

RURAL ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ALCOHOL USE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study outlines rural adolescents' perceptions of the reasons they choose to use or not use alcohol. The social contextual factors that underlie their decisions are addressed. Twenty juniors and seniors from four rural schools in a North Dakota county were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that the reasons given are similar to reasons given by other rural and non-rural samples although rural communities similar in characteristics and in close proximity can have very different patterns of adolescent alcohol use. Insight into the meaning these adolescents had about their experiences with alcohol is provided.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of alcohol by adolescents in rural areas of the United States is not a recent phenomenon. In the past, however, many people believed that the rural environment was protective for adolescents against the harsher effects of alcohol use and abuse due to the close knit community environment that was perceived to exist in rural areas (Cronk & Sarvella, 1997; Drixler, Krahn, & Wood, 2001; Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). The rates of binge drinking (identified as five or more drinks at one sitting by the 2005 Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration) and daily alcohol use by adolescents who live in rural areas is now higher than urban rates, and the age at which they begin drinking is earlier than that of their cohorts in urban areas (Cronk & Sarvella, 1997). Furthermore, adolescents in rural areas engage in more dangerous patterns of alcohol-related behavior, such as driving under the influence (SAMHSA, 2005). Statistics from the state of North Dakota, listed as the 47th least populated state by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2008, will be highlighted in order to take a closer look at rural adolescent alcohol use and will be used as a starting point to address the various levels of influence that encourage this alcohol use.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2003) listed North Dakota as having the highest rate of adolescent binge drinking (using the criterion of 5 or more drinks in one setting) in the nation and indicated that past month binge alcohol use was around 17% for all adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2007) showed that episodic heavy drinking by adolescents, which is specifically identified as 5 or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours on at least one day during the past 30 days, was much higher at 32.5% in North Dakota compared to 26.0% for all U.S. adolescents in the same age group. Past month alcohol use by those under the age of 20 in North Dakota during 2003-2004 was the highest among the 50 states at 42.7% (SAMHSA, 2005). In 2004, SAMHSA also reported that 291

adolescents between the ages of 12 and 20 years old were admitted for alcohol treatment in North Dakota, accounting for 17% of all treatment admissions for alcohol abuse in the state.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC along with state and local education and health agencies, showed that approximately 35,000 North Dakota adolescents consumed alcohol each year, based on self-reports by North Dakota students in grades 9 through 12 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005). In 2005, 20% of students had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before the age of 13, 49% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days, 34% had five or more drinks of alcohol at one sitting in the last 30 days, and 4% had a least one drink of alcohol on school property on one or more of the past 30 days (Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, 2006). In 2005, underage alcohol users consumed 22.7% of the alcohol sold in North Dakota (Miller, Levy, Spicer, & Taylor, 2006). Thus, it is hard to dispute that alcohol use by North Dakota adolescents is significant. These consumption patterns need to be addressed, as the daily use of alcohol and binge drinking have been linked with violent behavior, auto accidents, and death (Cronk & Sarvella, 1997). Alcohol consumption patterns are also associated with the number of sexual partners that an adolescent has, as well as the frequency of his or her sexual activity (Prince & Bernard, 1998). In addition, alcohol consumption habits, which are often developed in an individual's adolescent years, have the potential to affect his or her future health (Fletcher & Skinner, 2006).

Many North Dakotans believe that alcohol is only a minor to moderate problem among adults and youth in the state (North Dakota Department of Human Services, 2008). A state-wide community readiness survey conducted by the North Dakota Department of Human Services in April 2008 showed that the 14,400 adults who were surveyed were almost equally split between those who perceived alcohol use by youth as a serious problem (42.3%) and those who perceived

it as a mild to moderate problem (45.3%). In contrast, of the 1,725 community professionals who were also surveyed, 62% ranked alcohol use as a serious problem. Brenda Woytassek, coordinator of the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Coalition of Wilkin County, Minnesota said in her article in the county newspaper that “parents and other adults underestimate the number of youth using alcohol and also the age that they start” (Wahpeton-Breckenridge Daily News on-line, November 20, 2008). She goes on to say that parents believe that the adolescent who uses alcohol is “not my kid”. In December 2007, the Coalition surveyed 277 6th, 9th, and 12th graders in Wilkin County (a rural Minnesota county that borders southeastern North Dakota) and found that youth see alcohol use as a low risk activity with 44 % of seniors using alcohol over the last 30 days and 20 % of freshman using over the same time period. In contrast, the 2006 Community Alcohol Readiness (CAR) survey conducted in Fargo, North Dakota, indicated that 54% of the students surveyed saw teenage alcohol use as at least a moderate problem and as somewhat more problematic than adult use in the community (North Dakota State Data Center, 2008).

