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# College Students Who Abstain From Alcohol: Those Who Choose Not To Use

Sandra Jean Luck

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COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ABSTAIN FROM ALCOHOL:  
THOSE WHO CHOOSE NOT TO USE

by

Sandra J. Luck  
Bachelor of Science, Park University, 2001  
Masters of Science, Central Michigan University, 2004

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

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for the degree of

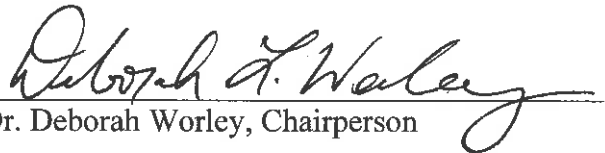
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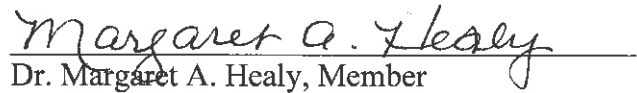
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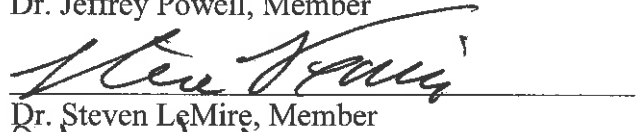
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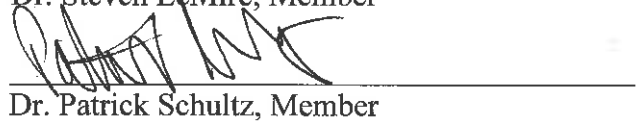
This dissertation, submitted by Sandra J. Luck in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

  
Dr. Deborah Worley, Chairperson


  
Dr. Margaret A. Healy, Member

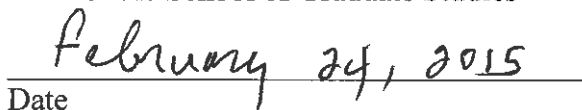
  
Dr. Jeffrey Powell, Member

  
Dr. Steven LeMire, Member

  
Dr. Patrick Schultz, Member

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

  
Wayne Swisher  
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Sandra Luck  
January 15, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and behaviors of North Dakota college students who have chosen to abstain from alcohol. This research contributes to the alcohol abuse prevention field by suggesting a framework to develop programming and recommendations were provided to develop prevention messages to increase the number of student abstainers on college campuses.

The Motivations of Abstaining from Alcohol Questionnaire (MAAQ) (Stritzke & Butt, 2001) informed scripted questions asked of four focus groups conducted at the University of North Dakota. The students who participated in the focus groups shared their experiences of choosing not to use alcohol while attending college. I considered their motivations and behaviors after examining their experiences.

The findings suggest that these students are motivated to abstain due to several factors, with parents' influences – both positive and negative – being the main motivator, as well as a desire to live up to high personal expectations and/or act as a role model. In regards to the behaviors of the college student abstainer population, this study found that the college students who abstained from alcohol had social lives similar to those who used alcohol, acted in a manner that reflected their personal responsibilities and self-efficacy, and were judgmental of those who used alcohol. Many participants shared the importance of staying true to themselves and abstaining as a priority in their life.

The specific comments related to these factors are provided and results are compared and contrasted to relevant literature. In order to gain a full understanding of

this population situated in its environment, it is suggested that Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) could be a possible conceptual framework. Recommendations for programming and practice on college campuses are offered, as well as possible avenues for further research with and for this population.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Alcohol has become an intrinsic part of the college environment. The research on college drinking dates back to 1949 and has been a prevalent topic ever since (Logan, Kilmer, & Marlatt, 2010); however, there has been less attention placed on the college student abstainer. Studies report between 11% and 38% of college students practice abstinence from alcohol (e.g., Cotner, 2002; Huang, DeJong, Towvim, & Schneider, 2009; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2002). Most of the alcohol-related research identifies a percentage of abstainers within the sample group but does not reveal other characteristics or experiences of these abstainers.

This study focused on providing an in-depth examination of the students' motivations and strategies they used to remain abstinent. This research contributes to the prevention field by creating a framework to develop programming and prevention messages to students who choose not to use alcohol. A qualitative method was used to understand the college student abstainers and their personal stories and experiences.

#### **The Scope of College Student Drinking**

In 1949, a survey of over 6,000 students at Harvard University was conducted and researchers found that 17% of men and 6% of women reported drinking more than once a week (Presley, Meilman, & Leichliter, 2002; Wechsler, 1996). More recently, in 2013, a survey of over 53,000 college students in the United States was conducted. Over 69%

of men and 67% of women reported drinking in the last 30 days (CORE Institute, 2014). The surveys provide evidence of dramatic increase in the use of alcohol by students since the 1950s.

This overall increase in college students' alcohol use is not the only concern. The excessive use of alcohol, or binge drinking, is another concern for administrators on any college campus. Binge drinking is defined for males as having five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks; for women, this measure is four or more drinks (Wechsler, 1996; Glassman, 2010). In 2007, the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States declared high-risk or binge drinking by college students a major health problem (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2007). Those who binge drink have a 13 times greater chance for alcohol abuse and 19 times greater likelihood for dependence (Knight et al., 2002).

There is a high prevalence of alcohol dependence among U.S. college students with 31% of the students meeting the diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence (Knight, et al., 2002) according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). One of the most significant criteria for this disorder is level of tolerance. The DSM-IV describes "tolerance as either (1) a need to increase the amount of the substance to achieve the desired effect or (2) a diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of the substance" (p. 432). More than two out of five college students have reported a high tolerance, and those who binge drink are more likely to meet the criteria for dependence (Knight et al., 2002).

College students who drink heavily or binge drink have reported experiencing negative consequences from alcohol-related incidents (Abbey, 2002; Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002; Jackson, Sher, & Park, 2005; Logan, Kilmer, & Marlatt, 2010; Mallett, Lee, Neighbors, Larimer, & Turrisi, 2006). Students who binge drink are ten times more likely to drink and drive (Presley et al., 2002; Wechsler, 1996) and have been the cause of nearly half of all motor vehicle accidents involving deaths and unintentional injuries (Wechsler, 1996). Specifically, Hingson, Heeren, Winter, and Wechsler (2005) found that 1,825 students aged 18-24 in the United States die each year from alcohol-related deaths.

Alcohol use by college students correlates with other risky behaviors (Abbey, 2002, Wechsler et al., 2002b); in 2005, 97,000 college students reported being a victim of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape (Hingson et al., 2005). Students who binge drink are five times more likely to have unsafe sex when compared to their non-binge drinking counterparts (Presley et al., 2002). Finally, poor academic performance, such as low scores on tests or assignments and/or missing classes, has been attributed to alcohol use (Powell, Williams, & Wechsler, 2004; Singleton, 2007; Sullivan & Risler, 2002).

### **College Student Abstainer**

College student abstainers are described in the literature as either those who have never engaged in alcohol use in their lifetime or those who have not used in the last 30 days (Huang, DeJong, Schneider, & Towvim, 2011). Both of these groups are minority categories in US colleges, as, in 2014, 16% of students reported having never engaged in alcohol use in their lifetime and 32% reported not using alcohol in the last 30 days (CORE, 2014). Some college campuses have noticed an increasing trend of college



students who have reported not using alcohol in the past 30 days (UND NDCORE Alcohol and Drug Survey, 2010); however, with a small body of literature on students who choose not to drink, there are some inconsistencies about who these students are.

Research findings have not been consistent regarding whether males abstain more than females or vice versa. For example, the College Alcohol Study (CAS) found that college men were more likely to abstain than college women (Wechsler et al., 2002b), while the 2014 CORE Alcohol and Other Drug Survey reported 33% of females did not use alcohol in the past 30 days compared to 31% of males (CORE, 2014). Men have been found more likely to engage in heavy episodic drinking, which may suggest women abstain more than men (White, De Sousa, & de Visser, 2011).

Whether they are men or women, the researchers have described several reasons why college students have made the decision not to use alcohol. Some of these reasons to abstain include concern of family histories of alcohol use and abuse (Huang et al., 2009), friends' abusive use of alcohol (Cotner, 2002), parental influences (Huang et al., 2011; van der Vorst, Engels, & Burk, 2010), and religion or lifestyle choices (Conroy & de Visser, 2012; Cotner, 2002; Harden, 2010; Knight et al., 2007). Some students have indicated alcohol is too expensive for their budget and that they prioritize college and learning as more important than choosing to abuse or use alcohol (Weise, 2011). In a qualitative study conducted with five college students who were non-drinkers, one student reported that she did not drink for these and other reasons. The authors described Dawn, a 21-year-old female, who chose not to drink because it was linked to broader lifestyle principles and she wanted to live a healthy lifestyle (Conroy & de Visser, 2012).

Even with the choice of abstaining from alcohol, non-drinkers have revealed that they experience negative consequences from alcohol-related incidents and still suffer from secondhand effects (Wechsler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002a). Secondhand effects of alcohol can be defined as “negative experiences directly resulting from someone else's drinking and are among the problems associated with heavy drinking” (Langley, Kypri, & Stephenson, 2003, p. 1023). College students living in residence halls or in fraternity or sorority houses have reported being insulted or humiliated, having their sleep interrupted, and having to look after or “babysit” drunken friends or roommates (Langley et al., 2003; Wechsler, et al., 2002a).

Excessive alcohol use has clearly caused problems with both the college student drinker and the college student abstainer. A review of relevant data has shown that there are states that have a higher rate of excessive alcohol use (Hughes, Sathe, & Spagnola, 2008). This study focused on college students in North Dakota and may be instructive to other health educators in light of the finding that North Dakota is one of the top three binge drinking states.

### **North Dakota College Drinking**

North Dakota is a rural state with a reputation for high alcohol consumption. There are high rates of alcohol use among college students, as well as high rates for binge drinking among those in the 18-25-age range (Hughes et al., 2008). In 2008, North Dakota was ranked number one nationally per capita in alcohol use, with 40.4% of the population reporting use, surpassing South Dakota (31.0 percent) and Montana (31.6 percent) (Hughes et al., 2008). North Dakota continues to rank high with alcohol use. In 2012, 24% of residents who were 21 years of age reported binge drinking. Researchers of

one study suggested there are high levels of consumption due to the “state's attractiveness to younger Americans looking for work. North Dakota had the nation's lowest unemployment rate in 2013 and has had the nation's fastest growing state economy in each of the past four years” (Myhighplains.com, 2014, para. 12).

Even though it is ranked highly, most of North Dakota’s population does not perceive alcohol use as a serious problem. In 2008, North Dakota community members and key informants (i.e. school counselors, teachers, and social workers) were surveyed by the North Dakota Department of Human Services using the *North Dakota Readiness Survey* to better understand the perceptions and attitudes about alcohol use in the community. Only 41% of the community members perceived alcohol use among youth to be a serious problem. In contrast, the majority of the key informants (i.e. school counselors, teachers, social workers) (62.2%) felt that alcohol use by youth was a serious problem (North Dakota Department of Human Services, 2010). Perhaps, one reason there are different perceptions between community members and key informants is alcohol has become integrated into our culture throughout high school and college. One professor who was interviewed reported, “College students see binge drinking as a conforming act rather than a deviant act” (Herzog, 2012, p. 1).

To better understand the college population, the eleven public North Dakota colleges biannually deploy the NDCORE (North Dakota CORE Alcohol and Drug Study). A total of 3,891 students at these eleven institutions completed the 2010 NDCORE survey, where 48% were males and 52% were females. Of these individuals, 35.2% were freshmen, 29.3% were sophomores, 17.8% were juniors, 15% were seniors, 1.1% were graduate students, 0.2% reported other or non-degree seeking, and 1.4%

reported other. The students who completed the survey represented all ethnic backgrounds; however the majority of the participants were White (87.8%). Other ethnicities included Black (3%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (2.4%), Hispanic (3.8%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3.8%), and other (1.3%).

Of those students who completed the NDCORE in 2010, 85.2% reported using alcohol in the past 30 days in comparison to a national reference group of 60,629 college students, of which 64.1% reported using alcohol during the past month (North Dakota University system, 2011). Among the North Dakota college students, 49.9% reported binge drinking, or having 5 or more drinks at one sitting on one or more occasions in the last two weeks (NDCORE, 2010), compared to 35.1% on the ACHA NCHA (American College Health Association National College Health Assessment) (American College Health Association, 2010).

Even though there are a high number of North Dakota college students who binge drink in comparison to the national average, there has been a slight decrease in the past years. The number of college students that reported binge drinking “during the past two weeks” in 2008 dropped from 50.5% in 2008 (NDCORE, 2008) to 48.3% in NDCORE’s findings in 2010 (NDCORE, 2010). UND is one of the few campuses in the state that has tracked the data for several years. In 2000, 59.6% of UND students reported at least one instance of binge drinking in the past two weeks compared to 38.2% of the national reference group (UND, Healthy UND Committee, 2010). In 2008, 39.6% UND students reported one or more instances of binge drinking at least once in the past two weeks compared to 37.5% of the 2008 national reference group (American College Health Association, 2008). Within the past ten years, UND has reported a 23% decrease in the

number of students reporting binge drinking. The corresponding percentage of students in the national reference group who fit these criteria has remained about the same during this same time period.

### **Campus Administrators Respond to Alcohol Concerns**

The excessive use of alcohol has caused concern at all college campuses. In 1996, college presidents considered student binge drinking the number one problem on college campuses. During that time, approximately 44 percent of college students were classified as heavy drinkers (Wechsler, 1996). As time passed, the percentage of heavy drinkers rose to include more than two-thirds (68.9%) of college students in 2003 (Walters, 2004).

In 2006, Broughton and Molasso conducted a meta-analysis of studies involving college drinking. The purpose of their analysis was to understand major themes and trends concerning college drinking and to recognize if there had been any change in alcohol research over the last 30 years. The researchers discovered a lack of a specific or unified theoretical framework within this body of research. There is a need to identify a specific framework to guide the college administrators who are charged with focusing on the alcohol issues on their campus.

Addressing college students' alcohol use and abuse has become a priority for college administrators on numerous college campuses. Both private and public college presidents have stated that student binge drinking is the number one problem on college campuses (DeJong & Langford, 2002). Addressing the problem of binge drinking has become a part of strategic planning and a priority for many colleges. For example, in January 2011, President Buchanan of the University of Wyoming (UW) received an award for creating an environmental change at UW. His strategy was changing the way

alcohol misuse was portrayed in the student population and media and removing the glorified aspect. President Buchanan implemented alcohol prevention initiatives such as late night programming, mandatory online alcohol education for incoming freshman, and alcohol education programs (University of Wyoming News, 2011). President Buchanan also established a task force that worked on policy changes, including local and state laws, and developed a strategic plan to prevent alcohol abuse and misuse for the UW campus.

Similar comprehensive prevention programs have been developed on other campuses, including campuses in North Dakota. In 2009, administrators at North Dakota State University (NDSU) developed a strategic plan to address high-risk alcohol and other substance usage (Hagen, 2009). Also in North Dakota, University of North Dakota (UND) president, Robert E. Kelley, charged faculty, staff, and students involved in the Healthy UND 2020 Coalition to develop goals and initiatives to create a comprehensive prevention plan (UND, Healthy UND Committee, 2011). All of these programs included a goal of decreasing high-risk drinking on their respective campuses.

The good news for North Dakota college administrators is a documented increase in college students who have chosen to abstain from alcohol. Since 2000, UND has annually observed an increase in students who report abstaining from alcohol in the last 30 days. According to the 2008 NDCORE, 22% of college students abstained from alcohol over a 30-day period prior to responding to the survey, whereas in 2004, 17.3% of students reported staying abstinent from alcohol over the past the 30 days (UND NDCORE Alcohol and Drug Survey, 2010).

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were asked in this study:

1. What are the motivations for college students to abstain or choose not to use alcohol?
2. What behaviors are exhibited by those college students who choose not to use alcohol?

