another focus group, a participant explained how she did not realize how little it took to binge drink. In fact, she explained,

So you think about it, one shot is a drink. So if you take four shots in an hour, two shots and a couple beers, so within a couple of hours, technically you are binge drinking. I didn’t realize that until I actually learned the definition of it, so when I thought of binge drinking, I thought, ‘Oh no, I don’t binge drink! And none of my friends binge drink.’ But in reality, we do.

Perhaps this misconstrued idea of what binge drinking meant to these females stemmed from the idea that “when I hear the word binge drinking, I think of something a lot more severe, like alcoholism.” This negative connotation could lead many students to believe they did not binge drink and to not label themselves. Nonetheless, the same focus group noted that binge drinking was pervasive all across universities and was seen as

more of an issue at the university she attended.

I think it's going to be the same at each campus, I just think it's associated more so with bigger campuses because there's more people... So I think it's just that it doesn't matter necessarily where you are, like [another participant] said, they'll find a reason to drink.

Another participant explained that the definition of binge drinking, Doesn't seem like it's that much, compared to the college lifestyle of drinking and going out. Like you wouldn't think that you were binge drinking if you were pre-gaming, but if you looked up the definition of it, then it was like, 'Oh yeah, I guess that is binge drinking.' But it just doesn't seem like it. I think it's more just how the lifestyle is now...

This concept of the young adult culture that revolved around drinking to get drunk drove many of the negative outcomes associated with drinking, like physical and sexual assault, as mentioned in the literature review, and left the impression that everyone on the campus was participating.

Furthermore, according the focus groups I conducted, advertisements only added to the perception of drinking to get drunk and having the best time possible. One participant said,

I think if they [alcohol commercials] are as appealing as how the first one [Bud Light commercial] looked, I think it definitely would [inspire binge drinking] because that would be promoting a night out drinking and if... lifestyles in our society are like that, then technically we binge drink and we just don't think that we do.

This was shocking that so many college students did not realize they binge drank. She admitted that binge drinking on the Midwestern university's campus "would happen more often than what we would think." In this focus group, all three participants believed many people on the university's campus binge drank regularly. This was a skewed reality and played into social norming's effects and the main concept of the bandwagon.

Participants also noted the inconsistencies in the Bud Light commercial, where "the fact that they were drinking before, drinking all night, drinking at another bar and drinking when they got home, for sure they were binge drinking. I was like, 'Why aren't these people passed out, drunk right now?'" one participant said. In another focus group, a participant pointed out that the Bud Light commercial "showed a lot bigger quantities of Bud Light in some instances too, and I think like in my head I was assuming that, 'Oh, all those girls are going to drink that huge amount of Bud Light.'" As if it was expected to drink excessively. One participant explained the effects of drinking excessively, "[They are] not even like puking and blacked out, but they are all hammered, that's for sure. They've definitely had more than four drinks." Another participant frankly said, "For a lot of fun stuff to happen, like in the Bud Light commercial, you have to drink more than four Bud Lights." What a stark example of how females viewed drinking and its effects on their social experiences and how these views reinforce their already pre-conceived ideas of drinking.

This discussion about the different standards between men and women when it comes to drinking afforded an interesting look at the double standard female college students endured throughout college and even life. On the one hand, they are encouraged to "keep up with the guys" and be a "cool girl" with crazy stories to brag about the next

day. But on the other hand, if they had one drink too many, they slipped into the “hot mess” and “*that* girl” who is “falling over, carrying her shoes, crying” stereotype. These pressures weighed hard on the participants as they explained their personal experiences as both types of women.

One participant told us that guys saw women who drank a lot as “the crazy girl.’ Or it’s like ‘Oh she drinks with the guys.’ Like if they drink a ton, she can keep up with the guys.” Another participant agreed, “I think the guys think you’re cool and the girls think you’re crazy [if you keep up with the guys].” One participant explained it was normal and typical “for one certain kind of girl to drink just as much as the guys all the time. I think that’s probably something they would brag about or mention or be known for.” Again, this was the kind of language the participants used regularly to describe their peers and most of the participants knew their meaning without needing any clarification.

Interestingly, one focus group mentioned their perceived root cause of this discrepancy.

I honestly think it comes from the studies we learn about through alcohol education. ‘Guys’ normal drink is this amount and girls’ is this amount.’ And you’re like, ‘Oh, well if I can drink that amount, I must be a badass like a guy.’

Another factor was the commercials. One focus group commended Bud Light for showing the “socially acceptable drunk” that existed for both men and women. In the commercial,

Everyone is still having a good time and you are like making questionable decisions, like you probably shouldn’t kiss the doorman or whatever. But it’s like those aren’t harmful decisions. Like they got right to where like you’re goal is to

be when you drink with your friends.

The females' perception of the double standard was further explained with how they viewed males' drinking standards. "I think guys are just expected to [drink more]. Binge drinking I feel like is just such the fraternity norm," one said. In another focus group, one participant said, "Guys can tolerate more. I mean I know that depends on the person, and they are bigger and tend to build up their tolerance like with people that I know." The participants further explained that they believed males felt the social norming pressures just as much as females. "I totally think guys have to be on each others' levels too," one said. "Like they have to match each other in the same way [females do]. I think they feel the same way [as us]." At the same time though, some of the participants saw the traditional gender stereotypes of men taking care of women portrayed in their own lives. One participant explained,

I feel like if there is a guy that's out with her, the guy is in a way, not technically responsible, but also responsible for that girl, you know? When I go out with my boyfriend, I feel like he is in some way responsible for me... when I am really drunk.

Sadly, the female participants believed the stereotypes and standards were harder on women. One participant explained her view,

If there is a guy and a girl who are equally drunk and like pretty bad, like almost blackout, I feel like people look down on the girl... It's like, 'Oh, Timmy's drunk again.' But the girls [are] like, 'Wow, who let her get that way?'

This lack of support among females led many to see this double standard and fall prey to the standard they wanted to fit into. In fact, one participant explained,

Even my boyfriend is like, 'You're drinking beer? That's gross. Like guys drink beer.' And I'm like, 'I mean, alcohol is alcohol.'... Why just because I am a woman I am supposed to drink mixed drinks all night or like wine coolers. God forbid beer!

This discussion culminated in how the advertiser was promoting overdrinking when I asked how the advertiser might be promoting over drinking. Each focus group had a different answer, but the main concept was the same, relatability. As I have mentioned before, this concept was reoccurring in my results. As one participant said,

I think part of that [our take on the commercial] has to do with the psychological concept that we are seeing that [the commercial] and comparing that to our nights out. And on our nights out, we know that we binge drink. So we assume, I'm sure many people could go to Gumby's and have fun sober, but we all assume that you have to be drunk to do that because that's our experience.