Many researchers have studied why alcohol use by adolescents in rural areas has been increasing over the past years. The social-contextual model has emerged to describe the phenomenon of adolescent alcohol use in relationship to factors in the environment (Cronk & Sarvella, 1997; Heflinger & Christens, 2006; Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). The social-contextual model identifies various contextual factors, such as family, peers, school, and community as important socializing agents for children and their families (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner (1986) described a nested approach where an individual is impacted by influences at these other levels. This individual-in-context model helps explain both the etiologies and development of substance abuse problems (Heflinger & Christens, 2006).

Within the social-contextual model, there are several behaviors which parents engage in that may lead to an increase in antisocial acts, such as substance use and abuse, committed by their adolescents. These behaviors include failure to adequately supervise their children, not providing adequate discipline for misconduct, treating their children in a neglecting or hostile fashion, and failure to reinforce conventional activities and socially desirable behavior (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). The social-contextual model predicts that an adolescent's sense of self is strongly tied to the quality of his or her family relationships. An adolescent who struggles with autonomy and identity issues may be less likely to have open communication and involvement with his or her parents as well as more family conflict which could lead to substance use (Sheer, Borden, & Donnermeyer, 2000). Furthermore, this relationship takes a circular path, for as an adolescent engages in more antisocial behavior, the relationship between the adolescent and his or her parents becomes even more negative (Larson & Dehle, 2007).

The social-contextual model also uses social control theory to explain how the family context may either protect against, or may increase the risk for, adolescent substance abuse (Sheer, et al. , 2000). Parents who have open communication and involvement with their adolescents will likely influence them in a positive manner, as they are more likely to express their opposition and concern about underage alcohol use. If the parents have exhibited a pattern of support and unconditional acceptance for their child, it is more likely that an adolescent will hold his or her parents' values in higher esteem than his or her peers' values, thereby minimizing the potential of influence by substance using peers (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). Family support is identified as an important part of adolescents' well-being as it provides them with a sense of security, helps them adjust to changes in their lives, and increases the chance that they will develop friendships with other youth who have healthy coping styles (Oetting, Edwards, Kelly & Beavais, 1997).

In comparison, a harsh parenting style has been linked to a parent's lack of awareness of an adolescent's activities as well as to a failure to promote involvement in community activities that may inhibit substance use and failure to restrict access to contexts that might encourage adolescent substance use (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). Adolescents who are involved with substance use or abuse are less likely to report that they felt that their family cared about them "a lot" (Oetting et al., 1997; Scheer et al., 2000). The perceived acceptance by parents of an adolescent's substance use often leads the adolescent to more substance use (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). It has also been shown that the earlier that an adolescent initiates use of alcohol, the more likely that he or she will become dependent (Heflinger & Christen, 2006). Early initial alcohol use, as well as increased use over time, is also associated with exposure to negative life events such as parental divorce, family health problems, and violence (Nation & Heflinger, 2006).

The dynamics within the community in which an adolescent and his or her family live may also influence the decisions that they make. Conger and Edler (1994) examined how the farming economic crisis of the 1980s disrupted the coping mechanisms of rural families. As the number of farming operations decreased, people were forced to look for employment elsewhere. Stress within the family often led to a more harsh and punitive parenting style. The amount of supervision of their older children's activities decreased when parental stress levels were high, leaving adolescents more freedom to explore potentially harmful activities, like experimenting with alcohol.