## **Potential Significance**

The current study was designed to explore the motivations and behaviors of North Dakota college students who have chosen to abstain from alcohol. In order to best serve and support the academic success of the entire college student population, better support students who abstain, and promote abstinence as a viable choice for students who choose to use alcohol, it is crucial for college administrators and prevention specialists to have a better understanding of students who choose not to use alcohol and the factors that contribute to the choice. Once there is a better understanding of these students' motivations and behaviors, a framework can be created to guide administrators and prevention specialists in their programming and presentations that will share strategies on how to abstain from alcohol and present the idea of not drinking as a valid option while in college.

## **Framework**

Cox and Klinger (1988) developed a framework for sorting motives for drinking alcohol using two dimensions; one reflecting the valence (positive or negative) and the other reflecting the source (internal or external) of the outcomes one hopes to obtain by drinking. This dimensional sorting process is further explained:

Crossing these two dimensions yields four classes of motives: (a) internally generated positive reinforcement motives (drinking to enhance positive mood or well-being), (b) externally generated, positive reinforcement motives (drinking to obtain positive social rewards), (c) internally generated, negative reinforcement motives (drinking to reduce or regulate negative emotions), and (d) externally generated, negative reinforcement motives (drinking to avoid social censure or rejection) (Cooper, 1994, p. 2).

Stritzke and Butt (2001) modified Cox & Klinger's framework to create a new framework that could be used to understand abstaining population. The MAAQ was developed to understand what motivates young adolescents who choose not to use alcohol or not to use alcohol in harmful ways. The MAAQ is constructed using five factors: (a) fear of consequences, (b) dispositional risk, (c) family constraints, (d) religious constraints, and (e) indifferences (Stritzke & Butt, 2001). In the current study, these factors constructing the MAAQ were used to guide the aspects of inquiry in the literature review, to design and phrase the focus group questions, and, finally, to interpret and categorize the results.

Considerable research has been conducted with each of the five factors that I used for this study. The literature review describes details from several authors regarding each factor. The five factors were then used to develop the focus group questions with the goal being to better understand if the literature concurred with the focus group members' motivations and behaviors. Finally, the factors became relevant in the results of this study as they connected to the findings and either agreed with or differed from the behaviors of the interviewed participants.



## Definitions

The following terms are listed in alphabetical order and are defined to clarify their meaning in the context of the study:

**College Student Abstainer:** Individuals enrolled in college who practice complete abstinence from alcohol use (Huang et. al., 2011). For this purpose of this study, “abstain” is defined as one reporting not using alcohol in the past year. While the length of abstention in relation to classifying individuals as abstainers varies in relevant research, one year of abstention is used here as I felt that shorter timeframes could not provide an accurate measure of a person’s dedication to abstention. College Student Abstainer, abstainers, and students who choose not to use are used interchangeably in this research.

**Adolescence:** The transitional stage of development between childhood and full adulthood— representing the period of time during which a person is biologically an adult but emotionally not at full maturity (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

**Alcohol and Alcohol Use/r:** For this study, alcohol is used interchangeably with alcoholic beverage, which is any beverage containing alcohol, usually beer, wine, or liquor (Merriam-Webster, 2012). Alcohol use is therefore the consumption of these types of beverages. Likewise, alcohol users are those who consume alcoholic beverages. For this study, one was considered to be an alcohol user if he or she reported consuming any amount of alcohol in the past year.

**Binge Drinking:** Five or more drinks in one sitting in the past two weeks for men and four or more drinks in one sitting in the past two weeks for women (Wechsler & Nelson, 2008).

Drink: Defined as a bottle of beer, a glass of wine, a wine cooler, a shot of liquor, or a mixed drink (Hughes et. al., 2008).

Past Month Alcohol Use: Refers to consuming at least one drink in the past 30 days (Hughes, et. al., 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006).

### **Methodology**

The current study used a qualitative approach to gain a better understanding of the abstinent college student. Four focus groups were conducted to discover the full range of possible participant responses. The focus group questions were developed using the framework from the MAAQ. The participants consisted of twenty college students who attended the University of North Dakota (UND), located in Grand Forks, North Dakota, enrolling approximately 14,500, with over 10,000 being undergraduates. The twenty UND students shared their motivations and behaviors as college students who chose not to use alcohol.

### **Bias and Assumptions**

There is potential for bias in this study. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) argue “we, as researchers, are part of the world that we are researching, and we cannot be completely objective about that, hence other people’s perspectives are equally as valid as our own, and the task of research is to uncover these” (p. 106). Specifically, I was previously employed as the Assistant Director of Health and Wellness at UND and worked with students who chose not to use alcohol as well as those who did use alcohol. I have a strong passion for empowering students to make positive choices in life including choosing not to use alcohol. Because UND is a small community, I knew some of the

participants in the focus groups and this could cause researcher bias. However, I no longer work in the Health and Wellness Unit at UND, and I have no contact with the students in a formal role in that department. Though there is the potential for these previous experiences and relationships to bias the study, I feel they did not significantly affect the data I collected, as participants were able to freely express and describe their own experiences, of which, being of a personal nature and interpreted by the individuals themselves, I had no previous knowledge or understanding. I used only the experiences detailed in the focus groups to compile the results in this study. While similar research varies on the length of abstinence in relation to classifying individuals as abstainers, I used the period of abstinence of one year, as I felt that the period of 30 days was too short to be an accurate measure of a person's dedication to abstinence. This personal feeling could be a bias as it is based on my experiences working with college students; however it is supported by questions asked on the NDCORE and ACHA NCHA.

The results of my research are based upon assumptions. First, I assumed that the reader of this research would be familiar with alcohol and alcohol use and have a general knowledge of how alcohol affects one's body, as well as a general knowledge of the societal effects of alcohol. I assumed the participants in the four focus groups answered the questions openly and honestly. I also assumed that there were students on the campus of UND who chose to abstain from alcohol use and that they would have specific reasons or motivations for doing so. Furthermore, I assumed that this group of abstainers would differ in some way from the group of students who chose to use alcohol and that discussion with abstainers would illuminate these differences and inform practice.

## **Organizational Design of the Study**

This chapter includes an overview of college student alcohol users and abstainers and North Dakota college student abstainers and users, a statement of the problem, research questions, bias and assumptions, and relevant definitions. Chapter II provides a review of the literature relating to social demographics of college students who use alcohol and college students who choose not to use alcohol. Chapter III identifies the methodology, research design, research instrument, and data used to analyze the research questions and research findings. Chapter IV describes the results and analysis of the qualitative research. Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The present body of research is composed of examinations of both the college student drinker and the college student who chooses not to use alcohol or abstainer. To better understand the abstainer, it is necessary to review not only the literature related to those who choose not to use alcohol, but also that related to the college student drinker. It is widely known that age of first use, student involvement, and living arrangements are some factors that correlate with the likelihood that a college student is prone to alcohol use. The absence of these factors may contribute to a student's choice to abstain. In this chapter, models are described that researchers use to identify the likelihood of a student using or abusing alcohol and some factors that suggest higher rates of abstinence are suggested.

#### **Demographics of the College Student Drinker**

Researchers have shown that a variety of demographics factors, such as age, gender, and ethnicity are associated with college student drinking. The average high-risk college student drinker has been described as a Caucasian male under the age of 23 (Wechsler et al., 2002a). Male students have been reported as likely to drink significantly more than female students (Larimer, Anderson, Baer, & Marlatt, 2000; Tremblay et al., 2010). Caucasian or White students and Native American students have had the highest risk of alcoholism (Presley & Meilman, 1994), while African American college students

and Asian college students have reported the lowest drinking rates among all ethnic groups (Wechsler et al., 2002a). It has also been reported that white students are more likely to drink heavily in college if they drank in high school (Stappenbeck, Quinn, Wetherill, & Fromme, 2010). Data from Asian and Hispanic students did not follow this trend (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002).

### **Predictors for College Student Drinking**

Several researchers have attempted to identify the predictors for college student drinking (e.g., O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Rickwood, George, Parker, & Mikhailovich, 2011; Tremblay et al., 2010; Wechsler et al., 2002b). Several predictors have been identified including age of first use (Grant & Dawson, 1997), environment or living arrangements (Carter et al., 2010; Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2004; Larimer et al., 2000; Rose, Kaprio, Winter, Koskenvuo, & Viken, 1999; Tremblay et al., 2010), and student involvement in student organizations (i.e. Fraternities or athletics) (Larimer et al., 2000; Perkins & Craig, 2006).

The strongest predictor of a college student's use of alcohol is reported as the age of first use, as this has been indicative of patterns later in life (Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood, 1994; Patrick & Schulenberg, 2010; Williams, Perry, Farbaksh, & Veblen-Mortenson, 1999). Adolescents who used alcohol before the age of 14 have been shown to be more likely to become alcohol dependent compared to those who chose not to use until at least age 21 (Grant & Dawson, 1997). In a study which followed participants from age 10 to 17, researchers found those who started using alcohol at age 10 or 11 were more likely to use high levels of alcohol at age 17 (Rose et al., 1999). In the same study, those who chose not to use until after age 16 were more likely to use limited alcohol or

abstain from alcohol. In another study that was done in the Midwest with middle school children, researchers found that the average age students reported being drunk for the first time was 11.74 years. Over 25% of the participants reported age 12 as when they were drunk for the first time, along with almost a third reporting being 13 years old when they were drunk for the first time (de Haan & Boljevac, 2009). Additionally, alcohol use while in middle school or high school has been shown to be another strong predictor of increased alcohol use during college (Larimer et al., 2000).

The college environment or living arrangement has been another predictor for college student drinking (Larimer et al., 2000; Rose et al., 1999; Tremblay et al., 2010). College students typically choose to live in one of four types of environments: fraternity and sorority houses, residence halls, off-campus residences, and parents' or guardians' homes. According to Dawson et al. (2004), there was a correlation between the type of living environment and the likelihood that the student would abuse alcohol. Students who lived in a fraternity or sorority house tended to drink more, and more often, than those who lived in other environments. Researchers have concurred that the high-risk drinker was most likely involved in Greek Life (Larimer et al., 2000; Perkins & Craig, 2006). A significant predictor of increased alcohol use for those students who joined fraternities in college was high school alcohol use (Huang et al., 2009). In comparing the alcohol use of fraternity and sorority members to the alcohol use in residence halls, Larimer et al. (2000) found that Greek students drank more heavily. However, one may question whether the students had more pressure to drink from their fraternity brothers or sorority sisters or if this behavior was developed due to their high school habits. In addition, the researchers in those few studies that have focused on abstainers have found consistent findings with

non-Greek students abstaining at a higher rate than Greek students (Huang et al., 2009). Finally, while the findings about college students who used alcohol off campus (e.g. in non-university owned apartments) have been unclear (Carter, Brandon, & Goldman, 2010; Dawson et al., 2004), researchers have claimed students who lived on campus were more likely to engage in high risk drinking than those who did not live on campus.

Another predictor of high-risk drinking in the available literature was involvement in student organizations while in college. Student involvement was defined as one's participation in various organizations, such as academic, athletic, or religious groups (Larimer et al., 2000). High-risk college student drinkers were less likely to value religious activities and academics compared to those who did not drink excessively (Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995). Also, those who chose to use alcohol placed value on social activities such as athletics. Correlations have been found between student athletics and high-risk drinking (Leichliter, Meilman, Presley, & Cashin, 1998; Perkins & Craig, 2006), specifically with male athletes, who were more likely to engage in binge drinking than female athletes (Perkins & Craig, 2006).

### **College Student Abstainers**

Recently, the college student abstainer population has become more of a research interest since there is a noticeable gap in the literature about non-drinking college students. In the last few years, those researchers who have conducted studies about college student abstainers have focused on who they are (Huang et al., 2011), the motivational factors and behaviors that they exhibit to remain abstinent (Herman-Kinney & Kinney, 2012; Huang, et al., 2009), and their personalities (Walton & Roberts, 2004).



Huang et al. (2009) studied the sociodemographics of college student abstainers such as their age, gender, employment status, academic achievements, environment, and their living arrangements. The researchers suggested that abstainers were most likely males who were under the age of 21. Male college students were 66-68% more likely to abstain than female college students. Students under the age of 21 were three times more likely to abstain than those over the age of 21 (Huang et al., 2011). It is important to note that approximately one-half of college students are under the age of 21 at most public universities (Wechsler et al., 2002b). The young college student abstainer finding correlates with the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) that documented a decrease in alcohol consumption among high school students (Eaton et al., 2010). College students who abstained in high school were more likely to abstain in college than those who used alcohol in high school (Huang et al., 2009).

Factors that encouraged abstinence have been identified in the few articles that focus on college student abstainers. These factors included student employment, environmental factors, and living arrangements of the college student. Student employment was a researched sociodemographic that possibly limited students' alcohol use. Students who worked greater than 10 hours per week were more likely to abstain (Huang et al, 2011).

Environmental factors that have been shown to influence students to abstain include past parental use of alcohol and parental use of tobacco and other drugs. Students were 1.5 times more likely to abstain from alcohol if their mother also abstained. Students who had chosen not to smoke or use other drugs were significantly more likely to abstain (Huang et al., 2009).

Students who lived with parents had the lowest risk for engaging in risky drinking behavior (Huang et al., 2009). Some of the past researchers of this topic have described abstainers as anti-social, indicating that abstainers reported having no friends or only one friend, being unpopular in school, and often feeling insecure around others (Leifman, Kühllhorn, Allebeck, Andréasson, & Romelsjö, 1995). Walton and Roberts (2004) suggested that students who abstained from alcohol were more introverted than those who used alcohol.

### **Motivations for College Students to Not Use Alcohol**

Literature concerning motivations for those who choose not to use, or abstain, from alcohol has increased in the past years. In research conducted in New Zealand and with student groups and demographics that were comparable to those in the United States, Seataoai-Samu, Suaalii-Sauni, Pulford, and Wheeler (2009) reported on five key protective factors that influenced students who chose to use responsibly or to abstain: parental influence, historical factors, religion, personal factors, and peer influences. Back in the United States, Chassin, Curran, Hussong, and Colder (1994) have implied that adolescents' substance use or abstinence was a result of other various factors including parental control and support, communication, parent role modeling, and their tolerance of use. Huang et al. (2011) found that abstainers were strongly motivated to remain abstinent due to lifestyle choice, which includes religious beliefs and not wanting the lifestyle choice, as well as the concern of their image. For some, this concern of creating a reputation of being a "drunk" was a motivation to abstain completely. Huang et al. also found legal concerns were associated with abstention for those under the age of 21.

Most recently, Herman-Kinney and Kinney (2012) investigated non-drinkers' experiences and how they managed stigmas and negotiated positive social and personal identities. Taste of alcohol, awareness of family alcoholism, personal, negative experiences with alcohol, and the desire to remain in control were identified as negative associations, and thus as motivations not to drink. The students had abstaining role models, an academic identity, an athletic identity, and/or a religious identity as positive associations or motivations not to drink.

### **MAAQ Framework**

After reviewing the literature on college student drinkers and abstainers, I searched for frameworks to assist with the current study. As discussed in Chapter 1, Cox and Klinger (1988) developed a framework for sorting motives for choosing to drink alcohol. Stritzke and Butt (2001) then used this framework to develop the MAAQ to understand what motivates young adolescents who choose not to use alcohol or not to use alcohol in harmful ways. Other researchers have used the MAAQ in similar research, testing it (Anderson, Grunwald, Bekman, Brown, & Grant, 2011), and altering it as needed to better suit the needs of their research (Madonsela & Mashegoane, 2012; Penny & Armstrong-Hallam, 2010).

I used the MAAQ as a framework to develop questions for the focus groups. The factors in the MAAQ include (a) fear of consequences, (b) dispositional risk, (c) family constraints, (d) religious constraints, and (e) indifference (Stritzke & Butt, 2001). I chose not to use this last constraint (indifference) because I felt it was included in the other factors and was not relevant in my study. The following is a review of the four other factors individually.