In this way, she explained that so many of the participants viewed the Bud Light commercial as promoting overdrinking because each of them could see themselves having that kind of night.

In other words, many of the participants had similar answers regarding Bud Light's apparent endorsement of overdrinking. "They [the women in the commercial] went to like three different bars and they pre-gamed and they drank after... And they all always had a beer in their hand," one participant said. "They [the women in the commercial] would've had to have been binge drinking to be drunk after seven hours," another agreed. "You can't drink four beers in seven hours and feel good." One participant put it succinctly, "They may not be straight up advertising it, but they are for

sure promoting it. They're sure, not advocating for it, but they're saying this is an ok thing, have a full night of drinking." Thus, the participants found the commercial promoted overdrinking without the negative side effects.

It's kind of showing that they can drink as much as they want and nothing is really gonna happen. Where as in reality, they're gonna drink that much and they're not going to be able to walk or they're going to have to have someone help them, hold their hair like help them get a ride home.

Concerning the Corona commercial, only one group noticed the girl had only four beers in the bucket. While other focus groups thought they were having a crazy afternoon on the beach, the one group saw "she did have a bucket of four. Which isn't technically binge drinking... between two people." Another participant agreed, "With her walking normally and stuff, you would assume it's the first bucket." In fact, one participant said, "there was nothing telling me that they were binge drinking." But this perception, as one participant pointed out, was all about personal reality and what one expected their own night or afternoon at the beach to be like. In this way, the participants found the Bud Light commercial was one they could relate to and, in turn, project their own perceptions of binge drinking and overdrinking.

Thus many main concepts ran through this line of questioning, but the overarching theme of the reinforcement of perceptions colored the participants answers and led me to conclude the commercials promote overdrinking and affect the consumers. While never stated explicitly, the creation of habits from the commercials, the relatability factor, the bandwagon effect after watching the commercials and the double standards that paralleled real life only led me to further conclude these commercials connected with

the women and reinforced their current beliefs about binge drinking and college culture.

Social Norming's Connection to Alcohol Advertising

The last two research questions aimed to delve into the connection, if any, between social norming and alcohol advertising. To do this, I asked three operational questions, throughout the focus group, to get the participants thinking about how the commercials, their friends, their environment and their college experience influenced their drinking behaviors. Through this line of questions, an overarching theme came out of the main concepts: social norming's prevalence.

First, I was interested in hearing if girls thought their friends ever acted like the women or men in the commercials. Even though I asked the question to see if it was easier for girls to talk about their friends' behaviors as opposed to their own, the relatability of the Bud Light commercial showed through and encouraged the girls to talk about 'us' and 'we.' Instead of sharing stories about their friends, they shared stories about their friends *and* themselves. Perhaps most candidly, one respondent said, "Every single night I go out is like the Bud Light commercial." This was very telling because as another respondent noted, "They [Bud Light advertisers] really understand. They clearly understand who, like what women, would be purchasing their beer. [It's really] just a Venn diagram of girls that drink Bud Light and girls that love drunk pizza." Speaking to the audience and driving them to see themselves in the commercial strengthened its appeal. In fact, another participant mentioned the relatability of the commercial and "especially the whole getting ready part and then going somewhere... How they were speaking was very true." In the same group, another participant noted, "It was just very college experience." Another participant called it "The epitome of girls' night."

Another interesting concept that presented itself in the form of the ‘cool girl,’ who exuded cool confidence, and athletic men, who showed off, represented the different standards between the genders when it came to alcohol. I discussed this in further detail above in the ‘Reinforcing Perceptions’ section, but wanted to touch on the points as they pertained to the participants and their perceptions of their friends. One participant noted,

The Bud Light commercial... showed [cool confidence] more when they all ended up together eating pizza and making fun of each other. I feel like that’s more what I would’ve taken from cool confidence, like ‘I am with my girls.’

Interestingly, one participant told us a story about how Corona commercials made it seem like every ‘cool girl’ drank Corona in a glass bottle on the beach.

[During spring break], one of my friends wanted Corona for the beach and we found Corona in cans because bottles weren’t allowed [on the beach]. She didn’t want it because she needed Corona in a bottle to look cool, even though it was the exact same beer when it’s in a can. But if you don’t have it in a bottle, you don’t look like the cool girl.

Pertaining to the second part of the research question that addressed the males in the commercials, many of the participants noted that males’ felt the need to ‘show off,’ which was a similar answer to the standards between men and women when drinking, as mentioned in the above ‘Reinforcing Perceptions’ section. In fact, one participant told us about a float trip she was on when a guy friend of hers wanted to show off.

One of our friends thought it would be funny to do a Russian beer bong... He smashes the beer on his head and then chugs it. We were like, ‘That’s not

impressive.’ But he thought it was. He was showing off [and] thought he was being so cool and we were like, ‘Stop.’

While this was just one instance, many of the participants noted guys showing off and trying to impress girls with how much they could drink. This was an interesting area of study that I would like to further study since the male-female relationship and how alcohol influenced and enhanced that relationship in college was very interesting, as I discussed in the previous section. Overall, this operational question presented concepts of relatability and gender ideas that fed college students’ ideas of how they should act when they went out.

Next, I asked the participants if they thought women their own age were influenced to act like the women in the commercials. Through this line of questioning, I learned the main concept was almost envy for the girls in the commercials. The respondents had a strong desire to have the kind of night portrayed in the Bud Light Living commercial. In fact, one participant noted,

Watching the first [commercial] really does make you want to go out and have a fun night with friends. So I think after you watch it and say it was a Friday or a Thursday where there was, ‘Maybe we’ll go out, maybe we won’t.’ I think maybe you’d watch it and be like, ‘That looks like a fun time.’ And maybe be in your head like, ‘Ok, yeah let’s go out.’

After watching this commercial, the participant was persuaded to go out and recreate that kind of fun and exciting night she saw in the commercial. Another participant said,

It [the commercial] does make me want to drink more like an adult because I want to have more nights like that... Because in the commercial, it's a lot of inside jokes that only happen when you're out drinking with your friends and you talk about the stories the next day. And that just like makes me want to do it more.

Many other participants had similar answers when addressing their friends' attitudes. Another participant explained,

[The commercial] makes it seem like it's very acceptable to act like that [drunk]. That might be the reassurance some people were looking for... 'Do other people drink all night? How does this work?'... So if you see that commercial, you're like, 'Oh, yeah, they do drink early and then they drink at the bars.' So they do pregame and drink and then aftergame.

This insight also delved into how younger and more inexperienced drinkers saw the commercials differently, almost as a roadmap for their social experience, with one caveat: "I wouldn't say that the young girls would go out and be like, 'Oh well, now I have to have some pizza or now I have to do this,'" another participant said. "I feel like it's a natural progression."