Rural areas around the country are now undergoing stress as a result of the current national and local economic climate in which many jobs are being lost. Families are struggling due to economic hardships, and the dynamics within the family environment are likely to change. As parents find employment outside of their immediate community and try to make ends meet by

working in more than one job, the time and energy that they have to monitor their children's behavior becomes limited, and the likelihood that they will react calmly to their children's misbehavior decreases (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). The chronic economic stagnation or decline in rural areas may also be related a loss of optimism and to a rise in the number of psychiatric disorders that are experienced by people who live in rural areas (Puskar, Sereika, Lamb, Tusaie-Mumford, & McGuiness, 1999). Parents who use alcohol or other substances to cope with their stress may also be setting up a pattern that increases the likelihood of their children's lifetime alcohol use (De Haan & Boljevac, 2009). To complicate the matter, it has been found that rural families seem particularly reluctant to use mental health services in order to deal with their emotional concerns (Bierman & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1997). They may refuse to accept help from "outsiders", fearing the stigma of seeking services, and may doubt the effectiveness of the services that are available (Heflinger & Christen, 2006). This, in turn, may lead to individuals and families hiding the fact that they are using alcohol. When adolescents do not have an adult in their family to turn to when they are having difficulties, it is important that they are able to turn to someone else whom they can trust.

Adults, other than parents, may also be powerful sources of pro-social attitudes and beliefs for adolescents. These in-depth mentoring adult relationships may have the power to moderate adolescent alcohol use (Hawkins, Cummins, & Marlatt, 2004). Mentors, whether they are family, teachers, or community members, may also increase an adolescent's sense of self-worth and achievement, as well as assist in his or her goal development (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001; Shears, Edwards, & Stanley, 2006). Having goals that focus on the future is protective for adolescents against developing problems with alcohol and other substances (Drixler et al., 2001).

In addition, extended family and community bonds that were once such a strong support for families in rural areas are now disintegrating as people migrate out of these areas (Scaramella

& Keyes, 2001). The ability to use these networks as support in guiding and supervising children therefore becomes more limited (Conger & Elder, 1994). More homogeneous communities, often those with extended family and social connections, generally have a greater presence of informal community groups that will be less tolerant of deviant behaviors and that will encourage conforming behaviors by adolescents (Scheer et al., 1997).

The social-contextual model extends beyond the immediate family environment and out-of-family mentor relationships into community and school interactions. Involvement in extracurricular activities at school and in the community often decreases the likelihood of adolescents drinking in rural areas (Gibbons, 1986). In one recent study, officials in rural schools saw alcohol use by adolescents as a significant problem. These officials were also more likely to view their communities as non-supportive, economically unhealthy, and not effective in dealing with adolescent alcohol use (De Haan & Boljevac, 2009). Community factors, such as prevalence of drinking in the community and the support and controls against drinking, were important predictors of reported alcohol use in the early adolescent years. De Haan and Boljevac reported that the increase in adolescent alcohol use in rural areas could be partly explained by communities that either unconsciously or consciously endorsed adolescent alcohol use as a relatively safe activity.

Other community factors that may also influence an adolescent's use and abuse of substances are population density and distance from a metropolitan area. Community population size is theorized to be an important consideration in adolescent alcohol use. Schultz and Neighbors (2007) found that college students from smaller towns and smaller high school graduating classes reported using alcohol more than students from larger communities and that they had attitudes that were positively associated with alcohol. Alternatively, however, Shears and his colleagues (2006) found that rural areas which had many community activities centered

on the schools and adolescents who developed strong school bonds had lower adolescent substance use. This was found to be especially true of more remote communities, which were identified as having populations less than 2,000 residents and located more than two hours driving time from a metropolitan area. Scaramella and Keys (2001) also found that rural residency protected against adolescents' substance abuse only in communities with 2,500 or fewer residents. These researchers classified communities on a rural-urban continuum, stating that the lack of specificity in reporting on the characteristics of the types and sizes of communities that occurred in some previous studies increased the difficulty of generalizing findings of the risk or protective effects of community size on adolescent substance abuse.

Under the social-contextual model, there is also a strong relationship between an adolescent's substance use and the substance use of his or her peers (Chopak, Vicary, & Crockett, 1998; Oetting et al., 1997). Perceptions and beliefs about alcohol and other chemical substances are shaped by the peers that an adolescent is exposed to and associates with. As a complicating factor, an adolescent who has a dysfunctional relationship with his or her family or problems at school will tend to be attracted to peers who exhibit antisocial behaviors. The belief that "everyone drinks" may lower resistance, even when knowledge about the risk is high (Jenkins, 2001).