## **Fear of Consequences**

The MAAQ contains questions related to respondents' fear of consequences such as school performance, being in control, not wanting to act like those who are drunk, being at risk for harm, and the law (Stritzke & Butt, 2001). As a student becomes more mature and responsibilities grow, personal reasons may influence his or her choice to abstain from alcohol. For example, a medical student striving to be at the top of the class puts his or her academic program as the highest priority, resulting in a decrease in the use of alcohol. Researchers have found that the academic records of those who binge drink are affected negatively, through the missing of classes or the failing of tests (Wechsler et al., 2002b). For example, over 27% of students at the University of North Dakota reported missing a class due to alcohol or other substance use/abuse in 2010 (UND NDCORE, 2010). Predictably, abstainers tend to have higher grade point averages (GPAs) than alcohol users (Huang et al., 2011).

Another consequence students may fear is that of legal ramifications. In the United States, the National Minimum Purchase Act was passed in 1984 to endorse the minimum legal drinking age of 21 for purchasing alcohol (Wechsler et al., 2002a). Alcohol violations can also cause financial distress. Furthermore, individuals in some careers are less likely to hire college graduates who have alcohol or drug violations on their record.

## **Dispositional Risk**

Dispositional risk includes family history of alcohol abuse or a medical condition that causes the student to not use alcohol. Literature of how family history affects drinking patterns of college students is conflicting, with multiple limitations among the

different studies. LaBrie, Migliuri, Kenney, and Lac (2010) found that students with a family history of alcohol abuse displayed more indications of potential alcohol abuse. These students had a higher tolerance and were more prone to negative consequences from alcohol use.

**Family history of alcohol abuse.** The present studies related to family history contain information on the genetic likelihood of heavy alcohol use and the impact of childhood exposure to alcohol use, including being a child of an alcoholic (COA). Students who have had drinking problems themselves, or family members with drinking problems, cited negative childhood experiences involving alcohol as their reason for choosing to abstain (Huang et al., 2009). However, some researchers proposed that genetics were more likely to determine the adolescent's alcohol involvement. McGue, Sharma, and Benson (1995) studied the relationships between parents and adolescents to discover if there was a correlation between adolescent alcohol use and genetic composition or environmental effects. The study, which included 653 adopted families in the United States, consisted of a mail survey that included assessment of drinking behavior and family functioning. The authors found a significant positive correlation between the same sex parent's problematic drinking and the birth offspring sample's adolescent alcohol use. Furthermore, they found no correlation when there was no biological relationship between the parent and adolescent. These findings were concurrent with the suggestion in the literature that there may be a genetically transmitted predisposition for alcohol abuse patterns.

Harburg, DiFranceisco, Webster, Gleiberman, and Schork (1990) investigated parental alcohol use and its implications for the adolescent. Their study looked at the "fall

off effect, when offspring respond to parental high-volume levels by moderating their own drinking” (p. 1141). Researchers in this study sampled 420 three-member sets of father, mother, and adult son or daughter. In 1960, the parents completed a self-report survey about drinking habits. When the parents were surveyed at this time, the offspring were between the ages of 2 and 54. In 1977, a list of offspring was obtained from the 1960 survey; the final sample included 48% men and 52% women. Contrary to the idea of genetic transmission of high alcohol use patterns, they found that most offspring whose fathers had drinking problems abstained as adults (63%), and only 15% imitated their fathers and drank in high volumes. They also found that the majority of offspring (76%) whose fathers had abstained from alcohol were likely to imitate that action, and 14% were high-volume drinkers.

The lack of parental monitoring was a predictor for early substance use for both children of an alcoholic (COA) and non-COA (Molina, Chassin, & Curran, 1994). However, because of the environment, a COA was likely to use alcohol almost one year earlier in his or her life compared to the non-COA, as well as more likely to use illicit drugs (Braitman et al., 2009).

Ohannessian et al. (2004) examined the relationship between parental consequences from substance use and adolescent psychological problems. The sample consisted of 173 adolescents ranging from 13-17 years old. The assessment included items measuring three constructs: (a) concern/worry about parent’s substance use, (b) avoidance of parents when drinking or using drugs, and (c) parental anger when drinking. The researchers found when adolescents were concerned about their mother’s substance abuse; the adolescent avoided the mother when she was drinking. The likelihood of the

adolescent being diagnosed with alcohol dependence increased when the mother displayed violent or angry behavior when consuming alcohol.

Crawford and Novak (2007) suggested that the largest factor for a college student to choose not to drink was his or her family upbringing. They found positive correlations between college students who chose not to drink and being raised in a family where alcohol was not present in the home.

**Medical history.** The other part of dispositional risk is medical history or health concerns. Health concerns have been noted as one of the personal reasons why a college student chooses not to use alcohol (Huang et al., 2011; Hughes, Stewart, & Barraclough, 1985). In this case, the concept of health concerns is related to abstainers wanting to prevent poor health and avoid specific health risks associated with the consumption of alcohol. In a study of abstainers, every participant reported feeling the health benefits of abstaining from alcohol use, including controlling their weight and increased athletic performance (Romo, 2012). To improve students' health, college administrators and staff are focusing on prevention and creating healthy initiatives on their campus such as new wellness facilities and healthy vending machines.

### **Family Constraints**

Researchers have shown that family constraints can be very influential on a student's decision not to use. Family constraints include parents, siblings, and family friends. It was possible to influence behavior through communication and parental role modeling. It is clear that the role of the parent was influential in different manners including parental communication, parental role modeling and family use, and family friend influence.

**Parental communication.** Parents can influence alcohol use through communication. Parental communication has been studied with the first-year college student. It is known that Generation X, also known as the Millennial Generation, communicates frequently with their parents due to the increase of opportunity with technology. Researchers have shown that an increase in communication between parents and college students was associated with decreased alcohol use (Small, Morgan, Abar, & Maggs, 2011). This communication was either direct, through parents stating concern about alcohol and drug use, or indirect, through parents offering a reminder of their core values. Administrators at several colleges have encouraged communication by sending letters to parents, suggesting communication about alcohol and drugs prior to attending college (K. Walton, personal communication, May 8, 2011). Small et al. (2011) suggested parental communication benefits the student beyond the first year of college.

Van der Vorst et al. (2010) found that adolescent males who drank moderately or heavily had little or no parental communication. It was suggested that male college students bonding with peers through alcohol-related activities dismissed family values, resulting in an increase in alcohol use (Cail & LaBrie, 2010). The researchers proposed parents continue to communicate with their student and encourage peer relationships that matched their family values.

**Parental role modeling and family use.** Parents may also impact their children through role modeling. Shore, Rivers, and Berman (1983) found that the college environment was more influential than past influences, such as parents' alcohol use. However, Walls, Fairlie, and Wood (2009) found parental influence as a key component for students to choose to abstain or use responsibly. Parental influence can include



communication, role modeling, and family member use of alcohol. Walls et al. (2009) found students were influenced through the parents' role modeling and parental supervision and concluded that low parental tolerance of heavy drinking influenced students to decrease their alcohol use. Leifman et al. (1995) found those who were raised with fathers who abstained from alcohol were more likely to also abstain from alcohol. They found that those who abstained also had fathers (73%) and mothers (89%) who abstained.

The strength of family bonds has been shown to be a predictive factor for alcohol use (Kuendig & Kuntsche, 2006). The relationship between the student and the parent may be related to the student's use or abstinence of alcohol. Being rejected by a father could be directly related to a student's reason for drinking; however, having a caring mother was not directly linked to explain any discrepancies in alcohol use or alcohol related problems (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez, 2010).

College students who had parents who drank heavily at tailgating events were more likely to drink heavily on weekends and be affected by negative consequences through their alcohol use (Abar, Turrisi, & Abar, 2011; van der Vorst et al., 2010). Some parents believe using alcohol in a secured environment is appropriate, as they are being "responsible role models," and teaching adolescents how to use alcohol. However, van der Vorst et al. (2010), conducting a study in the Netherlands, found conflict with this idea. They reported when parents allowed adolescents to drink at home, future alcohol problems were more likely to develop, even with high levels of parental supervision. Furthermore, they found that adolescents who were not allowed to drink at home were less likely to drink heavily in the future.

**Peer influence.** Huang et al. (2011) found that having a close friend who abstained from using alcohol was one of the greatest predictive factors of a student remaining abstinent. Students reported they would abstain 86% of the time when they had a close friend who chose to abstain (Shore et al., 1983). The authors found that an abstainer's peers were most likely abstainers as well. This was likely because of similar values and beliefs. These abstainers also reported being able to associate with those who chose to use, even reporting feeling supported in this choice from others. Furthermore, there was a 68% decrease in heavy drinking among those who used if they had a close friend who was an abstainer (Huang et al., 2009).

### **Religious Constraints**

Strong religious or spiritual beliefs have been reported as another possible motive for college students to choose not to use alcohol (Huang et al., 2009; Hughes et al., 1985; Vaughn et al., 2011). This is not a new idea; in fact, it was suggested by staff in the 2003 Office of National Drug Control Policy that faith played an important role in preventing substance abuse (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2003). Epler, Sher, and Piasecki (2009) completed a 16-year longitudinal study of college students who reported a family history of alcohol abuse and those who did not have a family history. They found that upbringing and religiosity were closely tied with those who chose to abstain.

Ellison, Bradshaw, Rote, Storch, and Trevino (2008) conducted a study that examined the factors between religious groups that have an acceptance of alcohol and those that do not. They found that those religious groups that used alcohol in their religious practices, such as wine in communion, were more likely to have followers that used alcohol themselves. Ellison et al. emphasized that those who considered themselves

Christians, but were accepting of alcohol outside the religious service, were only annual or semi-annual attendees (e.g. Christmas and Easter). They also found that those who took an active role in their religion, attending weekly worship service and daily prayer, were less likely to drink. Ellison et al. also found that of college students that drank, the majority of them had a religious affiliation of some kind.

Harden (2010) found that young people raised with limited or no religious exposure began to consume alcohol six months earlier than young people raised in a religious setting. In some cases, religious involvement was related to staying abstinent for a lifetime. Several religions required their members to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, including Latter-day Saints or Mormons, who collectively had the lowest use of substances (Merrill, Folsom, & Christopherson, 2005). The influence of attending church was shown to be a predictive factor against substance use (Merrill et al., 2005), as were parents' religious beliefs.

Huang et al. (2009) studied over 2,500 college student drinkers and abstainers. They found that most abstainers chose not to use due to lifestyle choice such as religious beliefs and image. In fact, those who were involved with more than six hours per week of religious activities were more likely to abstain. Wells (2010) looked at the differences of students at a religious-based college and a secular college. Even though both universities in the study prohibited alcohol on their campus, most students at the religious college perceived that drinking was discouraged on their campus (94.8%) compared to the secular college students (42.3%). Wells found the students who attended a religious university were more likely to be abstainers (64% reported abstaining for the last 30

days) compared to the secular college (30%). The researcher suggested that as individuals increased their religiosity, they chose to decrease their alcohol use.

Researchers in one study discussed the effects of individuals rejecting their religious upbringing or changing to a non-religious belief system. They found that the children of families who did not have a history of alcoholism and who attended church regularly and then changed later in life to a non-religion had the highest risk for alcohol dependency (Haber & Jacob, 2009).

### **Behaviors and Strategies Used By College Student Abstainers**

College student abstainers found strategies to manage their choice not to use during their years on campus. Females were more likely to be supportive to the drinking friends and family than the males (Piacentini & Banister, 2009), whereas the males tended to avoid the behavior.

One suggested strategy was the use of socially acceptable reasons not to drink. It is known that doctors persuade their patients to not use alcohol while using particular medications. Some abstainers believed it was easier to explain to their peers that they were on an antibiotic that weekend instead of stating that they just did not want to drink (Conroy & de Visser, 2012).

Another strategy was the deception or distraction of peers to refrain from use of alcohol. This practice was when a student chose to give others the perception that he or she was drinking alcohol by drinking a Coke or other non-alcoholic beverage in the same sort of red cup used by those who were drinking alcohol. In this way, students could attend parties and did not feel as though they would “kill” the party. They may have also fooled their friends at the party by leaving the beer bong table when it was their turn to

take another drink, such as by going to use the restroom. Students wanted to belong and be included in their peer groups (Conroy & de Visser, 2012).

Seaman and Ikegwuonu (2010) found college student non-drinkers to be confident with their decision and take pride in choosing not to use alcohol. These were the students who were able to confidently tell their friends, “No thanks,” when offered a beer and who didn’t care about being labeled the “black sheep” of the group. These non- drinking students also reported that they had no need for alcohol to be social. In fact, they were more socially competent than the drinkers because they were able to communicate without the drug (Conroy & de Visser, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Despite the abundance of literature and studies of college students’ alcohol use/abuse, there is a gap in the research about those who choose not to use, especially in the college student population in the United States. The present study was designed to fill this gap and to provide understanding about the lives of college students who abstain from drinking alcohol. Specifically, the study was constructed to use the MAAQ framework to explore the motivations and behaviors of those students who choose not to use alcohol.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to understand college student abstainers' behaviors and motivations that support their decisions to abstain. This chapter describes the design of the research study, the participants who were studied, the instrument that was used, and the data collection and examination.

#### **Research Design**

The current study was designed to explore the discourse and discover the insights of the students who are a minority on college campuses. A qualitative study was warranted because of the need to investigate the perceptions of these students. Focus groups were chosen over individual interviews because of the need for discussion among the student group. As discussed earlier, the college student abstainers are generally not the population that has been studied. My rationale for choosing focus groups in this study was to encourage discussion among the students rather than just one student answering each interview question.

There are several advantages of using a focus group as a means of collecting data (Kalmar, 2011), including discussions, which inspire deeper conversation from each of the members and elicit more information than from an individual interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Kalmar, 2011). Focus groups also elicit a broader range of responses from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Focus groups are also quickly analyzed, flexible, and inexpensive. Focus group participants discuss a topic in an open manner

compared to an individual interview that proceeds in a question-and-answer format (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Open-ended questions were used to provoke discussion among the group. Each focus group generally consisted of an unstructured, free-flowing discussion within a small group consisting of a minimum of four participants.

Due to the nature of the subject, I chose to use mini-focus groups, which involve small samples that are representative of a larger population. Mini-focus groups such as those used in this study are increasing in popularity among researchers who are dealing with a sensitive issue or searching for comfort for the participants to share personal stories (Krueger & Casey, 2009). One advantage to the mini-focus group was to allow personal stories to be told in length.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Twenty UND students who attended UND in 2009-2010 participated in the focus groups. UND is located in Grand Forks, North Dakota and reported an official enrollment of 14,697 in fall 2011. Of the total population at UND, approximately 51% were males and 49% were females (University of North Dakota, 2013). In previous years, the NDCORE was used to survey students at UND and it was found that 18% self-reported they abstain from alcohol for one year or more and approximately 32% of students reported abstaining from alcohol for the last 30 days.

Due to the nature of the study, I focused only on the abstaining population of UND students. Students who met the criteria for participating in the focus group reported not using alcohol for the past year with the exception of religious or cultural celebrations. I chose the timeframe of a year to eliminate those who chose not to use for a small period

of time or certain times in their lives. If they have not used for the past year, it is likely that they are specifically choosing to abstain from alcohol.

Participants were recruited via referrals from a variety of professional contacts. Various employees from UND departments of administration, faculty, and prevention specialists were contacted and asked to send an email to students who have openly discussed their choices not to use alcohol. The email described the requirements of this study, provided contact information, and requested students to communicate interest in participation in this study through phone or email with the author of this study.

Twenty-seven UND students emailed to inquire about the research study. A response was provided to each email received, reiterating the requirements of this study. Detailed descriptions of the different focus group times and locations were given to those students. In the email invitation, I also noted that the participants would each receive a \$20 gift card to a local pizza restaurant for participating in the full focus group session. Finally, the students were asked to forward the email to others who fit the requirements of abstinence from alcohol for at least the last 12 months.

After participants responded to the initial email, the first names of the students and the dates of the focus group preferences were registered. On the day before the assigned focus group meeting, a reminder email was sent to each participant. That email included the date, time, and location of the meeting, a request for confirming attendance, and a reminder of the gift card incentive for participating

Twenty-seven students agreed to participate in the focus groups. Having met the minimum number of participants for my study as outlined in my research protocol, I did not schedule additional focus groups. Unfortunately, not all students attended their



scheduled focus group meeting time. Table 1 displays the number of students registered to participate in each focus group and the number of participants that attended.