This natural progression added to the concept of envy because although it seemed like a natural progression, the participants all had an idea of how their nights should go and the commercials reinforced these ideas. In fact, one participant noted,

I think if you were to take Bud Light out of the picture and take all of the advertising out of the picture, I think that our college experiences would still be pretty similar... And I don't end up at Gumby's and stay up until 3 a.m. chatting with my roommates because I was drinking Bud Light... I just don't think the

commercial is the influencer. Alcohol is the influencer and the social scene of college.

This idea of the social scene at college supported the notion of social norming because the perception for college students was that everyone was drinking and having fun nights like those in the commercials. Another participant put it succinctly, “I feel both of those [factors, the commercial and the natural progression of the night] plus other people and their past experiences... can influence you.” In this way, many factors shaped these college students’ perceptions of alcohol and what they thought everyone else was doing. In turn, the participants envied the Bud Light commercial in particular because it was the “epitome of a girls’ night out,” and to them, one must have this kind of night to have any sort of social life in college.

Last, in an attempt to drive home the connection between social norming and alcohol advertising, I concluded the focus group by asking if the women thought the advertisers were successfully persuading people and the results were skewed. On the one hand, the participants saw the strong link between the target audience and the commercial. As has been said many times, Bud Light related to the participants. One said,

That [kind of night] would probably happen anyway, any night this weekend. But it almost makes me want to go do it tonight because I have fun like that with my friends all the time, like, ‘Shoot now I need to go buy some Bud Light and let’s have a party.’

Another participant explained how this supports why the Bud Light ‘Up for Whatever’ campaign was doing so well.

People are kind of relating to [the idea], that alcohol makes them feel ‘Up for Whatever.’ They do all these crazy things that are so fun and that you get to talk about the next day. And this beer company is doing these crazy things and these pop-up environments and towns and that emulates what you do when you go out. And I think that’s really cool.

Additionally, the Bud Light commercial in particular, resonated with many participants and their friends. “It relates to girls. A lot of girls don’t go out because they have boyfriends and they want to stay in. But [you] can be single, or you can have a boyfriend, just hang out with your friends,” one respondent said. Another participant explained, “Alcohol is something where if you don’t want to drink, an alcohol commercial doesn’t make you think any more or less. I just think after seeing like that Bud Light commercial I’m like, ‘Wow, Bud Light is cool.’” In another focus group, a participant explained that Bud Light’s style of advertising and emulating the every day social scene appeals to her. In her opinion, “It helps their brand image... But I don’t think that makes me more or less likely to drink. I would just be more likely, like if I am already going to drink, then I would think about them.” Therefore, this style of advertising resonated and related to consumers and kept brands like Bud Light at the top of mind.

On the other hand, some participants noticed the relatability, but did not see the strong link between the audience and the product, especially pertaining to Bud Light.

They weren’t necessarily persuading me, they were connecting more so. Their commercial was something I was able to connect with more, whereas Corona was something to influence me more if I was ever in the situation of being on a beach

in that sense. But neither were persuading me to go buy a drink right then.

In agreement, another participant responded, “It related well to girls and going out and all that stuff, but not necessarily connecting the product with the target market.” This particular focus group was not as influenced or persuaded by the commercial and concluded that “women don’t drink beer... That’s one of the biggest influences [on] why these commercials aren’t effective, is because women don’t drink beer.” This was the only focus group that was not as supportive of Bud Light as the other groups.

In sum, when asked to clarify if they are persuaded more by these commercials or by other people in the bar ordering Bud Light, the answer was clear: “Other people are drinking, or other people are drinking Bud Light, it must be awesome” and they want to order it. Therefore, in answering the two research questions addressing if beer commercials use social norms to affect other female college students’ drinking and if females believe that other female college students pay attention to social norms being perpetuated in beer commercials, the answers were clear: advertisers perpetuated and enforced social norms and encouraged viewers to emulate these behaviors. In other words, by keeping commercials relatable and paralleling the social scene that appears to be fairly common at the large Midwestern university, alcohol advertisers were able to keep their products at the top of mind and persuade consumers to an extent.

Overall, the overarching themes of relatability, inclusion and reinforcement strengthened the power of the commercials and their effects on social norming. While social norming was its own beast that clearly affected all of the participants in various ways, from “keeping up” at fraternities to “catching up” at bars, the relationship between the commercials and social norming was presented in these two themes. On the one hand

the relatability encouraged the participants to believe they needed to have experiences like those portrayed to fit in. On the other hand, the commercials reinforced notions the participants already knew they had, like being a cool girl and drinking to get drunk. Thus, this relationship was a dangerous one that I explored further in the next section.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Discussion

Overall, the literature review provided a basis upon which to develop my results and this resulted in four main research questions, which reinforced the four empirical generalizations (EG's) I defined.

The first EG stated alcohol advertisements relate to consumers from a young age and encourages heavy drinking later in life. The focus group results supported this notion because the main theme that came out of the results was relatability, or the idea that the commercials mirrored their own experiences and resonated with the participants. For example, the participants were all around the age of 21, and therefore, the commercials they saw and related to were those affecting their drinking habits now and later in life.

Furthermore, the participants referenced how the Bud Light commercial was “like you [were] watching you and your friends” because it related to them and, in turn, could encourage heavy drinking. Another participant mentioned how commercials resonated with her and reinforced her decisions to buy later. These results supported Martin et al.'s (2002) findings that aspects like humor, actors and a story line made the advertisements easy to recall and were more attractive to youth. Another participant reinforced the idea that story lines were attractive to youth when she noted how the Bud Light commercial inspired binge drinking because it was advertising a night of girls having fun and drinking heavily, which she believed was what happened in every college town. This directly supported Chen et al.'s (2005) findings that students responded best to advertising that portrayed humor and story lines.

Additionally participants agreed that the Bud Light commercial was speaking directly to their generation, using their language and their sentence structure. In fact, one participant said, “It was just kind of like these girls are so fun and that’s what they drink, you should do that and you’ll be fun too.” This idea that the commercial represented fun girls and those who watched the commercial wanted to become those girls directly related to Austin and Knaus’ (2000) findings that elementary school children had “positive identification with portrayals, [where they] wanted to be like [the characters and story line]” (p. 23). Although the participants in the focus groups were not elementary school children, the basic principle held true and expanded on Austin and Knaus’ (2000) research. Contrary to this research, one participant noted that the commercials did not start leaving an impression until she was older and more familiar with alcohol. Nonetheless, these results supported the EG and the overall theme of relatability as well because the participants wanted to be like the girls in the commercials.

In relation to the importance of the age of the participants, I utilized females who were right around 21 years old because, as Snyder et al. (2006) discovered, alcohol advertising related to youth who were underage *as well as* those over 21, in a similar way. The results from my focus group supported this research as one participant put it,

Even when you’re 21 and going to the bars... Your friends will like count how many beers you’ve had compared to them and they’ll either call you out on not drinking enough or call you out on drinking more than them.