Many rural adolescents do not view the encouragement that they receive from friends to drink alcohol as peer pressure, but as a mutually agreed upon behavior (Scaramella & Keys, 2001). In one study, rural adolescents indicated that they would not try to stop their friends from using alcohol, as they saw it as an expected and relatively approved behavior and a normative part of their social scene (Oetting et al., 1997). Some people who live rural areas may see alcohol use as linked to their notions of personal rights, privileges, and status (D'Onofrio, 1997). The belief is that hard work and vigorous play deserves a reward, and using alcohol is a commonly

acceptable form of receiving this reward. As part of this attitude, people who use alcohol are not judged by the amount of alcohol that they consume but by the actions that they engage in while using it.

Nation and Heflinger (2006) stated that individual psychosocial factors are important to consider when adolescents are treated for serious alcohol and drug problems. They found that “binge drinking” is more common in extroverted adolescents who associate with antisocial peers and participate in delinquent behaviors. Bonding with antisocial peers is believed by some researchers to have the greatest effect of all risk factors on lifetime use for all substances (Shears et al., 2006). Scott (1996) indicated that adolescents experiencing low self-esteem, emotional stress, and identity confusion were more susceptible to peer influence to use alcohol.

Adolescents who use alcohol consistently often state that their desire for pleasure-seeking or feeling “different”, better, or numb were reasons why they chose to use alcohol (Jenkins, 2001). It is when the prolonged, heavy use of alcohol and other substances becomes a means of dealing with emotional and personal crisis, or when the use of a substance occurs in the context of a stressful event, that many people in the adolescent’s life become concerned about his or her dependency issues (Oetting et al., 1997). Adolescents who use alcohol frequently to enhance their sociability and to rebel against authority may also become part of the high risk group that are prone to experience a significant number of dependency-related problems (D’Onofrio, 1997). Gender also plays a role in whether a rural adolescent is more likely to use alcohol, to what extent, and under what circumstances. Rural male adolescents often begin using alcohol at an earlier age than do female adolescents and have been shown to consume it more frequently and in larger quantities (Pope, Smith, Wayne, & Kelleher, 1992). Drixler, Krahn, and Wood (2001), have found that the highest level of self-reported “drinking and driving” occurred among grade 12 male students, as 1 in 5 of the participants in this study stated that they had engaged in this

behavior often or very often in the past year. In another study, adolescent boys were significantly more likely than adolescent girls to experience negative ramifications of alcohol use, in addition to driving while under the influence of alcohol, including riding with an intoxicated driver, damaging property, breaking the law and engaging in physical or verbal confrontations (Fletcher & Skinner, 2006). Rural female adolescents have significantly lower odds of getting drunk than male adolescents, and close bonds in school are protective for girls against lifetime use of alcohol, as it seems that they are more concerned with pleasing adults and are more likely to adopt positive family and community norms than rural male adolescents (Shears et al., 2006). Female undergraduate students identified as frequent “binge drinkers” in one study were shown to have low self-esteem and a strong desire to be liked and accepted (Bladt, 2002).

The process of individuation that occurs during the adolescent years may explain how the use of some substances, particularly alcohol, could be seen as experimentation and as part of the normative expectations for this age group in our culture (Conger, 1997; Drixler et al., 2001). As long as an adolescent’s alcohol use does not interfere with normal activities and the use of alcohol is time-limited, parents and other adults are likely to ignore, or even tolerate, its use. However, weak family and community sanctions against the use of alcohol, as well as other substances, may unintentionally lead to more use by adolescents (Scheer et al., 2000). The normative approach to alcohol use avoids that fact that experimentation with alcohol, especially by younger adolescents, often leads to more involved patterns of use and may also have the possibility of leading to the use of even more harmful substances later on (Chopak et al., 1998; De Haan & Boljevac, 2009; Scaramella & Keyes, 2001).