Table 1

*Participants Registered and Attended*

Focus Group	Number of students registered	Number of participants who attended
Monday	6	4
Tuesday	6	4
Wednesday	6	4
Thursday	9	8
TOTAL	27	20

Of all the participants, 30% were males (n=6) and 70% were females (n=14). Participants were not asked to describe their ethnicity; based on my observation, all but four appeared White. The students were asked if they were 21 and older; 25% were >21 years of age (n=5) and 75% were < 21 years of age (n=15). It was not an original intention of this study to collect demographic information; however, this information was beneficial to better understand the focus group participants. Table 2 describes the specific groups and individual demographics.

Table 2

*Specific Group and Individual Demographics*

Group	Pseudonym of the Participant	Demographics	
		Gender	Age
M	Guy 1	M	>21
M	Girl 1	F	<21
M	Peeta	M	<21
M	Prim	F	<21
T	Leonard	M	<21
T	Sara	F	>21
T	Kennedy	F	<21
T	Jillian	F	>21
W	Sir Pumpkin Longshards	F	<21
W	Kate	F	<21
W	Clove	F	<21
W	Maggie	F	>21
Th	Leah	F	<21
Th	Raoul Duke	M	<21
Th	Emily	F	<21
Th	MC	F	>21
Th	Devon	M	<21
Th	Ronda	F	<21
Th	Optimus	M	<21
Th	Emma	F	<21

*Note.* N=20

## **Procedure**

All focus groups were semi-structured with participants each being able to answer the questions and comment on others' remarks, as well as any follow up questions. The complete group protocol may be seen in Appendix A. Each of the focus group participants signed a consent form prior to the beginning of the session (see Appendix B).

I arranged for use of classrooms or meeting rooms on the UND campus as sites for the research study that would provide comfortable and somewhat private areas with an appropriate atmosphere for possible self-disclosure and yet were still publicly accessible. To ensure personal comfort for self-disclosure, each selected site had a door that could be closed to protect the confidentiality of the focus group members. This design allowed students to sit at tables across from one another in order to facilitate conversation or discussion. This also allowed the transcriber to be located in a corner of the room so there would be few distractions or an inability to hear participants' discussions. Each focus group was audiotaped for transcription and analysis.

When students arrived at the pre-determined location, they were greeted and invited to give themselves a pseudonym name on a place card to place in front of them during the focus group. Students were also given a copy of the focus group protocol and consent form and were then asked to leave a signed consent form on the table. Students were individually advised of the expected duration of the session, but they were also reminded that they could leave the focus group at their discretion if necessary.

Each session began with the author's introduction, recognition of the transcriber in the room, and, finally, a brief description of the focus group process. The participants were also reminded that if, at any time, they became uncomfortable, they could leave the

group or site. After the research study protocol was read and explained, each group was asked questions and each group member was allowed to respond. If participants did not respond, they were encouraged to respond or to at least offer other comments that related to the subject of the question. Toward the end of each focus group, follow-up questions were asked when clarification was needed and to ensure data had depth and breadth to document the motivations and behaviors of college student abstainers.

Open-ended questions were developed to elicit discussion among the group.

There were focus group questions and prompts to engage students in the key focus areas.

The topic areas for the questions included:

- Students' perceptions of alcohol
- Motives for choosing not to use alcohol
- Factors that have supported and assisted with participant's behavior choice.

In 2009, I did a pilot study on the subject of college students who choose not to use alcohol that revealed similar findings to the Stritzke and Butt (2001) variables I used in the questions for the focus groups. The focus group questions for the current study were informed by the MAAQ, by the review of literature described in Chapter 2, and by reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot focus groups. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, the questions were changed to fit into the purpose of the current study. The focus group questions are listed below.

1. In a sentence or two, tell me why you decided not to drink alcohol in the last year?
2. What experiences have you had that contributed to that decision?

3. What fears do you have about alcohol (if any)?
4. Tell me about your families' and friends' alcohol use (or nonuse)?
5. What is the most influential reason (motive) why you choose not to use?

At the closing of each session, the participants were thanked for their time and each was given a \$20.00 pizza gift certificate. As soon as the participants left the room, the author of this study immediately noted observations of the participants' behaviors and emotions throughout the focus group. Finally, all audiotapes and consent forms were properly labeled with the date and time of each focus group.

The same research design and focus group protocol was applied at each of the sessions. The only deviations from the focus group protocol occurred when there was a need to change an original site due to the room being double booked and when different follow-up questions were asked based on group responses. The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board approved this study through February 4, 2015 (IRB 201201-194).

### **Validity**

In all research it is important to make sure that the research instruments and design measure what they are intended to measure. In this study, since the actual behaviors and experiences are not observed directly, nor is the researcher able to access the internal motivations of the student, self-report data is used. Hoskin (2012) indicates that the use of self-report data is common in social and behavioral science research because it represents "a 'cheap' way (in terms of both time and cost) of obtaining data," is "easily implemented to large samples," and "can be used to measure constructs that would be difficult to obtain with behavioral or physiological measures" (para. 1).

Brener, Billy, & Grady (2003) have identified two critical factors to examine when assessing the validity of self-report data: cognitive issues and situational issues.

Brener, Billy, and Grady (2003) state that “cognitive issues address whether the respondents understand the question and whether they have the knowledge or memory to answer it accurately” (p. 1). According to Hoskin (2012), this level of cognitive understanding is “less a problem with questionnaires measuring concrete things like alcohol consumption”(para. 5). Situational issues, as defined by Brener, Billy, and Grady (2003), “include the influence of the setting of the survey (at school, at home, etc.)” (p. 1). The researchers expand on this factor, stating that “certain questions may have a socially desirable response (which also may change based on the setting)” and “some answers may disclose inappropriate or unlawful acts which could result in punishment” (p. 1). The researchers suggest that “the setting and way that the survey is administered is very important” and “the best results occur when there is a strong sense of anonymity and little fear of reprisal” (p. 1)

To ensure validity related to cognitive issues, the interview questions themselves were designed to allow students to provide honest and accurate representations of their behaviors and motivations. The pilot study conducted in 2009 allowed an opportunity to gain feedback on the phrasing of the questions so that they were clearly understood for the average student. Furthermore, during the implementation of this study, I used respondent validation to ensure trustworthiness of data collected. Using respondent validation, or member checks, refers to the process of asking follow up questions near the end of the focus group to gain more information or double check that the information stated previously was accurate and adequately described the participants’ experiences and

thoughts (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). I validated participants' responses near the end of each focus group.

To control for situational issues, the respondents were assured that their responses were completely voluntary and confidential, via the explanation of the research protocol and signing of consent forms, as well as the process of giving themselves pseudonyms. While they were all aware that they were asked to participate in this study due to their particular choice related to the use of alcohol, the research questions themselves did not place judgment on the use or non-use of alcohol. While some may suggest that the laws regarding drinking age may influence the responses of particularly the students under the age of 21, all of these students had already indicated that they did not use alcohol and they had voluntarily chosen to come talk about that behavior and the motivations behind it. That being said, the data do show that the students often had strong opinions about their own and others' use and motivations and the expression of these opinions could have skewed the resultant comments, or lack thereof, of other participants. I did ensure that all students had the opportunity to give a personal response to each of the questions and attempted to convey the tone that all answers and experiences were valid and useful.

### **Limitations**

Every study has limitations and this one is no different. The data were self-reported, which cannot be independently verified. The invitation to participate in focus groups was limited to students who attend the UND and in addition, because of the small percentage of college student abstainers, there were a limited number of participants in the focus groups. Lastly, the participants were selected through a technique where it was possible that participants knew each other. This may have created another limitation of

restricting students from reporting honest discussions during the focus groups. To control this limitation, I discussed confidentiality and requested students sign a confidentiality form to enhance the request. I encouraged students to be honest and trustworthy. Even with the noted limitations, responses seemed reliable and valid for the individuals reporting them.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted in an effort to answer the research questions of the current study. The data collected during the four focus groups was richly detailed. A total of 124 pages of transcripts was produced from the four focus groups. Since qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that involves continual reflection about the data (Creswell, 2002), the collected data were analyzed several times manually and then most recently using *Dedoose*, a web-based qualitative research application, to recode another time.

The manual coding process took place after all information from the four focus groups was transcribed. The first step involved examining the raw data of the four focus groups by reading and rereading the transcripts to understand the discourse of each group. I highlighted emerging topics and excerpts that I would use during a closer analysis. I wrote a summary for each focus group that described the participants, the discourse between the students, and any patterns that emerged.

After reading each focus group transcript several times, my next step was to discover patterns and irregularities between the groups (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). For example, notations were made when a discussion in a focus group did not follow the flow. Next, keywords or codes in each of the focus groups were noted, such as parents,



friends, users, non-users, role models, and personal goals. The codes were then used to identify and track the content of the participants' responses. Using the transcripts, I manually wrote notes on each transcript and repeated the process using sticky notes that were later used to connect codes to themes.

Once the coding of data was completed, raw data and codes were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. For each focus group, the frequency of each code was recorded using a formula from Microsoft Excel. The Excel program identified the frequencies for a code as it occurred in the raw data, and then all codes were combined for all four focus groups. In all, over 820 passages were identified from the raw data from open coding. Next, certain categories emerged from the data, such as parents who used alcohol, parents who chose not to use, judgments of others who use, and participants' friends' alcohol-related behaviors. This led to 11 separate codes.

The data collected during the four focus groups were first analyzed manually in order to recognize the emergent codes. Figure 1 illustrates the two themes and 11 codes that were identified in the manual coding process.

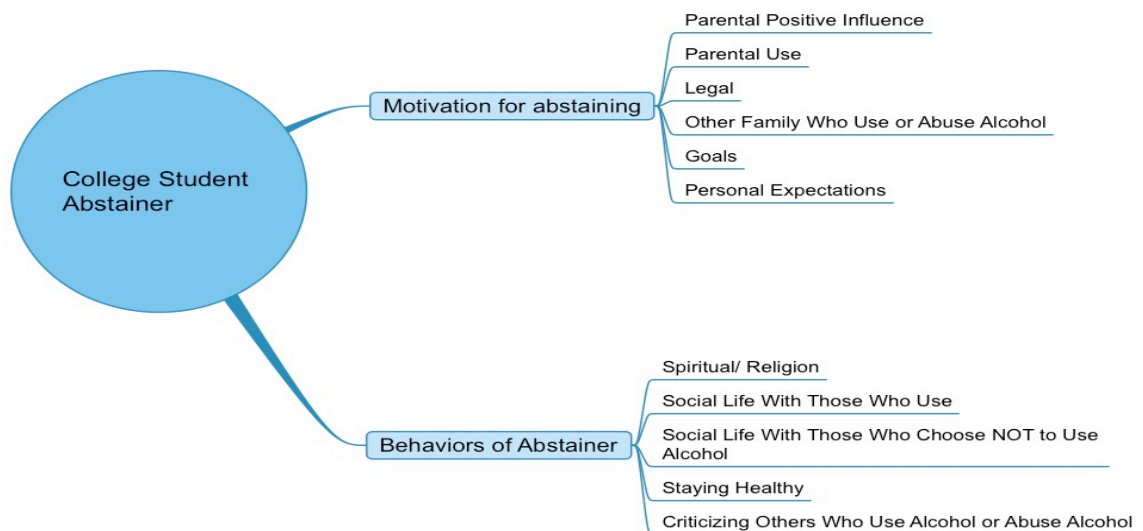


Figure 1. Themes and Codes Found in the Manual Coding Process.

Analysis was conducted a second time using *Dedoose* software and the data were checked and recoded. The coding in *Dedoose* is structured in a hierarchical fashion with sub-coding appearing under Root Codes. Eleven root codes were submitted and 34 sub-codes emerged from the data. Forty-five total codes were depicted and 1051 data segments were identified as meaningful excerpts. Table 3 lists the keywords that were used as codes and sub codes in subsequent analysis.

Table 3

*Themes, Codes, and Sub Codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Sub Codes</b>	
<b>Motivation for Abstaining</b>	Parental Positive Influence	Parents who do not use alcohol  Parents as role models Not disappointing parents	
	Parental Use	Parents with negative influences Parents who abuse alcohol Parents who use alcohol Other parents' negative influence	
	Legal Reasons	Legal Ramifications Important to follow the law	
	Other Family members who use or abuse alcohol	Siblings who abuse alcohol Grandparents or other family who use alcohol Grandparents or relatives who abuse alcohol	
	Personal Goals	Negative Situations I have been involved in with other family and alcohol use/abuse  General goals Academic goals Career goals	
	<b>Behaviors of the Abstainer</b>	Personal Expectations	To be a positive influence on someone
		Spiritual or Religion	Religious or Spiritual Beliefs Against the rules in the Church Church is important to me
		Social life with those who use	Culture in the college environment Negative culture at college and at ND Babysitting friends who use Taking care of friends who drink Friends who use
		Social Life with those who choose NOT to use alcohol	Friends who do not abuse alcohol Other things to do without alcohol
		Staying healthy	Personal health Athlete
Criticizing others who use alcohol or abuse alcohol	Not accepting others who use/abuse alcohol  Judging others who use Dumb things that drunks do Not logical Watching others lose control		

## **Conclusion**

This chapter included a description of the participants who were studied, the instruments that were used, and the methodology of the study. This chapter also included a summary of the two themes that derived from the research questions and the eleven codes and the 34 sub-codes that emerged from the data.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This research was an examination of a sample of college students who choose not to use alcohol, the motivations behind these students' choice, and the behaviors they exhibit. This chapter includes the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from twenty student participants in four focus groups at UND. Each focus group is described in detail in its corresponding section.

#### **Focus Group Descriptions**

**Focus Group 1.** Focus Group #1 included 2 males and 2 females, with two of the four participants 21 years of age or older. Two of the students reported their biological fathers as alcoholics. The focus group protocol described in Chapter III was followed and a total of 14 questions were asked, including the five questions appearing in the study protocol and nine follow-up questions: the total number of responses from this group was 72, with an average of 5.1 responses per question. A strong theme that emerged from focus group #1 was that of influence from behaviors modeled by family and friends. Modeling behaviors included abstaining from alcohol, modeling responsible parenting, practicing religion, and showing others that one can have fun without using alcohol. There was a discussion about being with friends who use. Some participants stated that they agreed to be designated drivers; others stated that they had enough of "babysitting" users and exclaimed that after so many times of being the responsible one, the "White

Knight goes away!” This group also had two powerful stories shared by the students of alcoholic parents. All participants in this focus group contributed to the discussion.

**Focus Group 2.** Focus Group #2 included 1 male and 3 females, with two of the four participants 21 years of age or older. Two of the students reported alcoholics in their families. Focus group protocol was followed and 11 questions were asked, including the five questions appearing in the study protocol and six follow-up questions. Participants answered with 108 responses, with an average of 9.8 responses per question. This group was very active and lively with one very strong personality who could be identified as a “teetotaler.” Participants had very different experiences with alcohol. One of them was 22 years old who refused to go to a bar or near any establishment with alcohol. The other three discussed family alcoholism, described friends with high tolerance for alcohol, and shared experiences where they kept their user friends “safe.” The question of the logic of others’ decisions to use alcohol came up, and the discussion led to how they were able to have fun without alcohol, including attending late-night activities, such as late night programming and going to work out at the Wellness Center on campus. Without knowing one another other prior to this session, this group seemed to connect well and continued the discussion several times during the session without any input from the researcher.