In other words, these social norms and pressures did not go away after turning 21.

Furthermore, Smart (1988), Wilcox and Gangadharbatla (2006) and Wilcox et al. (2015) were the outliers in this portion of previous research because, as Smart (1988)

stated, advertising was a “weak indicator” of heavy drinking, and instead researchers needed to focus on external factors as well to understand the totality of effects on people (p. 321). One participant noted that every girl interpreted commercials with the lens of her personal experience and compared what she saw to what she experienced, with the example of eating pizza after drinking excessively. In this way, she shed light on the idea that external factors like the environment of the college town where “everyone” seemingly ate pizza when they were drunk or the influence of personal experiences on perception also played a role in influencing college females to drink. On the other hand, a participant made the strong connection between the commercials and social norming when she said, “It’s uncomfortable if you’re with a group of people and you don’t drink... The commercials make it seem that way too.”

Overall, the overarching theme of the relatability of alcohol advertising and its attractiveness supported previous research and had practical implications. From the attractiveness of humor, characters and storylines to the impact commercials had when they mirrored real life, alcohol commercials left an impression on youth. External factors like environment and peer pressure both encouraged heavy drinking as well. These results supported and extended the EG to draw comparisons between the intertwining of relatability and effects of the perceived environment (college culture) and commercials’ perpetuation of this perception. Practically, to make a change in the culture, we need to acknowledge the effects of the relatable commercials and attempt to curb drinking by altering the way we reach consumers and how they perceive their environment. Perhaps this means focusing on older and legal adults, instead of perpetuating the stereotypical perception of college culture.

The second EG focused on how social norming corresponded to college students and encouraged heavy drinking. The results from my focus groups supported this notion because many females felt pressure to keep up and drink a lot simply so they could fit in with their peers, which supported the overall theme of inclusion. For example, one participant noted the pressures to keep up with older girls. She *perceived* they were all drinking a lot and she wanted to match that to fit in. Similarly, Perkins et al. (2005), Park et al. (2009) and Borsari and Carey (2003) all confirmed that because students consistently believed their peers were drinking more than in reality, this created a norm from a misperception. This had theoretical implications as it provided more evidence in support of social norming theory.

Furthermore, the participants explained how the need to “keep up” or “catch up” to friends played directly into the theme of inclusion. For example, one participant explained, “You want to catch up because you want to be on the same level as everyone... They are all probably looking like they’re having a great time, dancing, jumping around, screaming and you’re like standing there [sober]...” The perception of college culture that stated drinking equaled fun encouraged these women to drink a lot to be a part of the culture. The focus group results paralleled Hustad et al.’s (2004) conclusion that the personality traits of sensation seeking and impulsiveness, or keeping up with their friends in my findings, contributed indirectly to heavy alcohol consumption and worked hand-in-hand with social norms and overall perceptions of drinking on campus.

Additionally, misperceived notions about drinking and subsequent social norming played directly into the theme of inclusion on another level when female participants

wanted to be on the same drinking level as their friends. One participant explained how she needed to do this so she was not “*that girl*,” meaning unsociable. This was another example of the insider language the participants continued to use throughout the focus groups. Knowing this language could be extremely useful to public health communicators as they try to educate this demographic on binge drinking. These results supported Testa et al.’s (2009) conclusions that perceived social norms of college, including peer pressure and perceived drinking norms, altered women’s drinking behavior. Perhaps these women would not have drunk as much or felt the need to be included without the perceived drinking norms.

Interestingly, as with the literature, the answers were not black and white when it came to how social norming affected the participants. In fact, many of the participants noted how they felt not only the norms of college culture, but also the norms within their friend group affecting them. One participant explained, “I’ll have like one [drink] to appease my friends, but I don’t really want to, but it’s like I am doing it almost to literally just to fit in.” Other participants explained the pressures, either implicitly or explicitly, from friends to join them in drinking excessively. Implicitly, one participant said, “It’s like if you don’t go out at least once, you feel like you’re missing out and stuff, like everyone is having so much fun without you...” Another participant noted how she based her attitudes towards drinking and how fun her night was by those around her and if her friends were not being fun, she joined a different group of people. These norms, enforced by friends as opposed to the college culture as a whole, paralleled Dunleavy’s (2008) findings that students’ perceptions of their specific social group affected them more than their campus drinking culture overall. This had theoretical and practical implications in

that it supported the strength of social norming theory on college campuses and also could lead to targeted education to address the power of social norming.

Additionally, Campo et al. (2003) discovered that social norms heavily influenced college students' consumption. My results supported this through statements like, "If we're [my friends and me] like sitting down at a bar and this group of girls are out dancing, I might be like, 'Oh my god, let's go dance!'" This was social norming at its most basic level: the influence of other people and the perception of how much more fun they seem to be having with alcohol. Furthermore, another participant described the college drinking culture as very group oriented. She explained how even though they might not be going to the fraternities any more, they still felt pressures to drink from the group they were with. "It's playful, but I guess it's like the mature version of you sitting there and not slapping the bag and getting made fun of," she said.

Thus, the intertwining of inclusion in the overall college drinking culture and the social norms these women face every day (whether or not they go out) all supported the previous research on social norming theory and further solidified it as a core cause for the binge drinking culture on college campuses. Therefore, through this expanding theoretical implication, we have the opportunity to bring about a change in the culture through education programs that address social norming's effects.

The next EG explained the relationship between social norms and females and how this predisposed them to drink more to try to fit in with their peers. Also, the theme of reinforcing perceptions (from my results) worked with the EG to expand on it.

One example was with gender norms females encountered and how those affected their drinking behavior. For example, one participant noted how she and her friends were

encouraged to “keep up with the guys” and be a “cool girl” with crazy stories to brag about the next day. Then the double standard between men and women presented itself if females had one drink too many and they slipped into the “hot mess” and “*that* girl” who was “falling over, carrying her shoes, crying” stereotype. This gender angle enhanced the EG and lent the opportunity for further study of gender and social norming.

Interestingly, another participant pointed out that these differences in gender drinking norms could stem from alcohol education because these resources defined the amount that men and women were able to drink. As another participant explained, females were rewarded with praise from males and disdain from other females if they could “keep up with the guys,” which was an evolving gender norm. All of these examples supported Ham and Hope’s (2003) findings that college women were beginning to drink as much as men because the gender drinking norms were evolving. Another participant explained the gender disparity well,

If there is a guy and a girl who are equally drunk and like pretty bad, like almost blackout, I feel like people look down on the girl... It is like, ‘Oh, Timmy’s drunk again.’ But the girls [are] like, ‘Wow, who let her get that way?’