Conversely, there are factors in the rural environment that have been found to influence adolescents’ decisions to not use alcohol. Personal factors shown to contribute to this decision include having future aspirations (Dunn, et al., 2011), which was found to be predictive for the

upcoming 30 day behaviors of adolescents, as well as developing a non-user identity and feeling accountable to one's self and others (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Development of pro-social behaviors (Carlo, Crockett, Wilkinson, & Beal, 2011), as well as social competence related to social confidence, assertiveness, and communication skills (Griffin, et al., 2011) were also protective for rural adolescents who made the decision to abstain from alcohol. Other researchers also found that nurturing assertiveness skills in rural adolescents was related to less alcohol use (Lilleho, Trudeau, Spoth, & Wickrama, 2004), while in a rural Canadian study it was found that adolescents who avoided alcohol must resist conformity while, at the same time, find strategies to prevent exclusion from the larger peer group who did use alcohol (Friscolanti, 2007). For girls in rural communities, their intention to refuse a substance was associated with later substance use initiation as compared to those girls who had no intention to refuse substances (Trudeau, Lillehoj, Spoth, & Redmond, 2003), while for boys, the role of religion was found to be important in protecting against substance use because of enhanced school bonding and increased self-efficacy (Milot & Ludden, 2009).

Factors within the family that contribute to a rural adolescent's decision not to engage in substance use include parents who hold expectations for their children for non-use, family sanctions against underage substance use, and having parents who talk about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs (Dunn, et al., 2011). Researchers found that, with the rural adolescents they studied, that family support and parental monitoring resulted in having adolescents who were less likely to initiate use of all drugs except for beer and wine (Sullivan, Kung, & Farrell, 2004), while others found that strong family support and communication, as well as consistent parental discipline and monitoring, was important in limiting or preventing rural adolescent alcohol use (Wills and Yaeger, 2003). In general, having an affectionate relationship with parents was associated with alcohol abstinence for rural youth (Spoth, Redmond, Hackaday, & Yoo,

1996), however, parental closeness and monitoring was associated with less incidence of early initiation of alcohol use rather than use later in adolescence (De Haan & Boljevac, 2009). In addition, positive peer influence has been associated with a lower prevalence of adolescent substance use for rural adolescents (Dunn et al., 2011, Spoth et al., 1996). Rural adolescent who feel a close bond with their school have lower rates of substance use, especially in the most remote communities (Shears, et al. 2006).

Community supportiveness was related to less lifetime and past month alcohol use for rural adolescents (De Haan, Boljevac, & Schafer, 2009). Having adults who were interested in youth activities and their well-being was an important component of this support. Researchers found that having a sense of connectedness to one's community was associated with a rural adolescent's self-actualization, and this connection with adults in the community provided a source of feedback for youth on what behavior is acceptable and constructive (Fogarty & Brennan, 2010). These researchers also found that the decisions made by rural adolescents about substance use was shaped by having a voice at the community level and helped them forge a bond with positive role models.

As highlighted in the previous information, the social-contextual model outlines the different factors in the environment that contribute to the decisions that adolescents make. Parents, extended family members, school and community leaders, and peers all have been shown to have some impact on the choices that an adolescent makes regarding alcohol use. While it is important to examine the perspectives of all the individuals who may have a significant role in influencing the decisions that are made by the adolescent, perhaps the most insightful information can be gained from the adolescents, themselves. This study will examine the reasons that adolescents give for making the decision to use or not to use alcohol, incorporating a basic interpretive qualitative research approach. This approach was chosen

because it helped the researcher understand the meaning that the adolescents have constructed regarding their experiences with alcohol use within the communities where they live. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to attempt to understand and make sense of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective (Merriam, 2002).

METHODS

Location

A rural county in North Dakota was selected as the study area. The communities within this county were chosen because of their designation by the U.S. Census Bureau as medium-rural, which translates into a community with a population between 2,000 and 20,000 but also includes communities with a population less than 2,000 which are located less than 2 hours driving time from a metro area. For a homogenous sample, all communities that were chosen had a population size of less than 2,000 residents, with high school populations (grades 9 through 12) of less than 150 students. These communities represented four of the five rural schools within this county; one rural school in the county was excluded because it was the district in which the researcher resided and was where her children attended school.