**Focus Group 3.** Focus Group 3 started with five members; however, one participant received a phone call and left the room without returning. Four females remained in this focus group, with two of the four participants 21 years of age or older. Two of the students reported alcoholics in their immediate family. The focus group protocol was followed and 24 questions were asked, including the five questions appearing in the study protocol and 19 follow-up questions. Participants answered with a

total of 68 responses and an average of 2.8 responses per question. This low response rate was a revealing description of this group of females. They did not seem to know one another and seemed very cautious or guarded with their answers. Several follow-up questions were used to attempt discussion within the group. This group also had an unplanned break near the end of their session due to a double booking of the site, and the entire group had to relocate to another room nearby to finish the session. Even though this group said considerably less than the other groups, there were still several powerful statements, including sharing personal information about one participant's embarrassment of her grandfather who was an alcoholic. Another participant shared stories about her stepfather's incarceration and how that impacted her decision to stay sober. Three of the four participants had strong friendships where alcohol was involved, and they frequented the bars, parties, and places where alcohol was served. The drinking culture in North Dakota, specifically UND, was a subject that they discussed more than any other question. This group was overall quieter than the other focus groups but still provided valuable information and contributions to the research questions.

**Focus Group 4.** The final focus group included the largest number of participants, three males and six females. Only two of the participants were age 21 or older. Five of the eight students reported being children of one or more parents who are alcoholics. One participant reported he was sober for one year and was in treatment for an addiction to marijuana. The focus group protocol was followed and 11 questions were asked, including the five questions appearing in the study protocol and six follow-up questions. Participants answered with 125 responses, with an average of 11.4 responses per question. This group had several athletes. There were also a few students who shared

their strong religious beliefs. Participants shared the importance of role modeling to youth, their teams, and family members in their communities. There was a great deal of discussion on “making parents proud” and not letting them down. Several stories were told in this session about how parental figures portrayed themselves on youth hockey trips, how their team parties were difficult to participate in, and how one participant’s parents fought when they were drinking or drunk. As in the first three sessions, participants in this session discussed the drinking culture of UND and North Dakota, expressing that other students assumed it was the norm to drink. All contributed to the discussion about UND’s drinking problems while sharing personal information that answered the research questions with rich text.

### **Themes, Codes, and Sub codes**

During the data analysis and coding process, I identified 1051 data segments from the focus group transcripts as meaningful excerpts. Both the manual coding process and *Dedoose* articulated themes, which were structured in a hierarchical fashion. Those themes were shown in Table 3 and include the two main themes of: 1) Motivations to Abstain and 2) Behaviors of the Abstainer. The theme of Motivations to Abstain has as its codes: 1) Parental Positive Influence, 2) Parental Use of Alcohol, 3) Legal Reasons, 4) Other Family Members Who Use or Abuse Alcohol, 5) Personal Goals, and 6) Personal Expectations. The other main theme of Behaviors of the Abstainer had the codes of: 1) Spiritual or Religion, 2) Social Life With Those Who Use, 3) Social Life With Those Who Choose NOT To Use Alcohol, 4) Staying Healthy, and 5) Criticizing Others Who Use Alcohol or Abuse Alcohol. These themes and codes are described in more detail in the following sections.



## Theme 1: Motivations to Abstain

In research question one, the abstainers were asked what motivated them to choose not to use. In all four focus groups, parents were a major influence. Following the law and legal consequences/reasons were also discussed several times as a motivator. Numerous stories included other family members and their parents' friends as a motivation or reason not to use. Lastly, students' personal goals and personal expectations were discussed. Each of these codes is examined in the following paragraphs.

### Parental Positive Influence

Several students in the focus group shared their experiences about their positive parental influence. Examples of positive parental influence were those parents who either did not use alcohol or used responsibly, and those who had a belief system or value system that they shared with their children. The sub codes that were identified are displayed in Table 4 and were 1) Parents who do not use alcohol, 2) Parents as role models, and 3) Not disappointing parents.

Table 4

*Positive Parental Influence: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Parents who do not use alcohol or use responsibly	Parents as role models	Not disappointing parents
Monday (n=4)	4	2	4
Tuesday (n=4)	3	2	1
Wednesday (n=4)	8	8	5
Thursday (n=8)	5	5	2
TOTAL	20	17	12

**Parents who do not use alcohol.** The word ‘parent(s)’ is one that was spoken several times in each focus group. Students discussed how their parents’ non-use of alcohol or responsible use of alcohol affected their motivation or reason to choose not to use. One student stated how the environment of having little alcohol in the house has made an influence on her use: “My dad doesn’t drink so that has a big influence on my life and he never had a drink in his life and he’s just always kind of said it’s disgusting.” Another concurred and stated, “There’s no alcohol in my house and my parents didn’t drink so I was just away from it.”

Another participant agreed with the fact that not having alcohol around the house influenced his reason to not use. He stated,

My parents never really told me not to drink or anything but I grew up in a house where I never really saw it. I grew up . . . my parents never really drank around me . . . when I got to high school they started drinking around me but not that heavily.

Another student stated,

With my dad I’ve never seen him drink, I’ve never even heard of him drink. So, it was like, I grew up and they were always like happy and stuff. I grew up in a house where you didn’t need alcohol. There’s never alcohol in our house.

**Parents as role models.** One participant felt that her parents used alcohol responsibly and taught her that she does not need alcohol in her life. She replied,

My parents don’t drink. Like my dad maybe has a beer a month maybe and my mom . . . I have never seen her drink and like my aunt . . . my mom is the oldest of 5 and none of her siblings drink and so . . . it’s just like the atmosphere I’ve grown up in is just you don’t need alcohol and . .

. so . . . that's something I've taken to heart and that has truly affected me saying that like I don't need it . . . It's unnecessary and it's not something that you have to have . . .

**Not disappointing parents.** One participant reported the positive and negative influence of each parent. She stated, "My father is a heavy drinker and my mother doesn't even try to drink. She is determined and I guess compared with their lives, I found my mother is more productive so I follow that side." Another participant stated,

My parents were really strict and I had two older sisters and they got in trouble a couple of times for drinking when they were in high school. And my parents would get very mad. I never understood why my sisters didn't understand why my parents got mad but as I got older, like I understood when I would go and see all my friends getting in trouble getting in car accidents like all that... all the consequences they would have. Now I understand why my parents were so strict and now like I kind of wanna just make them proud by not drinking.

This yearning to maintain parental approval was common across all groups. In a different focus group, one student commented,

My parents weren't as strict but they taught me to not drink and not do any drugs and stuff. They trusted me not to do so, so I kind of felt like I had to, I should keep like what I said as a kid, like not to drink and stuff cause I didn't want to disappoint them and all.

One student had discussed this promise to his mom and how he did not want to break the promise or disappoint her. He stated, "I made a promise with my mom awhile back that I won't drink until I'm 21. I won't do drugs or anything. So I wanna keep that promise."

The participants reported positive choices made by their parents were relevant in their choice of not using alcohol. Furthermore, there was discussion from over half of the students in all of the focus groups who stated they had a parent or family member who was an alcoholic.

### **Parental Use of Alcohol**

Motivation to abstain from alcohol was reported regardless if there was a negative influence or a positive influence. An example of negative influence would be those parents who are alcoholics or abuse alcohol. Several students in the focus groups talked about their parents or other friends' parents who abused alcohol. Table 5 displays the four sub codes of 1) Parental negative influences, 2) Parents who abuse alcohol, 3) Parents who use alcohol, and 4) Other parents' negative influences.

Table 5

*Parents Who Use or Abuse Alcohol: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Parental Negative Influences	Parents who abuse alcohol	Parents who use alcohol	Other parents' negative influence
Monday (n=4)	13	14	2	7
Tuesday (n=4)	10	2	2	2
Wednesday (n=4)	25	1	8	3
Thursday (n=8)	2	5	5	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>

**Parental negative influences.** The subcategory of parental negative influences emerged from discussions about low parental tolerance of heavy drinking or heaving drinking consuming/destroying a parent's life. One student described his youth and how his biological father's behavior made a statement in his life:

Well . . . for me . . . like my whole life . . . it's just been like from when my biological dad and just watching . . . it destroy him . . . um . . . quite honestly since I was 12 . . . as far as I can remember . . . I mean just . . . just alcohol was a part of like his life . . . and just the way that . . . I mean I could see it change him because like I knew how he was like when I mean he didn't drink . . . he was just normal and was really fun to be around and stuff like that . . . but I mean . . . even a couple of drinks in him and stuff like that it would just change his mood a little bit and it would just be so skewed and the decisions he would make like . . . staying at the country club till like two in the morning and he's . . . I'm like on the putting green which I really personally for me I love golf I didn't care but . . . I knew that he was just in there socially drinking and he'd get into the car and we'd drive home and like I knew he was drunk and I'd just pray the whole ride home . . . just . . . 'God let us get home' and then as soon as I turned 15 (the age of eligibility for a drivers' license), like that rite of passage for him for like . . . yeah . . . like now you can drive me home and stuff like that so it would give him an excuse to drink more or stay out later which is kind of just like . . . I know in my mind this is not right . . . like . . . this is just a terrible decision and just like how like it changed him and he would get so angry and just violent and just really scary, scary person . . . and for me like growing up like some of the things that happened to me that he did to me and stuff were just like 'oh my God' . . . I look back on that and thank God I'm alive and . . . and I can't. I'm in that . . . that I was in that

household and just being able to make it out of there and just say you know what . . . like I know exactly what he did and like he's a nicer . . . a nice guy and stuff like that but . . . like . . . I don't think he knew his own limits and the alcohol kind of affect him in this way . . . and the way my mom describes it it's almost like a disease for him it's like a couple drinks and he's just gone and she's like you know it could be heredity to and that like is what scares me . . . well I'm not taking that risk . . . so I've been really hesitant to think of like what could happen . . . I don't want to be like that . . . like if I get married and have a wife and kids and stuff it's like . . . what kind of an example am I setting . . . I have a younger brother to . . . he's only 13 and that's such an impressionable age of like even where I am like . . . 25 and he's in high school and stuff he's still seeing decisions I'm making . . . and that oh well he still will compare himself and I don't want him to think that it's okay like . . . I am 25 obviously . . . like if I was having one beer and stuff like that that he could see the difference in terms of out of control.

Another student reported,

They drink pretty heavily and sometimes like little fights with like my mom and dad will turn and like escalate into bigger fights. So when I was younger like they were just getting into like big fights and they'd be too drunk, so that they would like my mom would call the cops and so like it would just turn into like, like stupid big arguments over just something small. So I mean I don't wanna like, if I'm ever in a relationship, like I don't ever wanna like be out of control with

someone. So like I wanna be able to respect the person and not, not just be out of control with them.

**Parents who abuse alcohol.** One student revealed he chose not to use because his father was “out of control,” stating: “. . . he would just drink cause that’s what he did and he would just continue to drink and drink and drink.” Several students talked about how they saw their parent(s) lose control while using alcohol and they did not want to have the same experiences. One young participant stated,

My father . . . was a severe alcoholic and like he would just drink and like he wouldn’t . . . he would just drink. ‘Cause that’s what he did and he would just continue to drink and drink and drink and then like honestly that’s probably the reason why I haven’t seen him in a long time. It’s just because it was such a problem for him. He couldn’t find that control issue and he would lose himself with that and just let these, just the alcohol just take over in terms of his emotions and his decisions and that’s something that I will obviously never let happen to me . . . just let myself lose that control so . . . that’s for me at least.

One student talked about how her parents’ use was a vivid memory, “It’s just like some of the decisions and stuff it’s just like . . . a 14-year-old should not know how to make a martini just like from watching.” In addition, one participant discussed how he did not understand the logic of using alcohol at a young age:

I didn’t understand like why . . . at that age I was like, why wouldn’t dad come home? You know? Why wouldn’t he come home? And so that just like made an imprint in my mind . . . it just . . . it’s always . . . been one of those memories that

kind of . . . I don't know it gets to you.

**Parents who use alcohol.** Students discussed their parents' alcohol use and how that influenced their decision. One student stated,

They don't really drink hardly ever, but when I was young my dad would go to like a sports bar every Sunday and he told me he'd like have beer. When I was little, I didn't really understand it - I just thought it was bad and so I was so devastated that he was doing that. So he quit going even though he wasn't doing anything bad because he realized it was kind of like a perception thing. And so since that time, I mean we've never had alcohol in our house and they might drink like on a special occasion, but they both raised my brother and I not to drink until we're 21 and then to do so very responsibly, So I think I've drank four drinks total since I turned 21 and my brother drinks maybe once a month but he's very responsible... so just really didn't grow up around it too much.

Another student commented,

Then my other uncle is like a, a beer or glass of wine or two at Christmas and parents?... my parents were stepmom and dad, um, they were wine on the weekend with cheese and apples, a glass. Siblings? That's another story. Step-brother, stepsister? Again never saw them drunk but knew they went out with their friends and drank.

**Other parents' negative influences.** Students commented on how other parents' negative behaviors influenced their choice not to use alcohol. One student shared an experience from when she was younger. She stated,

I'd go to hockey tournaments with my brother because my brother played. I



would see just these parents just like passed out or walking around just obnoxiously to these kids who are maybe middle school. I was just like I don't want to be that type of person to be seen ... that person is like completely uncontrollable and they can't act like that, so that's just why I chose not to drink

Another student agreed with her and stated,

I guess that's kind of one of my experiences too. Me and all my brothers play hockey and just kind of the same thing - being around the hotel and after we go to bed, like parents sneaking out at night going down to the bars

### **Legal Reasons**

A code that emerged from the data was that of legal reasons not to drink. The legal age to drink alcohol in the United States is 21. The students discussed how the law itself played a role in their choices not to use alcohol and how concern about legal consequences affected their choices and behaviors. Table 6 displays the two sub codes of 1) Legal ramifications, and 2) Important to follow the law.

Table 6

*Legal Reasons: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Legal ramifications	Important to follow the law
Monday (n=4)	3	2
Tuesday (n=4)	4	5
Wednesday (n=4)	4	2
Thursday (n=8)	4	0
TOTAL	15	9

**Legal ramifications.** One student was explicit about how the law has affected his choice to not use alcohol at college while under age 21. He stated,

I'm only 18 and all of my friends are older than me. Well, the majority . . . the vast majority are (older than me) and so they're all 19 and stuff and they're still underage but it's like they've also made the conscious decision not to drink and so there's no reason for us to do so because we can't legally obtain alcohol.

Another student agreed and stated,

Being under 21, those of us that are looking for to go into careers into the legal field, . . . well I'm looking to go into being a lawyer. It's like we can't have something like that.

**Important to follow the law.** Students in the focus group shared how the using alcohol under the age of 21 was not only illegal, but also against the law.

One student reported, "The law of the land right now is, um under 21, you can't drink, and so I've abstained from that." Another agreed and stated, "I'm not 21 yet, so I value the laws of this country. It's against the law for me to do it any way."

Irresponsibility was discussed with one focus group. One student stated, "You're breaking the law, which isn't responsible by definition." Another student agreed and stated, "I guess it's not as big of a decision for us because we're all what you call 'good kids' - we let the law make the decision for us."

### **Other Family Members Who Use or Abuse Alcohol**

Parents are not the only family members that influenced the participants. A few students discussed their other family members, such as siblings, grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Table 7 displays the sub codes of 1) Siblings who use, 2) Grandparents or other

relatives who use, 3) Grandparents or other relatives who abuse, and 4) Negative situations I have been involved in with other family and alcohol use/abuse.

Table 7

*Family Members' Use or Abuse: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Siblings who use/abuse	Grandparents or other relatives who use/abuse	Grandparents or other relatives who/abuse	Negative situations I have been involved in with other family and alcohol use/abuse
Monday (n=4)	0	2	3	7
Tuesday (n=4)	2	0	3	2
Wednesday (n=4)	5	2	5	3
Thursday (n=8)	1	2	0	2
TOTAL	8	6	11	14

**Siblings who abuse alcohol.** One student shared about his older sister's experiences with alcohol. He stated,

My oldest sister, she would, she used to go to parties and drink. And she ended up doing really bad things, like sleeping with a bunch of guys and she wound up pregnant, She wasn't the best role model, so I decided that I didn't want... I wanted to live my life to the fullest and not risk anything that could ruin that.

Two students shared about their brothers' use of alcohol. The first commented,

My younger brother, on the other hand, he has chosen to drink and um when he drinks, every time he drinks, something bad happens. One time he decided it was a good idea to walk out in traffic and try to get hit by a car. Another time he

thought he should bang his head against the brick wall. And um, and now he's going through like rehab for all of that.