Many other participants voiced similar perceptions. These results supported Hummer et al.’s (2012) conclusions that females believed males wanted females to be able to keep up with them and, in turn, believed males found this attractive.

Furthermore, the participants continually mentioned planning to become blackout and how that idea was rampant across the campus. In relation to the literature, although Piane and Safer (2008) found females did not have as many misperceived norms, Caucasian females were just as likely to drink as much as their peers. All of the

participants in my focus groups were Caucasian and their peers reinforced their perceptions of drinking and affected their own drinking behavior.

Additionally, through their study, Hummer et al. (2012) found females continually overestimated how much alcohol they should drink to become attractive for men. These conflicting gender norms and subsequent perceptions of the norms were then exacerbated by the reinforcement from alcohol commercials. For example, a participant described the Bud Light commercial showing a “socially acceptable drunk” that existed for both men and women. Yet none of the participants could attain this “level” of inebriation because of their misperceptions of how much the people around them were drinking and, in turn, how attractive their drinking behavior was to men.

Furthermore, Schulte et al. (2009) confirmed, “Teens often overestimate the quantity and frequency with which other adolescents consume alcohol[; and] moreover, misperceptions about the collective norm have been shown to influence age of drinking onset and the escalation of use” (p. 542). The strong effect of norms was apparent when the participants explained how they viewed binge drinking with responses like,

So you think about it, one shot is a drink. So if you take four shots in an hour, two shots and a couple beers, so within a couple of hours, technically you are binge drinking. I did not realize that...

Or that the definition of binge drinking “doesn’t seem like it’s that much, compared to the college lifestyle of drinking and going out. Like you wouldn’t think that you were binge drinking if you were pre-gaming...” Thus, these misperceived norms skewed female college students’ ideas about drinking and how much they should drink, which led to dangerous decisions.

In addition to their above findings, Schulte et al. (2009) reinforced other researchers' findings in that, just as females did, males tended to drink more to be perceived as masculine. One participant's story about her friend who voluntarily smashed a beer can against his head and drank the entire thing to impress the girls around him supported this idea. While this was just one instance, many of the participants noted males showing off and trying to impress girls with how much they could drink. Similarly, Yankelevitz et al. (2012) also found that social norms heavily influenced males. For example, from my research, a few participants explained how they felt that males were simply expected to drink more because they could tolerate more, and they had the same misperceived perception females had. Therefore, males misperceived norms as well and it would be an interesting study to then draw comparisons between the genders, which I outline below.

Overall, the EG that focused on social norms strong effects on females played hand in hand with the theme from my results of reinforcing perceptions. Sadly, this led to risky drinking decisions and scenarios where females wanted to impress males and their friends. Yet these results supported the strength of the Theory of Social Norming, its broad effects on females, and it expanded on it with the differences in gender aspect.

With the use of the Third Person Effect Hypothesis, which was the focus of the last EG, I was able to delve deeper into the stories about social norming. For example, many participants talked about other girls and how commercials and friends influenced them. From responses like "I think *they* [other girls] would be more influenced by going out and emulating the actions [in the commercials]..." or "I think after *you* watch it... [you'd] be like, 'That looks like a fun time,'" or even "Watching the first [commercial]

really does make *you* want to go out and have a fun night with friends.” These examples related to both Glazer et al. (2010) and Real and Rimal (2007) who concluded that ‘others’ were more affected and therefore drinking more was typical. Thus, the Third Person Effect Hypothesis and theme of social norming’s prevalence supported each other through my results.

On the one hand, the impact the participants perceived the commercials had on college students and themselves was surprising. While some pronouns like ‘them’ and ‘you’ came out in the stories, I was surprised to hear how many stories featured themselves and their own experiences. The idea that they were comfortable enough to divulge stories about themselves and admit their own risky drinking decisions strayed from previous research findings. Perhaps this was because they were in a comfortable, more intimate group and felt better about opening up, as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest. Alternatively, perhaps the idea that bragging about how much one drinks and being praised for one’s drinking ability (mentioned in the Results section) was showing through and they wanted to impress their peers. For example, one participant explained how the Bud Light commercial made her want to go have a fun night with friends.

While they might have been more willing to talk about themselves, they were quick to assert they could never explicitly confirm they were persuaded by the commercials. Although these conclusions were somewhat contradictory, as one participant said,

Their [Bud Light] commercial was something I was able to connect with more, whereas Corona was something to influence me more if I was ever in the situation of being on a beach in that sense. But neither were persuading me to go buy a

drink right then.

As with the binge drinking questions above, the participants overestimated how much they personally drank as compared with the larger student population and this paralleled both Glazer et al.'s (2010), Real and Rimal's (2007) and Begin's (2005) findings.

Therefore, my research somewhat supported the last EG that focused on the Third Person Effect Hypothesis. While the EG and theme of social norming's prevalence still supported each other, my results did not strongly support the hypothesis. Nonetheless, the theoretical implication was there to explore the type of group and/or person that responded well to the Third Person Effect Hypothesis. Practically, this encourages further research to determine the strength of the hypothesis. Additionally, the questions that utilized this theory were focused on females talking about other females. It is possible that discussion is too close to home and future research should discuss the opposite gender as a means of Third Person Effect. For example, some of the participants mentioned their guy friends' habits and these were easy for them to discuss because it was about the *other*.

Last, of the studies that I utilized as a basis for my own research, those that looked at the correlation between alcohol, advertising and subsequent binge drinking (e.g. Anderson et al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2006), overwhelmingly used comprehensive reviews of the literature or quantitative research methods. Neither of these methods allowed for a view into the inner workings of female college students and the college culture that surrounded them. The results from these focus groups showed a startling reality for these women filled with pressures to blackout; to drink too much to be

perceived as cool; to go out even if they have homework and other responsibilities; to take a pull at a party; to keep up with the people around them merely not to feel awkward; to drink excessively to catch up to people who have already been drinking for a few hours. These constant, intense pressures weighing on the participants to drink more was only reinforced by the perceptions of those around them and the alcohol commercials I showed in the focus group. None of the other studies had the opportunity to find this data because the method the other researchers used was not conducive to learning about people and their true habits. Thus, qualitative methods like focus groups and in-depth interviews can only strengthen the research in this area of study and find how best to educate on and reduce binge drinking and subsequent deaths and injuries.

Overall, it is difficult to pin point the main reason for the misperceptions of drinking on college campuses. Theoretically, my results supported previous research concerning the Theory of Social Norming and the reinforcement of norms by college culture environment and alcohol advertising. Nonetheless, my results gave opportunity to research in the area concerning gender, age and type of research. Furthermore, gaining insight into this insider jargon and hearing how females think and talk about alcohol was invaluable, especially for the public health field. As one of the goals of this research was to understand how college students, and women in particular, view alcohol commercials and how we can use that information to change perceptions, this research provides a wealth of knowledge. Terms like “that girl,” and instances when the group came to a consensus almost without exchanging much more than glances was important to assess. Practically, by curbing the relatability and ‘need to fit in’ factors in commercials that are so appealing and that are reinforcing misperceived gender and drinking norms, I believe

there is the potential to reduce binge drinking in the female population and, in turn, the devastation that accompanies risky drinking, like injury and death.

