Emerging Topics in the Social Norms Approach to Problem Drinking and Health Promotion in College

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Emerging Topics in the Social Norms Approach to Problem Drinking and Health Promotion in College

I. What We Currently Know & Directions for Future Research (Perkins)

II. Heavy Drinking, Misperceived Norms, and Retention (Perkins)

III. Research on Alcohol Misuse and Sexual Risk Taking (Craig)

IV. An Experiment Conducting Late Night Breath Tests (Craig)
What We Currently Know

• Traditional approaches to reduce problem drinking (health education, health terrorism, and social control) are of limited or no effect.

• Exaggerated perceptions of the drinking norms pervade all campuses and subcultures.
Students’ Misperceptions of the Norm for the Number of Drinks Consumed the Last Time Other Students “Partied”/Socialized at Their School

(NCHA Nationwide Data from 72,719 Students Attending 130 Schools, 2000-03)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy of Perceived Drinking Norm</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under-estimate by 3+ Drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
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71% Overestimate Peer Drinking!
• Perception of the peer norm is the strongest predictor of personal drinking level compared to all personal, demographic & environmental factors that have been researched.

• Bystanders become more prevalent due to misperceptions of the norm.
The Social Norms Model

- **Baseline**
  - Identify Actual & Misperceived Norms

- **Intervention**
  - Intensive Exposure to Actual Norm Messages

- **Less Exaggerated Misperceptions of Norms**

- **Predicted Result**
  - Less Harmful or Risky Behavior
Examples of Strategies to Reduce Misperceptions and Strengthen Positive Norms

- Print media and PSA campaigns
- Peer education programs and workshops for targeted risk groups
- New student orientation presentations
- Counseling interventions
- Curriculum infusion
- Electronic multimedia
Social Norms Marketing Programs at the University of Virginia

Campus Wide Campaign
Weekly Campus Posters, newspaper ads, BAC cards, & E-mails
-- Commenced Fall 2002
Annual music event
-- Commenced Spring 2004
Facebook Ads
-- Commenced Spring 2005

Primary Campaign
Monthly Dorm Posters
-- Commenced Fall 1999

Supplemental Social Norms Programs
Parent Orientation
Annual Session with Normative Statistics
-- Commenced Summer 2002

Social Norms Programs

Target Audience
First Year Students
All Undergraduates
At Risk Groups

Six Years of Declining Negative Consequences Related to Alcohol Misuse Among Students Exposed to a Social Norms Intervention at U of Virginia


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% No Consequences</th>
<th>% Multiple Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When is the Social Norms Approach Most Effective?

- Clear positive norm messages
- Credible data
- Absence of competing scare messages
- Dosage is high (ongoing and intense social marketing of actual norms)
- Synergistic strategies
- Broad student population receives message in addition to any high-risk target groups

Source: H. W. Perkins (ed), The Social Norms Approach to Preventing School and College Age Substance Abuse, 2003
Directions and Questions for Future Research

• What are ways to increase norm message visibility in changing information networks?
• How do we increase the credibility of data about peer norms?
• Are gender based norms or other subgroup norms more or less important influences?
• What is the impact of misperceptions on retention?
Path Model of Student Drinking Impact on Retention

High Risk/Heavy Drinker

Misperceives Heavy Drinking as Norm

Light Drinker or Abstainer

Injuries and Deaths

DUI arrests

Social Infractions

Depression

Academic Failure

Academic Apathy

Social Participation

Retention

Source: H.W. Perkins, NASPA, 2010
Canadian student disaffection among light and non-drinkers\textsuperscript{a} by their perceptions of the student drinking norm at parties and bars in their school environment (N=1,197)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of Disaffection</th>
<th>Accurate Perception of Drinking Norm</th>
<th>Overestimates Drinking Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not feel valued as a person at their school</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not happy at school most of the time</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks they do not fit in with other students on campus</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not think it is important to work with other students to improve their school</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>34%***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}Students reporting typically consuming 0 or 1 drinks at parties and bars.

*Significant difference between percentages at p < .05; ** p < 01; ***p < .001.
References for Part II (Retention)


Part III – Research on Alcohol Misuse and Sexual Risk Taking

Part IV - An Experiment Conducting Late Night Breath Tests

Creative Ways to Engage Students and Faculty in Applying the Social Norms Approach to New Topics and New Ways of Collecting Data
Engaging the Research Curriculum to Study Campus Sexual Health

- Independent Study Project “Survey of Alcohol Use, Safety, and Sexual Behavior”
  Krizia Mayer (WS’08) and Ben Dahlberg (H’08)
  - Email-delivered, password secured, anonymous survey of random sample: 51% response rate (203 respondents)
  - 2/3 reported having zero or one sex partner in the previous 12 months
  - But, only 10% were able to identify this as the campus norm
Engaging the Research Curriculum to Study Campus Sexual Health

- **William Smith Senior Honors Project** – “Alcohol Use, Sexual Behavior, and Perceived Stigma Among William Smith Students” Samantha Miller (WS’09)

  - Email-delivered, password secured, anonymous survey of all William Smith Students: 52% response rate (565 respondents)
  - 2/3 have not become intoxicated and then had casual sex.
  - 17% intentionally become intoxicated and then engage in casual sex, but almost half overestimate this percentage by more than 20%.
Engaging the Co-Curriculum to Study Campus Sexual Health

- HIV/AIDS Collective (student club)—“2009 Survey of Sexual Health and HIV Risk” Natasha King (WS’12) and Bernadette Wormuth (WS’12)
  - Email-delivered, password secured, anonymous survey of random sample: 32% response rate (293 respondents)
  - Two thirds of sexually active students use condoms most of the time or always but students tend to under estimate the frequency of peer condom use.
  - Students report that alcohol use reduces condom use frequency
Engaging the Course-Based Curriculum to Study Campus Alcohol Use

• First Year Seminar: Alcohol in College—What is Myth? What is Reality?”

  – Random double-blind breath tests every night of the week between 11pm and 3am: 85% response rate (1837 respondents)
  – 75% of students measure BAC of .05% or less. 60% have a BAC of 0.0%.
  – More than half of students perceive that the majority of students have BAC levels higher than is actually the case.
Engaging the Course-Based Curriculum to Study Campus Alcohol Use

Distribution of BAC levels of HWS students returning home late at night (N=1837)
Engaging the Course-Based Curriculum to Study Campus Alcohol Use

Distribution of BAC levels of HWS students returning home late at night

- School Night (N=1138)
- Weekend Night (N=704)
Engaging the Course-Based Curriculum to Study Campus Alcohol Use

Distribution of BAC levels of HWS students returning home late at night by gender

- Males (N=945)
- Females (N=793)
Conclusions

• Engaging faculty and students in public health research enhances the educational experience for students and scholarly work of faculty.
• Data from this research provides the campus with resources to enhance healthy practices on campus
• There are no increased costs to engage students and faculty in this enterprise