The second student stated,

My oldest brother, he once, while intoxicated, broke a window while attempting to get back into the house, which he had been locked out of because he came home at like 2 am. He came home at like 2 am and was like, the door's locked. And then apparently thought he could open a window and somehow like ended up breaking it, like putting his hand through it, like punch a hole. My older brother above me was like me, never drank. We apparently just looked up at our siblings and we're like, "Yeah let's not be them."

**Grandparents or other relatives who use alcohol.** Other family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, were also reported as having had an influence on the students. One student stated,

I've got some few uncles, one uncle is, don't know if he's an alcoholic. I mean it's, it's one of those things where if he is, he's a functioning one... where I've never seen him, to my knowledge, drunk but then again I've never seen him at a family function without alcohol.

**Grandparents or other relatives who abuse alcohol.** The participants concurred that they did not want to end up like their family members who abused alcohol. One student discussed how she witnessed all the problems alcohol can bring to a family, reporting:

I have [an] aunt who is an alcoholic and has a son who is an alcoholic and just kind of all the problems that go along with it, it's not something that I

would ever wanna encounter. So it's like, I don't think even one drink isn't terrible, but for me I just wouldn't want it to lead to something more so I just, I don't need it.

**Negative situations I have been involved with other family and alcohol use/abuse.** The death of someone who had abused alcohol was discussed in one focus group. During this discussion, the participant discussed her feelings: “Like my uncle? He drank himself to death and I don't know how long he drank... I think since he was a teenager. He died some years ago. Every time we went to visit, he was always just drinking and drinking and not doing anything, not remembering anything. It was just really sad.”

One student reported on the stories she heard about violence with alcohol in her family:

I've had a few experiences like those, but then my step-grandfather died before I was born. But I've heard horror stories like he was a very violent drunk and he drank all the time, and just some of the things I've heard from various members of my family, it's like you don't want to go there. And my uncle is also an alcoholic, so... and he was, he's not violent, but he's made some pretty stupid decisions that have landed him in jail.... so just not something I even want to meddle with. It's like better off not touching it.”

### **Personal Goals**

Goals were discussed in all of the focus groups. Table 8 displays the sub codes of goals: 1) General goals, 2) Academic goals, and 3) Career goals.

Table 8

*Personal Goals: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	General goals	Academic goals	Career goals
Monday (n=4)	0	1	1
Tuesday (n=4)	3	0	5
Wednesday (n=4)	2	2	0
Thursday (n=8)	6	3	2
TOTAL	11	6	8

**General goals.** The students stated that alcohol did not fit in their lifestyle. One student stated, “I chose not to drink alcohol because it didn’t match with my goals.” Additionally another student stated, “. . . Growing up my whole life, I guess my goal is to be in the Olympics, and it still is, but I just feel drinking would hinder that.”

Additionally, another participant linked athletic goals or personal health goals with legal reasons not to use stating,

Also, in our school, we have the guilty by association rule. That’s like, if you get caught drinking if you’re on a sports team or like in an extra-curricular activity, you’re not able to participate. And even just being at the event, even if you’re not drinking, you are guilty and so that was like another big reason for me. Like I enjoy getting together with my friends and enjoy like being around people and stuff, but if it’s gonna be a time where, like if there’s any drinking involved, it’s not even worth going

**Academic goals.** Several participants discussed the importance of their academics in relation to alcohol use. One participant reported,

I have a pretty heavy workload with my classes that I take and stuff and I just number one don't have time for it. And number two . . . like (the) cost-benefit of doing it isn't worth getting caught after what I'm going for in athletic training. I wanna apply for physical therapy and you can't have anything bad on your record, so it's just easier to stay away from it all together . . .

**Career goals.** One student reported, "With my major, I'm going forensic science and hopefully work for the FBI someday, if you have anything on your record you can't really work there."

Another participant linked career goals and legal reasons for not using: Being under 21 those of us that are looking to go into careers in the legal field, like I know you mentioned you want to be a cop? Well I'm looking to go into being a lawyer. It's like you, we can't have something like that on our record. All you have to do is be stupid once and get caught. It's just not worth it.

### **Personal Expectations**

Participants in the focus groups discussed how they had personal expectations to uphold and either perceived themselves as a role model in the community or as a role model for their sibling(s). Table 9 displays the frequency of the sub code of being a positive influence on someone.

Table 9

*Personal Expectations: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	To be a positive influence on someone
Monday (n=4)	3
Tuesday (n=4)	3
Wednesday (n=4)	5
Thursday (n=8)	10
TOTAL	21

**To be a positive influence on someone else.** One student stated, “I’ve got a little sister and I don’t know... I just want to set the example, because you know I’m going to college and she’s going to a different college, but she does look up to me and I really don’t want to set a bad example. Obviously I don’t want to become the black sheep of the family.” Another student reported, “I kind of see myself as a role model to, like what they said, like little kids. I’m an education major so that kind of plays a big role in it too, but I also have three little brothers and an older brother and they all look up to me.”

In several of the focus groups, students discussed how they perceived themselves as role models in their communities. One student stated, “I’m kind of like a role model for not just my family but the community.” Some students who were athletes stated that being a role model was an important priority for them.

One athlete reported she chooses not to use alcohol since,  
 . . . a lot of people knew me in the community . . . like a lot of little kids  
 looked up to me and so it was just like, number one not something that I  
 had time for, and number two, like I didn’t want to let anybody down and  
 I didn’t want to let myself down.



## Theme #2: Behaviors of Those Who Choose to Abstain

The researcher also wanted to better understand the student's behaviors after they made the decision to abstain. Questions were asked to find out what students did instead of using alcohol and what influenced those activities.

### Spiritual or Religious Reasons

Multiple students reported abstaining from alcohol because of religious beliefs and activities. Table 10 displays the sub codes of 1) Religion or spiritual beliefs, 2) Against the rules in my church, and 3) Church is important.

Table 10

*Spiritual or Religious Reasons: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Religion or spiritual beliefs	Against the rules in my church	Church is important
Monday (n=4)	3	2	1
Tuesday (n=4)	2	2	1
Wednesday (n=4)	2	4	2
Thursday (n=8)	1	0	1
TOTAL	8	8	5

**Religious beliefs.** One student discussed how her spirituality was important to her and how it affected her decision to choose to abstain to keep her body and mind healthy. She stated, "We don't consume alcohol it's not good for ...your overall well-being."

**Against the rules of the church.** One student connected spiritual reasons along with legal reasons for not using alcohol during college:

I'm not even 21 and like, for me, like spiritually, like in the Bible it's, I mean, doesn't say like to not drink underage but I mean um he does or God does state

like um to follow the law of the land. And obviously the law of the land right now is, um under 21 you can't drink, and so I've have abstained.

Several students discussed practicing their religion or being spiritual. One student reported the reason for not using: “. . .one would be on a spiritual level I know the bible says you're not supposed to.” A second student reported,

It comes down to it, the core is probably my faith of why I don't drink.

Not that by any means is alcohol wrong in the Bible, but I just I don't have a desire to do it. I don't, I feel like it, it's like being due to my faith and that love that I feel from Christ that I don't . . . I don't need it. I don't want it.”

**Church is important.** Another student discussed how the church has protected him from the use of alcohol and how church was an important part of his life:

The church my parents attended actually had a school, so I was really, really sheltered until I was 16. Like all of my friends were kids of... people from our church you know so . . . and not to say that just because you attend church makes you a good person or anything of that right, you know? But that kind of stuff wasn't, wasn't an issue . . .

### **Social Life With Those Who Use**

Several students in the focus groups discussed their social life with others who use alcohol. Even though they chose not to use, they often still had friends who did choose to use alcohol. Table 11 displays the sub codes of 1) Societal Expectations, 2) Negative culture at college or North Dakota, 3) Taking care of friends who do drink, 4) Babysitting friends who use, and 5) Friends who use.

Table 11

*Social Life With Those Who Use or Abuse: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Societal Expectations	Negative culture at college or ND	Taking care of friends who do drink	Babysitting friends who use	Friends who use
Monday (n=4)	2	7	10	1	7
Tuesday (n=4)	7	3	1	1	2
Wednesday (n=4)	12	5	7	0	32
Thursday (n=8)	9	7	2	0	24
TOTAL	30	22	20	2	65

**Societal expectations.** Focus group members discussed the culture and societal expectations. Some students stated they felt that it was expected to come to college to party. One stated: “Like freshmen will come in and they’re... it’s the preconceived notion of coming to college... I think anywhere... anywhere as a freshman.” Another student agreed that most students felt it was necessary to party. He stated, “Yeah we’re here in college and it’s time to party.”

Several students in the four focus groups reported not needing alcohol to have fun, but that the culture of the college environment is difficult to fight. One student stated,

Just looking at like what the culture of our society is at now... I mean you look at people and you see why. Like you just look at people in general, well people are sitting down and drinking at like 11, 12 o’clock, one in the afternoon and getting like drunk and you’re like well, why is that? I mean it’s, it wasn’t socially acceptable before but now you see these ads on TV that are pushing like, oh the games on oh you gotta have a beer and I mean the games on at like anytime I

mean from the whole wide range of the day which is just promoting like not heavy drinking, but it's just constant drinking.

The conversation flowed and another student stated,

I guess for me, it comes a lot with... like in high school I had a lot of classmates/friends that all they did was drink on the weekends and... it got to a point where it's just that's all that happened and... like... it's just so... like unnecessary that it just... kind of drives you nuts that they don't do anything other than drink and they feel that alcohol has to be present. I think that kind of goes into what you said about, the game being on, oh you have to have beer, and that's just kind of seems to become part of like a subculture in America - that in order to have fun you have to have alcohol and it's just, I don't find that true at all.

**Negative culture of college and UND.** Students shared their thoughts on how the negative cultures of college, and at UND in particular, affected their behavior as abstainers. One stated,

Kids were choosing what colleges they wanted to go to. They were like, oh so you're going to the party school (laughter) like either St. Cloud or here and so that's what it's known as.

Another student reported,

North Dakota has gained that reputation. I mean Grand Forks as a city, I mean I believe it's like number 2 behind a huge city of Texas in binge drinking like as a general and that our college itself falls in the top 10 for public schools I believe at least. It's just, I mean people come here and they already have that preset notion. I mean like you look at Spring Fest for example.

One student shared the difference between North Dakota and California. He stated,

Compared to like California, coming from California, like a lot of people do drink but I just feel there's more things to do in California that I mean... it's not like here, here everyone's doing it every weekend. Like in colleges in California? People do drink but there are other things to do, like there's going to the beach, there's going to amusement parks. I mean, I hate to say, but there's nothing in North Dakota so I feel like kids just turn to like alcohol to have fun cause there's just nothing to like go out and do besides alcohol. All there is, is parties every weekend. Like there's nowhere to go outside of Grand Forks that's close enough so I think that's the big reason why a lot of people drink here.

**Taking care of friends who use.** A few students talked about how they continued to go to parties and chose not to use but were there to be with friends or for friends who needed help. One student in the focus group stated he could have fun without needing alcohol at parties. Some students who attended parties were DD (designated drivers) and others just kept their friends safe. One student in the focus group stated she would never let her friends get behind the wheel, no matter how many drinks they had. Another student said,

I know my friends are getting home safe. Like I'd rather have me be sitting there doing nothing. And then usually they'll just, they'll buy me pop. I will have a pop but and then I'll just hang out because I can have fun without needing alcohol. And my friends don't get like plastered or anything but if they do have enough so I'd never let them get behind the wheel. I think one drink is too much to get behind the wheel.

**Babysitting those friends who use.** Students shared stories about babysitting their friends who were intoxicated. One student stated that he was not going to be the ‘white knight’ anymore. He said,

I think that’s really the idea the White Knight complex dies really quickly when you realize the people are just going to keep going back for it . . . you can’t be around all the time to protect them so . . . just . . . it . . . it . . . I don’t want to see any of my friends end up driving drunk or something like that and getting into an accident or even worse hurting someone else . . . but . . . you can’t follow them around . . . it’s their own life . . . you know . . . and so that’s why slowly but surely I’ve disassociated from most of them . . . it’s not worth . . . it’s not worth investing my life in a friendship with them if they’re just going to destroy their life and try to pull me down with them.

Others talked about how they used to take care of friends and then had some negative experiences and just decided to stay away from it. One student stated,

. . . And like there was a point where I was with one of my friends and she was like kind of getting harassed by this one guy . . . it was like . . . I was like . . . okay let’s go . . . and then the guy kept harassing and I was like, I told the guy like, all right you need to back off dude and stuff . . . and he kept coming around and, okay you need to leave, and then he was like in my face. I was like, okay we’re leaving and it was like . . . he just kind of followed and I’m like, I’m going to call the cops if you keep following us, like you need to leave and she’s just like . . . wants to get out of there . . .

and she's drunk and I'm just like oh my gosh . . . like what is this? Like after that I was just like you know what . . . like I can't be this guy . . . like . . . like . . . this isn't my job . . . like kind of deal . . . like . . . I . . . this isn't what I want to be around . . . like if this is the decision that they're going to make, they're going to make it . . . I mean I can't prevent this all the time from happening just because this is what they're deciding so . . . I just took myself out of the equation and stuff like that.

**Friends who use.** Several of the focus group members hang out with friends who use alcohol. Some of the participants felt comfortable with those who use and never felt pressure from these friends. One student reported,

I think all of my friends, everyone knows I don't drink and um they kind of tease me. But like nicely, so it's not anything. So I've kind of thought the same thing, like fearful, it's like oh what are they gonna think? But everyone is really nice. And actually (I) went out to a bar with a couple people one time and one of my best guy friends who is like super macho drinks Shirley Temples with me.

Another student stated, “. . . I'll go and I'll hang out. I'll bring my ice tea and lemonade and just have fun but without drinking.”

Other students in the focus groups discussed how they stay away from friends who use. They felt that their friends were making the wrong choice to use alcohol. One student reported,

The other group of people is the XX team and I don't hang out with them on weekends because they do the exact opposite. Um it's pretty bad especially after

conference meets when we get time off from training... um so I've just avoided those all together, so no influence.

### **Social Life With Those Who Choose Not To Use**

Huang et al. (2011) found that having a close friend who abstains from using alcohol was one of the greatest protective factors. The old proverb, “Birds of a feather, flock together,” seems fitting for the college student abstainers in this study. Generally, people all choose to spend time with others who have the same beliefs and behaviors as they do. College students are no different. The abstainers in this study reported having close friends who chose not to use. Students tend to gravitate towards those who act and behave the same. Table 12 displays the sub codes of 1) Friends who do not abuse alcohol, and 2) Other things to do without alcohol.

Table 12

*Social Life With Those Who Choose Not To Use or Abuse: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Friends who do not use/abuse alcohol	Other things to do without alcohol
Monday (n=4)	0	9
Tuesday (n=4)	7	6
Wednesday (n=4)	6	3
Thursday (n=8)	10	5
TOTAL	23	23

**Friends who do not use/abuse alcohol.** It seems as though when students discussed their close friends who abstain with them, their religion was involved. For example, one student stated,

[Of my] three closest friends, one is very religious and she chooses not to drink for religious reasons. Um one I'm, I have a feeling it's mostly



because she's underage she just and it doesn't really interest her. And the other it's, she and I have pretty identical histories of, we've come to the same conclusions that it's just not something we want to mess with.

We've had enough crap in our lives without adding to it.

Another student reported similarly stating,

I guess I have kind of two groups of people I hang out with on a regular basis. One is all of my Christian friends and none of them drink at all. Um we just don't see the point. And the other group of people is the ... team and I don't hang out with them on weekends because they do the exact opposite. Um it's pretty bad especially after .... when we get time off from training um so I've just avoided those all together so no influence again.