Limitations

While holding focus groups helped me to look at the group dynamic as Jordin and Brunt (1988) suggested, my results were not without limitations. First, recruitment for on a college campus during the summer semester was difficult because a very small percentage of students were still on campus. While my snowball method was effective in recruiting the number of participants I needed, I would have liked to have a wider variety of students from across campus to gauge more differences in how college females in different organizations, majors, etc. thought similarly or differently.

Next, since there were multiple participants in each focus group, ensuring everyone spoke and felt a part of the conversation was challenging, especially with dominant personalities. Additionally, there were times when I could tell the participants were uncomfortable speaking in front of one another about their habits and this perhaps skewed the truth. For example, one participant said,

I would say [drinking] every day would be regular... I'm not saying that I do, I am just saying I know people that do and like have a glass of wine every night, I wouldn't say they are binge drinking.

It was clear she did not want to be judged because she clarified that *she* did not drink every day.

Another limitation within the focus group setting was the side conversations that popped up throughout. If there were more than three participants, it was easy for two to begin talking about the question between themselves, muffling the responses and, in turn,

the audio tape. This made transcribing every word difficult and in a few places, the conversations were completely inaudible.

Also, the structure of the focus group itself may have led to a limitation that should be explored in other studies. The Bud Light commercial dominated the discussion and this may have been because I showed it first every time. Perhaps, showing the Corona commercial first would have led the participants to discuss the commercial more.

Similarly, perhaps a wider scope of commercials that better represented social norming would be a better starting point. I found the Corona commercial was very limiting in that many participants only associated it with the beach. For future studies, a more general commercial might work better to elicit new ideas and perceptions.

Last, as for the format with showing the commercials and then talking about perceptions, I found it difficult for the women not hear the questions framed by the commercials they saw. For example, concerning the Corona commercial, only one group noticed the girls only had four beers in the bucket. All of the other focus groups assumed they had an excess of beers to share between them. Perhaps this was how the question was framed, focusing on drinking a lot, or perhaps it was because the Bud Light commercial showed the women drinking excessively. In this way, it was difficult to ensure the women did not hear questions framed in certain ways.

Future Research

These results gave me an interesting look into how female college students viewed alcohol and advertising and how these perceptions reinforced social norms that surrounded them every day. With these results as a basis, the future studies in this research area are endless. First, the females really connected with the Bud Light

commercial and its relatability. A study that delves more deeply into alcohol commercials that reiterate and mirror personal experience and if they are truly effective would expand researchers' knowledge on the influence of alcohol advertising and its impact on or support of social norming. Perhaps even leading to measures being taken to curb alcohol advertising and its impact on young adults.

Furthermore, one participant noted in her discussion on alcohol advertising the advertiser's use of social media as another avenue of reaching young people. With social media's expanding influence these days, performing a study that focuses on social media as the advertising outlet would afford an interesting look at how inundated young adults are every minute with alcohol advertising. Another avenue is to look at the educational side of drinking on college campuses. This study could use Park, Rodgers and Stemmler's (2011) study on health organizations use of social media. With that research as a basis, steps could be taken to find the most effective outlet for reaching young people and educating them through a better use of social media as a tool (Park, Rodgers, & Stemmler, 2011).

Additionally, focusing on the male perspective as it pertains to this study would be an interesting contrast to the females' perceptions. As mentioned in the 'Discussion' section above, it would be very interesting to reframe the Third Person Effect Hypothesis questions so they focus on how men are influenced by the commercials as opposed to how other girls are influenced. This would afford insights into the links between the Third Person Effect Hypothesis, social norming and binge drinking on college campuses.

Last, I led a focus group with a group of males as a part of my research to glean what they thought about the commercials targeted at women and encouraging excessive

drinking behavior. I was surprised to find the men agreed with the women on multiple ideas. First, one participant noted how beer is primarily targeted towards men. Also, the men had the same perception of the culture on the campus: drink to get drunk. one participant said,

You're going into the night saying that, 'I'm just going to drink until I can't drink anymore' ... It comes down to you trying to keep up with the mindset. You're trying to keep up with the culture and what everyone else is doing. So you're going to drink what the person next to you is drinking, and if they keep drinking, you're not going to stop.

Social norming appears to affect men and women in similar ways and was further supported when one participant noted the commercials reinforcing excessive drinking and social norming. "If you look at how everyone drinks now... If you're going to party, you're going to drink a lot of alcohol, because they're seeing that [in the commercials]," he said. Furthermore, the men also saw the effects of the commercials in reinforcing the idea that one needs to keep drinking to have a good time. In many ways, men and women deal with alcohol pressures, social norming and the effects of alcohol advertising in similar ways because they are targeted as a group and a culture.

In many ways though, the men had a different take on these commercials that would lead to interesting research studies. First, the men saw these commercials as a male's idea of what women do on a weekend night when they are with their friends. They did not see the relatability women might feel behind the story and assumed a man must have made it. This goes against the majority of female participants who felt the commercial resonated with them on a personal level. As one of my future research

suggestions was to look at how effective relatable commercials are, it would be interesting to support the research findings with a group that is not targeted to see if they think it is effective or actually turns them away from the product. Additionally, the men were not as embarrassed to admit they do or do not fall in the 76 percent of students who drink regularly. This is just one example of this group being truthful and not adhering as much to 'groupthink' as the females. This could be for a variety of reasons of showing off in front of other males or being more outspoken, but this would present an interesting research study to see the differences when talking about alcohol and social norming, why males are more vocal and comfortable.

Overall, I hope that the results that came out of my study will lead to further research in this area to curb the alcohol abuse that is rampant on college campuses. Perhaps this is in the form of hindering relatable alcohol advertisements to youths. Perhaps it is encouraging departments on college campuses to take more action to encourage safe drinking behaviors. As many of the respondents noted, the college and young adult culture encourages excessive drinking behaviors that social norming then reinforces every time a female is out with her friends or feels the pressure to go out. In turn, social norming affects female college students and alcohol advertising reiterates all of the social norming and pressures females already feel, making it all seem normal.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script

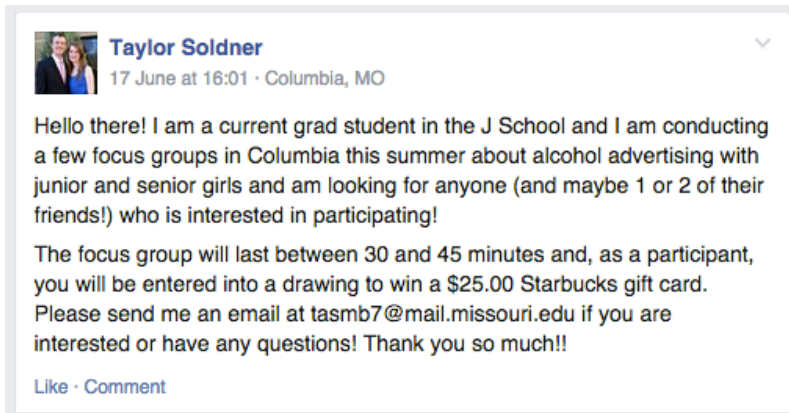
I posted on Facebook about the focus group as well as asked participants if they have any friends who may be interested. The Facebook post was altered slightly depending on the audience, which is seen in the screen shots I have from those posts. I also utilized a past professor to send out the message in a similar way, hoping to reach more participants. Both scripts are located below:

Facebook

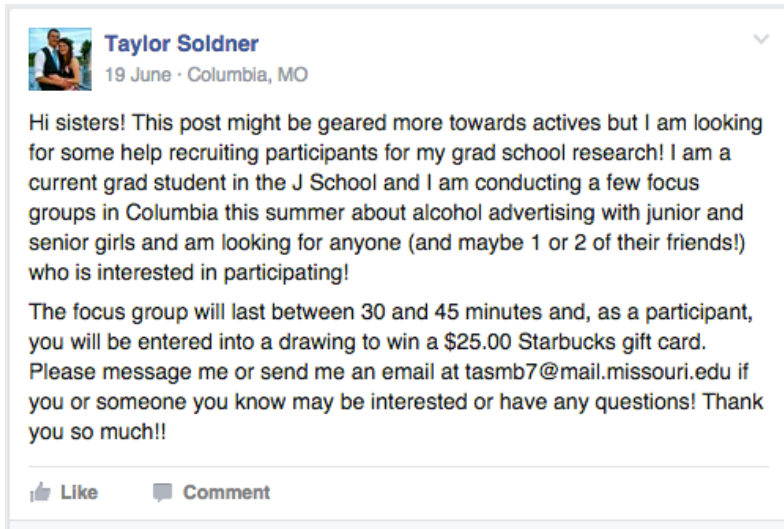
Hello! My name is Taylor Soldner and I am a current grad student in the J School. I am conducting a few focus groups about alcohol advertising with junior and senior girls and am looking for anyone who is interested in participating!

The focus group will last about one hour and, as a participant, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25.00 Starbucks gift card. Please send me an email at tasmb7@mail.missouri.edu if you are interested! Thank you so much!!

- Post on Mizzou Class of 2016 Facebook Group on June 17, 2015:



- Post on Chi Omega-Rho Alpha Facebook Group on June 19, 2015:



A screenshot of a Facebook post by Taylor Soldner, dated June 19, 2015, from Columbia, MO. The post contains text about recruiting participants for grad school research and a Starbucks gift card prize. Below the text are 'Like' and 'Comment' buttons.

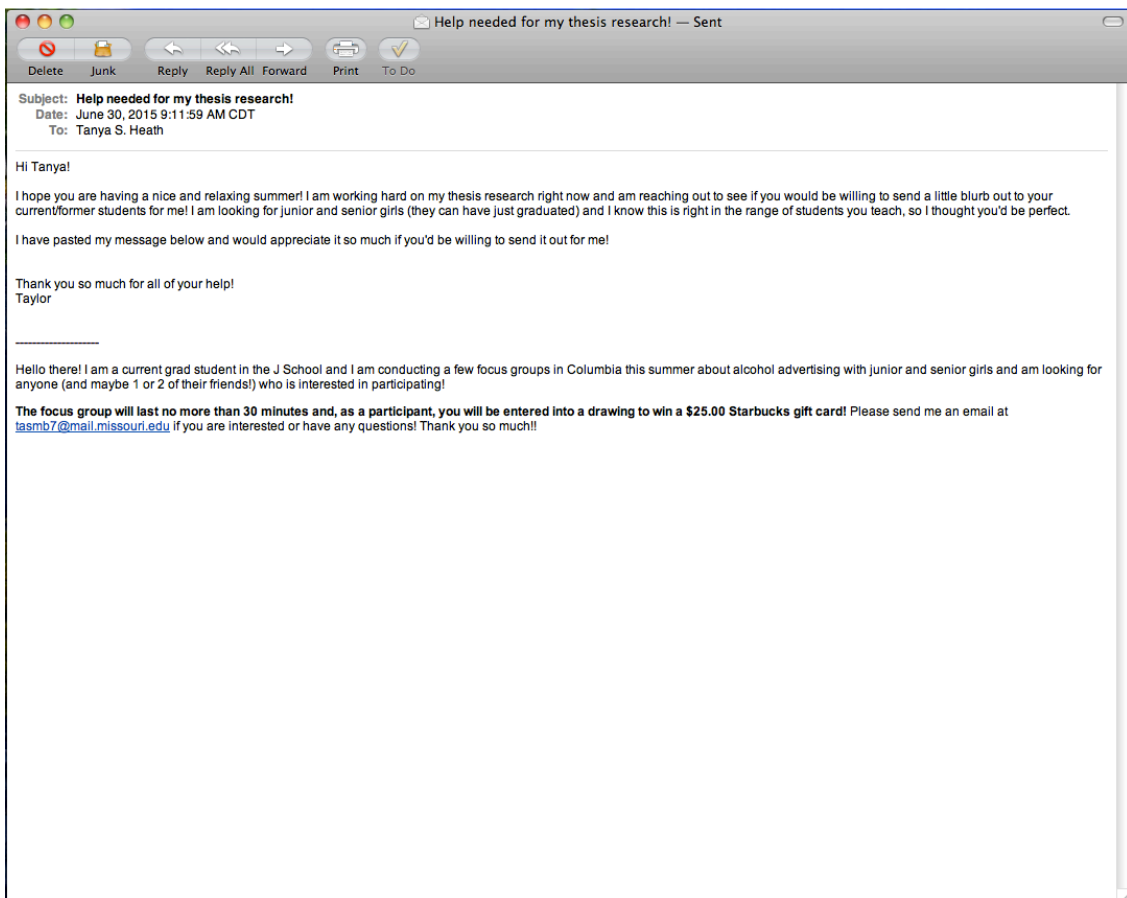
Taylor Soldner
19 June · Columbia, MO

Hi sisters! This post might be geared more towards actives but I am looking for some help recruiting participants for my grad school research! I am a current grad student in the J School and I am conducting a few focus groups in Columbia this summer about alcohol advertising with junior and senior girls and am looking for anyone (and maybe 1 or 2 of their friends!) who is interested in participating!