One student who did not discuss religion reported not having any friends who use alcohol. In fact, he stated, "My friends don't drink, so on campus there's no reason for me to go to a party like that because I won't know anyone there." Another focus group member agreed that it was easy not to use alcohol because of the friends with whom she spent time. She stated,

I've just been really blessed with the fact that all my friends also choose not to drink and I've never seen any family members drunk around me so it makes my decisions a lot easier. I don't have to deal with the peer pressure or the norms because I'm not exposed to them

One student reported going out to a bar with a couple of people who do not abuse alcohol. They simply go to the bar for the atmosphere and enjoy having one drink. This student showed confidence in her choice to abstain. Another

student who felt that her friends respected her choice reported,

I think generally all of my friends are really respectful and most of them don't drink when we're together. So I think even they can tone it down and not make it such a big priority in their life.

**Other things to do without alcohol.** Several focus group members talked about what they do in their free time without alcohol. One young male student reported that he enjoys UND's facilities, which allows him to do activities that do not include alcohol. He stated,

If all your friends are like, "man we wanna go show off at the Wellness Center, how good we are at dodge ball for all the ladies around." Everybody's probably ready to go.

Another student cited alcohol-free programming, saying: "Alcohol-free like Night Life is a great step... right... every weekend there's at least one event." Finally, one student reported being generally able to have fun without alcohol, "I said before multiple times, I can have fun doing anything. Like, I can, I don't care about looking completely foolish and not fit."

### **Staying Healthy**

The discussion in several of the focus groups was staying healthy and health as a priority. A few focus group members were athletes who felt it was important not to use alcohol; however, not all who talked about their health were athletes. Table 13 displays the frequency of sub codes of 1) Personal health and 2) Athletics.

Table 13

*Staying Healthy: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Personal Health	Athlete
Monday (n=4)	3	0
Tuesday (n=4)	2	5
Wednesday (n=4)	7	4
Thursday (n=8)	8	5
TOTAL	20	14

**Personal health.** Focus group members shared their reasons for staying healthy.

One student talked about how health was important to her and how it related to her choice of not using alcohol. She stated,

Like being in shape and being healthy is important to me. And besides that factor also like . . . I'm kind of a control freak. Like I like to have myself in control and I like to know what I'm doing at all times and I don't wanna jeopardize like any of that.

Another student had a goal to run a marathon and stated that she would not use alcohol, as she didn't want to jeopardize her running.

Physical health was not the only kind of health discussed. Mental health or keeping one's mind healthy was also discussed. One student stated,

I would never want to put anything in my body that would limit my ability to make decisions. It just seems kind of stupid to drink something that would allow my judgment to decrease.

**Athlete.** A few focus groups included athletes who prioritized health. One student stated,

I was a student-athlete at (another university) um so that would in conflict with my eligibility although a lot of student-athletes do drink . . . I just didn't feel that, as a part of me and a part of my views and my beliefs, that consuming alcohol, especially while during season, isn't good for your body or you know, your performance. But there are studies that show that you know a certain amount will help you. Um there's also that argument going around on the team."

Another student athlete reported the same reasons for choosing not to use, saying ". . . because I'm an athlete and I can't really drink during the season and I know the damage it can do to your body."

### **Criticizing Others Who Use Alcohol**

After reading the notes several times, the researcher noticed that the abstainers spoke of the users many times. The abstainers not only mentioned judgments of those who use, but also mentioned not understanding the users' logic of using alcohol or abusing alcohol. Table 14 displays the frequency of sub codes of 1) Attitude of not accepting others who use or abuse, 2) Dumb things drunks do, 3) Judging others who use, 4) Not logical, and 5) Watching others lose control.

Table 14

*Criticizing Others Who Use Alcohol or Abuse Alcohol: Frequency of Sub Codes per Focus Group*

Focus Group	Attitude of not accepting others who use or abuse	Dumb things drunks do	Judging others who use	Not logical	Watching others lose control
Monday (n=4)	0	6	18	10	5
Tuesday (n=4)	1	7	10	6	8
Wednesday (n=4)	4	3	15	8	8
Thursday (n=8)	0	1	7	2	6
TOTAL	5	17	50	26	27

**Attitude.** During one focus group, the participants discussed their perceptions of the attitudes of those who used alcohol under the age of 21. One participant stated,

I would say that most binge because I know a lot of the younger students, who are underage, if they're gonna drink, they're gonna drink alot because you get the same minor either way, if you've had one drink or twelve.

**Judging others.** Students also seemed to easily judge others. One student perceived that those who used alcohol did not have goals in mind:

I mean people that want to be pilots generally have had that dream since they were younger. And I mean that seems to be one of those majors that people come across at a younger age then maybe most and you want it for so long. But alcohol is still worth risking it? There is something seriously wrong with you if a substance is worth risking your dream. Like I just can't wrap my head around that.

**Dumb things.** Some focus group members questioned the 'dumb' things that the users did and their decision-making skills. One student commented, "Why would you

want to spend half your life drunk anyway? I mean wouldn't you rather be able to remember why you made a dumb decision?" Another student stated,

Binge drinking to me is, that also includes that mindset, um "Let's go out and get drunk" and like you're looking forward to the weekend. By Sunday night you're looking forward to the next weekend and that's your, you know? You have Facebook posts and tweets about it, like "Can't wait till the weekend, blackout or blackout like neon party"

**Not logical.** Logic was a word that came up many times in all of the focus groups. Students could not comprehend or understand the logic of choosing to use or abuse alcohol. One student stated,

I knew a lot of people in high school. Some of them weren't really close friends but you know they were friends um... but they would talk about at lunch time, you know, the party this past weekend or "this happened this weekend at so and so's place." And "before I blacked out" or you know, "this happened" and um... you know? I always felt uncomfortable, kind of, when they would bring that stuff up because what I did on weekends was, you know, I went to ...these events and um... competing or doing homework. I mean, I wasn't looking forward to the next party, or alcohol was never on my mind um... at that age. I just didn't understand how these other um... classmates of mine were getting a hold of the alcohol or how they knew people um... but... yeah... I thought it was kind of um... unnecessary especially at that age when you when you're going through so much, just as a teenager and then just being in high school, um... so I think that just adds another, um... social issue into the mix.

Another participant did not understand the logic of using underage and stated,

That's really sick reasoning, it's like, "well I've already murdered somebody . . . three more people I want to take out." "I'm gonna do that cause they'll give me the same needle." I mean it's just horrible logic.

Another student stated,

Really the reason I choose not to use alcohol is I don't see the point in it. Like, I mean, I know like, I have friends who say, "oh but you have so much more fun when you are drinking." But I mean a lot of people I know they don't have like one drink just for the heck of it. They like binge drink, typical North Dakota binge drinking, and so like they don't remember anything from the night before. And they're like, "Oh, but it was so much fun." It's like, you don't know if it was fun, if you don't remember what you did. So I mean, people just like use it to have fun from my experience. And I don't think that you need alcohol to have fun.

Another student agreed by stating,

Well, I think what "Girl" said actually holds really true. I've never seen anyone really have more fun when they were drinking or drunk then they did when they weren't. Especially the whole "I can't remember it but it was fun" seems to be prevalent and that that makes no sense unless you have you know some really embarrassing pictures on Facebook the next day um... you don't, you don't know what you did and it seems... it almost seems like in our culture that there such a repression on um... exhibiting emotions right? Like most especially for guys. Like a guy, unless, you shouldn't show emotion, unless you're angry or you're cheering for your sports team.

**Watching others lose control.** Several students reported that using alcohol was just an excuse to use bad behavior, whether that behavior was treating someone badly or doing something illegal. One group of students focused on the male behavior of abusing alcohol. One student stated,

You're not allowed to do anything else and it seems, almost like a lot of people, especially men, seem to use the alcohol as an excuse to just let out what they actually want to say and they haven't found a way to... to actually open up and say that..

Another student discussed discovering others' alcohol abuse during his first job at McDonalds. The student reported,

I got my first job when I was 16 at McDonalds.... and I remember working at night and that's exactly all I'd hear from all of the kids. Like, "oh yeah I went to this party over the weekend and I went over and did this" and they were trying to tell me how cool it was, cause they really rapidly realized, "oh this guy is, you know, very naïve. He doesn't understand anything about the world, how it really works, so let's educate him." And so they were trying to invite me to these parties and beyond the like.... well I didn't have the experience of sneaking out of the house or anything like that. So before I could even make up my mind, yes or no, what I would see then is Saturday morning when I would be there opening and the guys that were, or the gals that were, showing up to open literally couldn't stand the smell of like the eggs or the bacon we were making. They were going and throwing up in the back sink. I'm like the first night that, or the first morning that that happened, it sealed my... my intent, "pssh, that was fun?" And the guy, and I



literally remember the guy's name, he was um... well I don't remember his last name but Robbie was his first name... and as he's throwing up in the back sink, he's trying to tell me how much fun he had that weekend... and I'm like, "really? Like I went to a basketball game, I played basketball with my friends (laughing) that was fun... you know we won (laughter) I don't feel like throwing up I'm going to go back and work now." You know? So yeah it just really impressed in my mind something that was brand new to me was just ugly so...

### **Summary**

This chapter included the results and analysis of the current study. A description of each of the focus groups was provided as well as a summary of the progression of the discussion in each group. Excerpts from the discussion and quotes from participants were used to indicate the themes, codes, and sub codes that emerged from the data.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the college student who chooses not to use alcohol and to understand the factors that support his/her behaviors and motivations when choosing not to use alcohol. In the current study, I used a qualitative research design to analyze focus group data from students who report choosing not to use alcohol in the last year. I examined the data from twenty college students who attended the University of North Dakota and reported abstaining from alcohol for the past year. I found two significant findings relating to the motivation of college student abstainers. Parental influence and other family members' alcohol abuse were significant but abstainers' motivations were too varied to find a specific correlation for this behavior. The three significant findings relating to the behaviors of the abstainers included an active social life, high expectations of self, and judging others who use alcohol. The findings of this study are discussed below according to the two themes.

#### **Motivations for Abstaining**

Students in the focus group shared several motivations for abstaining from alcohol. The findings of this study that highlighted students motivations for abstaining were parental influence and family abuse. The two themes are discussed further.

#### **Parental Influence**

In this study, I found that whether the parents chose to use alcohol, not use alcohol, or abuse alcohol, they were an influence on the students' choice not to use

alcohol. The existing literature did not completely agree with what was found in this research. Several of the literature studies that were reviewed found that students whose parents did not use or used responsibly made the choice not to use alcohol. This study found that the motivations of an abstainer did not correlate with the parental use but correlated with their influence – whether it was positive or negative influence. Crawford and Novak (2007) suggested that the largest factor for a college student to choose not to drink was his or her family upbringing. They found positive correlations between college students who chose not to drink and being raised in a family where alcohol was not present in the home. Kuendig and Kuntsche (2006) cited that strong family bonds have been shown to be a preventive factor for alcohol use. Leifman et al. (1995) would agree, as he found that those who were raised with fathers who abstained from alcohol were more likely to also abstain from alcohol.

Herman-Kinney and Kinney (2012) found more than 15% of their sample of nondrinking students reported their parents as a positive influence in their choices and having had an indirect influence on their college behaviors. Parental role modeling and parents' communicating expectations of use has been implicated in the reasons for students to choose not to use (Molina et al., 1994; Walls et al., 2009). Walls et al. (2009) also reported parental influence as a key component for students who chose to abstain or use responsibly.

Some participants in the focus group of this study reported that positive choices made by their parents were relevant in their choice of not using alcohol. They also reported being taught values and beliefs by their parents and other role models. These students had positive parental influences. Some focus group members shared that they

had a close relationship with their parents and that they did not want to disappoint them. These students respected their parents and admired them for their behavior. They wanted to be the same as their parents.

Since several of the students cited parents who didn't drink at all, one may assume that the best sort of positive role models would be parents who don't drink at all around their children. However, the non-drinking parent may not be the only motivation for a college student to choose not to use, as this evidenced by the participant who felt that her parents used alcohol responsibly and taught her that she does not need alcohol in her life at all.

Other students in the focus groups shared their stories about their alcoholic fathers and mothers, which brought tears to their eyes. Some shared stories about their parents fighting and how they do not want to become their parents; which is why they chose not to use alcohol. One powerful story was the memory of the young male college student who sat in the pick up in the parking lot of the Country Club waiting for his Dad to get out of the bar so he could drive him home. The students opened up about personal experiences that motivated them to make the choice to 'not be like' the parent(s) who abused alcohol. These students do not have positively influential parents and are making the choice to abstain from alcohol.

### **Family Abuse**

The other significant finding was students were motivated to choose not to use due to family members' alcohol abuse. Several of the students shared stories about their parents' or grandparents' alcohol abuse and how this affected their choice.

The authors of the literature describe how genetics play a role in alcoholism. Some participants discussed the possibility of genetics and how they did not want to take the risk and be like their parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles. The literature review reported that Children of Alcoholics (COAs) had negative childhood experiences involving alcohol (Huang et al., 2009), however the authors of the literature do not discuss how the alcoholic parent inhibits the students' choice to abstain from alcohol during their college years.

In conclusion, though parental influence and family abuse played a major role in college student abstainers' motivations, it seems that the type of influence may be specific to each particular student and his or her experiences.

### **Behaviors of an Abstainer**

The second theme was the behaviors of an abstainer. The key findings focusing on behaviors of abstainers were that the college students who abstained from alcohol were social, had high expectations of self, and were judgmental of those who used alcohol.

#### **Social Life**

This study found that the abstainers enjoyed their social life and found it acceptable not to use alcohol. Their social life was similar to that of other college students' minus the alcohol. The findings in this study do not concur with researchers in similar studies who have found that the behaviors of the abstaining population can often include being anti-social (Huang et al., 2009). Students in the focus groups were not anti-social. In fact, several of them shared their experiences at the bar with their friends who drink. They discussed that they enjoyed the social atmosphere such as dancing. There

was one participant who was happy to care for others and enjoyed spending time with friends, even if they were at the bar.

Others found comfort with those similar to them. They seemed to primarily spend time with those who chose other priorities and enjoyed simple things in life without using alcohol. They cited engaging in healthy behaviors, such as athletics and late-night alcohol-free programming, as activities they enjoyed with friends.

Students who choose not to use alcohol still love to have fun. Even though they chose not to use alcohol, some students in the focus groups reported attending parties where alcohol was served. College student abstainers in this study described their social life as fun. Many of the participants discussed their social lives as very full and rewarding. Some still went to the bars and danced and socialized. Others went to the late night programming at their residence halls or at the student union and enjoyed being sober. This disclaims the research of Walton and Roberts (2004) that suggests students who abstain from alcohol are more introverted than those who use.

### **High Expectations of Self**

Several students talked about how their goals and expectations played a role in their choice of abstaining. A few focus group members were athletes or had high expectations to stay physically fit. These students shared the importance of choosing to abstain to refrain from the extra calories of alcohol and the risk of decreasing their performance levels. The students prioritized their health or their team much higher than using alcohol. Other students focused on goals relating to others and how others perceive him or her. They shared their interest in becoming or remaining a positive role model for others, including siblings, youth, and community members.

### **Judgmental Behavior**

Another behavior that became prevalent from the focus groups was the judgment of those who used alcohol. Many members of the focus groups stated they did not understand why others drank so much and why they needed to put themselves those positions. They criticized several actions of those who use alcohol and some even seemed angry about others' use - even to the point of not wanting anything to do with anyone or any business that was involved with alcohol.

In conclusion, this study revealed similar motivations as were found in other studies, but elaborated on those motivations and showed the complex intricacies of parental influence and experiences with those family members who choose to use alcohol and how alcohol was used/abused. In regards to the behaviors of the college student abstainer population, this study found that the college students who abstained from alcohol were social, had high expectations of self, and were judgmental of those who used alcohol. In order to best make sense of these factors, a conceptual framework can be created to help define and inform practice.

### **Considering Conceptual Frameworks**

As the earlier discussion illustrates, this study closely connected with the framework and five factors described in the MAAQ (Stritzke & Butt, 2001). This study revealed two themes along with eleven codes. These themes and codes fit and concur with the five factors described by the MAAQ (see Table 15).

Table 15

*Situating Themes and Codes in the MAAQ Framework*

MAAQ Factors	Corresponding Codes in Theme #1: Motivations to Abstain	Corresponding Codes in Theme #2: Behaviors of the Abstainer
Fear of Consequences	Legal Reasons	Staying healthy
	Personal goals	Social life with those who use Criticizing others who use or abuse alcohol
Dispositional Risk	Other family members who use or abuse alcohol	
Family Constraints	Parental Positive Influence Parental Use	
Religious Constraints		Spiritual or Religious Reasons
Indifference	Personal expectations and desire	Social Life with those who choose not to use alcohol

However, by looking at the data in this way, it is impossible to gain a full understanding of the College Student Abstainer as a person situated in his or her environment and to consider the complex interplay between the students' personal factors, behavior, and environment. For this level of in-depth understanding, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, may be used to augment a root list of codes and characteristics.

SCT is a framework that is commonly used to understand the college student who use or abuses alcohol (Burke & Stevens, 1999; Yeramani, 2010). SCT recognizes that human behavior is a continuous, reciprocal relationship between three components: personal factors, behavior, and the environment. Figure 2 shows how the themes and codes found in this study could fit into these three components.



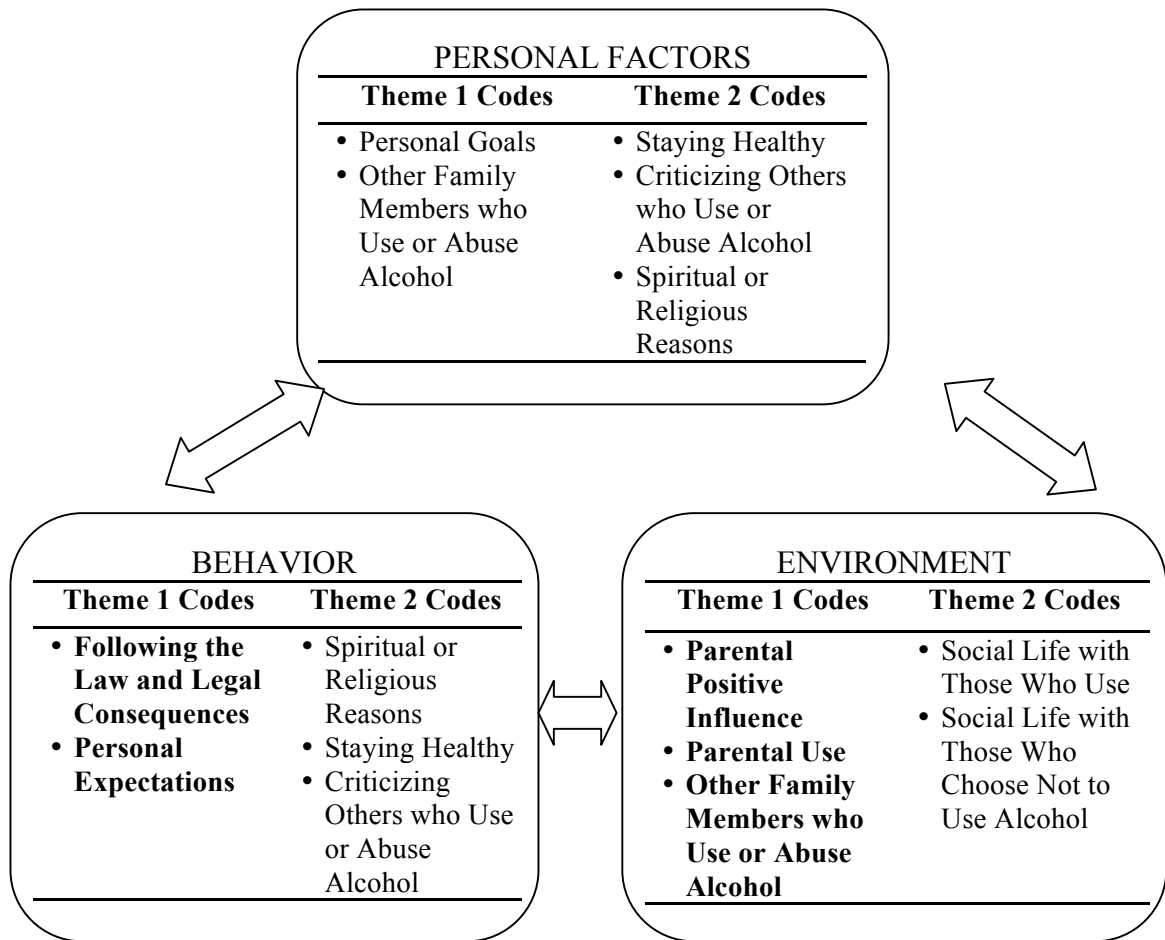


Figure 2. Situating Codes and Themes in Social Cognitive Theory.

Personal factors are defined as one’s thoughts, feelings, or beliefs; this can also be described as one’s self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one’s confidence when managing risky behaviors such as alcohol use or abuse. A college student who chooses to abstain from alcohol may exhibit high levels of self-efficacy and demonstrate strict expectations to not use alcohol.

In the studies that have used SCT to predict college student drinking behavior, the key construct is personal factors or self-efficacy. The prior studies associated the need to increase the students’ self-efficacy as a requirement for behavior change (Bandura,

1977); whereas, the current study reveals students' prior high self-efficacy and ability to reject or resist the alcohol.

Behavior is defined as individual stimuli. Bandura (1989) describes our standards of behavior as being developed through others' reactions or our observations of norms or standards. Several researchers have demonstrated that parental influence is a factor for students choosing to abstain from alcohol (Huang et al., 2011; Seataoai-Samu et al., 2009; van der Vorst et al., 2010). A college student may observe the abstinence of alcohol in a family. This observation then informs the student's standards for alcohol use.

The students' individual responses of choosing to prioritize education are another example of a factor in predicting the behavior of an abstaining student. The focus groups in this research discussed academic goals and how those goals affected their behavior. One participant in the focus group described the importance of her education and how it is a priority over alcohol use: "I have a pretty heavy workload with my classes that I take and stuff and I just number one don't have time for it."

Finally, environment is defined as the factors physically external to the person including peers, family, and social surroundings (Bandura, 1977). Alcohol is a part of the college environment; however, there are also several opportunities for college students to be involved in non-alcoholic activities, such as university-sponsored late-night events or socializing with other peers who choose not to use alcohol. This interaction within the collegiate environment shapes the student's actions or behavior to choose not to use alcohol.

Data from this study also suggest another reason students may prioritize studies and choose to abstain for alcohol – these students may see themselves as role models for

others. Some students in the focus group discussed how they felt it was important to be a role model for brothers, sisters, or even younger community members. These students had a desire to be a positive influence for others and associated academic integrity as a significant association with abstaining from alcohol. The literature review had similar findings, with abstaining students preferring to identify as abstaining students with academic excellence (Herman-Kinney & Kinney, 2012).

SCT has been explored in several studies of alcohol use or abuse; however there are no known studies that explore the relationship between the three components of SCT and the college student abstainer.

### **Recommendations**

One finding was that one of the abstainers' common behaviors was to have high expectations of self. This leads me to suggest a marketing strategy to highlight college student abstainers who would be outspoken and tell stories about their decision to abstain via a social media marketing campaign. Students telling real stories can impact others. These stories could describe what motivates them to abstain. Since alcoholism has become prevalent and visible in the public, it seems that more and more students are dealing with parents or family members who struggle with this addiction. Promotions that allow students to tell their story could resonate with others who have had similar experiences. This study included athletes who abstainers. Athletes are role models to each other and even to other students on campus. Their words can be powerful to others and impact those around them, so including some student athletes who choose not to use could prove influential.

Another recommendation is for colleges to develop or enhance their late night programming events. Students who choose not to use alcohol are not necessarily different than non-users in relation to social nights and activities. I found that the abstainers had the same desires to have fun, have friends, and spend time with friends - they just choose not to use alcohol. Several times during the focus groups, the participants shared their suggestions about more late night programming. The literature review reported that late night programming drastically reduces alcohol use during the times and evenings that the program is happening (Patrick, Maggs, & Osgood, 2010) and would also support those who choose not to use alcohol. A recommendation would be to provide late night programming and focus on all groups of students, not just those at risk or not just the abstainers. The market is the entire college student population. Increasing college late night programs could potentially increase the number of college students who choose not to use alcohol, which could minimize several of the alcohol violations and injuries. Patrick, Maggs, & Osgood (2010) indicated alcohol-free programs “may serve additional valued purposes such as enhancing the college experience, improving retention, and preventing the onset of drinking among abstainers or light drinkers” (p. 160).

Several students in the focus groups shared their experiences with their friends who use alcohol. If the universities and colleges create and develop activities in a manner that students find interesting and entertaining, the promotion will be word of mouth and it is possible that several students may choose a late night of non-alcoholic entertainment compared to attending an event with alcohol. These activities would contribute to a healthier campus and healthier environment. This is not an innovative idea. In fact,

several college campuses around the country are now promoting alcohol-free activities. The key is to understand what this generation of college students are interested in and what events or activities they would choose over a night that includes alcohol.

### **Further Research**

This dissertation investigated the motivations and behaviors of those college students who choose not to use alcohol. Certainly, there are several more questions that are left unanswered after the completion of this study. A deeper investigation of SCT, MAAQ, the research methods, and late night programming are a few I found would be of interest.

One potential study is to further explore SCT. It has been explored in several studies of alcohol use or abuse; however there are no known studies that explore the relationship between the three components of SCT and the college student abstainer. SCT could be an applicable framework for the study of college student abstainers to inform how the variables of personal factors, behavior, and environment of a college student abstainer may impact each other. It may be a significant contribution to the existing literature through such an application.

However, this study revealed the likelihood that the MAAQ could be a possible conceptual framework. The MAAQ may need revisions to better construct questions that allow the researcher to obtain more details about the motivations of the abstainer.

Using a different research method may also be an interesting to explore further. There are several quantitative surveys focusing on the alcohol use or abuse of college students. Reframing the questions to include the perspective of abstainers in the survey may highlight more details about abstainers' motivations. Further quantitative research

could be explored and investigate whether there are personality differences of those who use alcohol and those who choose not to use. This study found that the use of alcohol is only one facet of the individual's behavior rather than the defining factor in the individual's personality.

Several focus group members suggested more alcohol free late night programming for college students. Recently, this area of research has been growing. Furthering the conversation about the benefits, needs, and interests for those who abstain as well as those who use alcohol may be an interesting study.

### **Final Conclusions**

All parents, whether they use alcohol, abuse alcohol, or chose not to use alcohol, have a strong influence on their child's choice to use alcohol as a college student. In this study, I examined several different stories that led back to the student's parental influence. Recommendations include developing a marketing strategy via social media to shed light on and promote the normalcy of the abstainer and enhancing college late night programming to encourage a social life without alcohol for both users and non-users. This research could be the beginning of a new concept of prevention that includes lessons learned from those who are making the choice to abstain and could create a social norm that alcohol is not necessary in a college student's life. We know that there has been a decrease of alcohol use among high school students, and this may be a trend in the future.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Protocol

- I. Introduction
  - a. Introduce self
  - b. Talk briefly about the study
  
- II. Setting the Tone
  - a. Briefly give an overview of the questioning procedure (e.g. questions asked to the group. Respondents talk in turn, in any order they desire. Moderator may call on participants to participate.)
  - b. Be respectful of each other's opinions
  - c. Do not interrupt each other.
  - d. No right or wrong answers. All answers are opinions and experiences. Give as much information as possible or as much as comfortable.
  - e. For any particular question, if you feel you have already covered the information in a previous question, you do not need to repeat the same information.)
  
- III. Consent
  - a. Session will be taped. Only used for the purpose of this study.
  - b. Strict confidentiality will be observed. No real names will be used in any reports.
  - c. Do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.
  - d. May leave the session at any time. Only participants who finish the entire session will receive compensation.
  
- IV. Questions
  - A. Personal Decisions
    1. In a sentence or two, why did you decide not to drink in the last year?
    2. What experiences have you had that contributed to this decision?
      - a. Have people influenced you? If so, how?
      - b. Have any organizations influenced you? If so, how?
      - c. Have any belief systems or philosophies influenced you? If so, how?
      - d. Has your living arrangement or who you live with influenced your decision? If so, how?
    3. In a sentence, tell me about your friends.
      - a. Describe what it is like to find friends who do not drink
      - b. Describe what it is like to socialize with friends who do not drink
      - c. Tell me about the support you get from friends about your choice



## B. Motives

### 1. Fear of consequences - Motive

What are fears of drinking?

- i. Legal?
- ii. Academics?
- iii. General health?

### 4. Dispositional Risk

- a. Does using other medication keep you from using?
- b. Tell me about your family history and alcohol?

### 5. Family Constraints

- a. How have your parents influenced you?
- b. Tell me about how they communicate with you?
- c. Describe your parents as role models?
- d. Describe how peers influence you to abstain?

### 6. Religious Constraints

- a. Does your religion or spiritual beliefs influence you?
- b. How many hours do you spend in religious activities?
- c. Do you lead religious activities?
- d.

### 7. Indifference toward drinking

- a. Do you attend parties where there is alcohol?  
What are your techniques not to use?
- b. Do you feel pressure to use?

C. Last question: What is the most influential reason (motive) why you choose not to use?

IV. Briefly summarize the focus group answers and preliminary themes.

V. Give the participants a chance to respond to the summary.

VI. Closing

- a. Thank the participants
- b. Remind them of their confidentiality. They can tell others what they said, but they cannot tell others outside the room what was said. Cannot reveal identity of other participants.
- c. Offer them contact information so that they may see the results of the study.

VII. Distribute gift cards

VIII. After the participants leave the room, take 15-20 minutes to write down notes or preliminary themes from the focus group.

## Appendix B

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**TITLE:** Students Who Choose Not To Use Alcohol  
**PROJECT DIRECTOR:** Sandi Luck, M.A.  
**PHONE #** 701-215-2561  
**DEPARTMENT:** Educational Leadership

### **STATEMENT OF RESEARCH**

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this research study is to understand more about the lives of college students who abstain from drinking alcohol in four-year research universities in North Dakota colleges. Specifically, the study will explore the motivations and behaviors of students who choose not to use alcohol. The information obtained from the surveys will show trends in alcohol and drug use and will assist in the development of substance use prevention programs.

### **HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?**

Each focus group will have approximately 6-8 participants. A total of 32 students could participate in the focus groups (4 groups).

### **HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in the study will last approximately 90 minutes. Your involvement in the study will end once the focus group is completed.

## **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?**

Your participation in the study will include answering questions about why you choose not to use alcohol along with responding or commenting to other participants' answers.

## **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?**

The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, should a participant experience any trauma as a result of participating in the focus group, the participant should seek counseling with the university's counseling center.

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

The benefits you may expect to receive from participating in this study include: 1) A better understanding of the research process, and 2) An increased awareness about sense of belonging and community at the university through sharing similar experiences. We hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study and possibly create focus future programming and educational efforts to possibly better understand how to change the college environment to be more beneficial to those who abstain from drinking. Your responses in the focus group may be used to assist in the development of alcohol and other drug abuse interventions to improve the climate for all North Dakota college students.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY**

Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to participate. If you choose not to participate in this study, you may leave the focus group.

## **WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

## **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

For the participation in this study, participants will receive a \$10 gift card to a local pizza restaurant. The compensation will only be available to those participants who participant in the full focus group session.

## **WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?**

The researcher is funding this study.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Focus group participants will only be referred to by their pseudonyms on the focus group tape recordings, on any subsequent written transcripts of the tape recordings, and in any subsequent reports. At no time will the real names or identity of participants be revealed to anyone other than the researcher and professional transcriber; strict confidentiality will be observed in all phases of the research. Both tapes and transcripts will be kept in a secured and locked location at the researcher's home for the duration of the research project up to seven years.

## **IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?**

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the university.

## **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?**

The researcher conducting this study is Sandi Luck, M.A. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Sandi Luck, M.A. at 701-215-2561.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone else.

## **DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:**

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Completing the survey means that:

1. you have read and understood this consent form
2. you have had your questions answered, and
3. you have decided to be in the study.

You may keep this consent form.

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