The focus group will last between 30 and 45 minutes and, as a participant, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25.00 Starbucks gift card. Please message me or send me an email at tasmb7@mail.missouri.edu if you or someone you know may be interested or have any questions! Thank you so much!!

Like Comment

- Email to former professor on June 30, 2015



A screenshot of an email client window titled 'Help needed for my thesis research! — Sent'. The email header shows the subject, date (June 30, 2015 9:11:59 AM CDT), and recipient (Tanya S. Heath). The body of the email contains a message from Taylor to Tanya, including a request for help with thesis research and a request to forward the message to students. The email ends with a thank you and a signature line.

Help needed for my thesis research! — Sent

Delete Junk Reply Reply All Forward Print To Do

Subject: **Help needed for my thesis research!**
Date: June 30, 2015 9:11:59 AM CDT
To: Tanya S. Heath

Hi Tanya!

I hope you are having a nice and relaxing summer! I am working hard on my thesis research right now and am reaching out to see if you would be willing to send a little blurb out to your current/former students for me! I am looking for junior and senior girls (they can have just graduated) and I know this is right in the range of students you teach, so I thought you'd be perfect.

I have pasted my message below and would appreciate it so much if you'd be willing to send it out for me!

Thank you so much for all of your help!
Taylor

Hello there! I am a current grad student in the J School and I am conducting a few focus groups in Columbia this summer about alcohol advertising with junior and senior girls and am looking for anyone (and maybe 1 or 2 of their friends!) who is interested in participating!

The focus group will last no more than 30 minutes and, as a participant, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25.00 Starbucks gift card! Please send me an email at tasmb7@mail.missouri.edu if you are interested or have any questions! Thank you so much!!

In-Person, after the Focus Group ends

Thank you so much for your participation in this focus group! In an effort to continue my research, I am asking if you all know of any friends who may be interested in this study. Your additional help will not influence the result or what was said in the focus group, in any way.

Do you have friends who you think would be interested? If so, please give me their PawPrint now. I will contact them once and they will not be forced to participate.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study University of Missouri Social Norming through Alcohol Advertising and Binge Drinking on College Campuses

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Taylor Soldner. The purpose of this research is to understand the effects of alcohol advertising on drinking habits.

Your participation will involve a focus group that will take approximately one (1) hour.

Risks and discomforts

There are very minimal to no risks associated with this research. Everything said within the focus group, will remain confidential and anonymous. By audiotaping the session, there will be no personal identifiers associated with your answers. Also, during the focus group, please do not state your name or other identifying information.

Furthermore, after the focus group, the researcher will transcribe the results so that any identifiers are in no way connected with your answers. In this way, the researcher ensures your confidentiality and keeps the information anonymous.

Potential benefits

You will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25.00 gift card to Starbucks. If you would like to be entered into the drawing to win this, please write your Pawprint on the sheet provided. This identifying information will not be associated with your answers, nor will it be used for any other purposes than for the gift card drawing.

Protection of confidentiality

While we cannot protect privacy within the focus group setting, everything said within the focus group is confidential. The audiotapes taken during the session will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and the subsequent transcripts will be password-protected. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Taylor Soldner at the University of Missouri at (703) 965 – 1453 or tasmb7@mail.missouri.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board at 573-882-9585.

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

APPENDIX C

Adapted from the Tufts University Alcohol Study, Spring 2000
Focus Group Script (adapted slightly by group)

Introductory Comments and Introductions

1. Opening Question: Beer Commercials' Effects

- After watching these commercials, what do you think the company was trying to achieve with its commercial? Why?
- Who do you think they were targeting? And, why do you think that?

2. Females and Alcohol Advertising

- What are your expectations about drinking/alcohol in commercials? Where did you get these ideas?
- After seeing this commercial, are you more inclined to go purchase that product? What about your friends? Is there a time you can think of when a friend or a sister of yours acted like the women in the beer commercial? What about the guys in the commercial? Tell me more.
- Do you think women your own age are influenced to act like these women in the commercial?

3. Binge Drinking

- How would you describe binge drinking? Does anyone you know binge drink? Does this commercial encourage binge drinking?
- Is there a different standard between men and women when it comes to drinking?
- How might the advertiser be promoting overdrinking?

4. Drinking Regularly and Social Norming

- Missouri College Health Behavior Study from 2014 found that 76% of students say they drink on a regular basis. Do you fall in this 76%? Do your friends? Do you feel like you have to “keep up” with people to stay a part of the 76%?
- Do you think the advertiser is successfully persuading people? Why or why not?

5. Anything else?

- Is there anything else you would like to add or include before we wrap-up?

Conclusion

APPENDIX D

Television Beer Commercials Used During the Focus Groups

- **Bud Light**
 - Bud Light Living: “Girls Night”
 - February 2014
 - <http://bit.ly/1B2Hvdp>
- **Corona**
 - Corona Extra: “Football Trick”
 - August 2010
 - <http://bit.ly/1BXLxIX>

APPENDIX E

How the Research Questions and Focus Group Questions Relate

Research Questions	Focus Group Questions
<p>RQ1. Do female college students think beer advertisers are trying to persuade them to purchase their product? And if so, how?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After watching these commercials, what do you think the company was trying to achieve with its commercial? Why? • Who do you think they were targeting? And, why do you think that?
<p>RQ2. Do female college students feel that their peers' drinking habits are affected by social norming? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missouri College Health Behavior Study from 2014 found that 76% of students say they drink on a regular basis. Do you fall in this 76%? Do your friends? Do you feel like you have to “keep up” with people to stay a part of the 76%?
<p>RQ3.A. What does binge drinking mean to female college students? Do female college students believe they overdrink in certain situations? Is there a different standard for men and women when it comes to ‘overdrinking’? Why or why not? RQ3.B. Do females in college think beer advertisers promote overdrinking? Do the depictions in the beer commercials on television promote overdrinking or not? Why or why not? RQ3.C. Do female college students feel that television commercials affect their own drinking? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe binge drinking? Does anyone you know binge drink? Does this commercial encourage binge drinking? • Is there a different standard between men and women when it comes to drinking? • How might the advertiser be promoting overdrinking? • What are your expectations about drinking/alcohol in commercials? Where did you get these ideas? • After seeing this commercial, are you more inclined to go purchase that product? What about your friends?
<p>RQ4.A. Do female college students feel that beer commercials that use social norms affect other female college students' drinking? Why or why not RQ4.B. Do females believe that other female college students, who they know, pay attention to social norms being perpetuated in television beer commercials?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a time you can think of when a friend acted like the women in the beer commercial? What about the guys in the commercial? Tell me more. • Do you think women your own age are influenced to act like these women in the commercial? • Do you think the advertiser is successfully persuading people? Why or why not?