Participants

Approximately 152 two high school students in the 11th and 12th grades from four communities within this county were asked to participate in this study, which consisted of all the students in these grades that were present in school the days the interviewer came in to speak to them. School administrators within these communities were contacted by letter (Appendix A, Appendix B), and later by phone, to gain their support in recruiting students to participate in this qualitative study, as well as their consent to conduct interviews on school property during the school day. Once their consent was given, the researcher scheduled a visit to the classrooms to describe the study (Appendix C) and handed out a ballot form (Appendix D) on which they could indicate by checkmark whether they would, or would not, like to participate in the research study. The forms were folded and passed back to the researcher so anonymity was maintained. Those who indicated by a “yes” checkmark that they would like to participate in the research were asked to write down their parents’ names and addresses. Parents of adolescents under the

age of 18 were sent a letter outlining the research goals and procedures (Appendix E) and two consent forms (Appendix F), one to keep and one to send back to the researcher in a stamped, return envelope that was enclosed in the material sent to them. Parents of adolescents 18 year of age or older were sent just the letter outlining the research goals and procedures (Appendix G). After parental consent was received by the researcher for students under the age of 18, interviews with the students were individually set up through phone contact. Students over the age of 18 were contacted by phone to set an interview soon after the informational letter to their parents had been sent out. At the time of the interview, student assent forms for those under 18 (Appendix H) or student consent forms for those over the age of 18 (Appendix I) were signed by the participant, and confidentiality issues were reviewed with each participant. Special precautions were taken to ensure participant confidentiality as the researcher received a certificate of confidentiality from the National Institute of Health (Appendix J) so that student information could not be subpoenaed by any court of law. Student information was protected in a locked storage unit and on a password protected computer at the HDFS graduate office at North Dakota State University.

Twenty-six 11th and 12th grade students from the four schools initially agreed to participate in the study, as indicated by student ballots. However, four students would not return the interviewer's phone calls to set up an interview, one student moved before his interview could take place, and one student's father refused to let her participate in the study. Both students who indicated that they have used alcoholic beverages, as well as those that indicated that they did not use alcoholic beverages, participated. Before the interviews took place, the interviewer reviewed the interview procedure and student rights with the participants (Appendix K). After the interview, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire that focused on demographic information; including age, grade, and family background (Appendix L). All

students received an informational sheet that listed local alcohol and drug treatment centers after their interview was completed (Appendix M). Participants also received a ten dollar gift certificate to a local video store for participating in the research.

Due to a low initial participation rate, some of the recruiting procedures were modified after the first three interviews took place. The oral script describing the study to the students was altered (Appendix N), and ballot form (Appendix O) was modified to ask students the reason that they chose to participate or not to participate in order to better understand their rationale. Students were not required to hand in the ballot during the researcher's initial visit to the classroom but were also allowed to put their completed assent form in a specially marked box in the school office in order to protect their privacy. The parents of those who agreed to participate were sent a signed letter from the school principal (Appendix P) that outlined his or her approval of the study along with the original information sheet and consent form, if the adolescent was under 18 years of age. Students were also allowed to interview after the school day was completed, as an alternative to interviewing during a break during the school day, in order to better accommodate their schedules.

Researcher-Interviewer

The researcher-interviewer is a white female with undergraduate degrees in nursing and social work and is completing a master's degree in human development and family science. She has worked for numerous years in public school and college settings as a social worker, after-school program coordinator, tutor, and instructor. She was born and raised in a rural North Dakota community and grew up in a community where alcohol use by adolescents was a common activity. She and her husband are now currently raising their own children in a rural North Dakota community. Her own community was not chosen to participate in this study. Her biases may include her own involvement and understanding of the climate and culture of rural

North Dakota communities and people. Selective attention to certain details and selective interpretation of the data will be prevented by participating in frequent debriefing sessions with her thesis advisor as the research project evolves.

Interview Questions

Six research questions were developed, using the framework of the social-contextual model, to determine the impact a rural North Dakota adolescent's decision to use, or not to use, alcohol. These questions evolved from a review of the literature and through procedures outlined in a qualitative research class the researcher participated in at North Dakota State University. A semi-structured interview style was used to allow the researcher flexibility in asking questions of the participants, while, at the same time, allowed her to have a guide to direct the interview (Merriam, 2002). The following research questions were asked:

1. What are your experiences with using alcohol?
2. What are the reasons you choose to use, or not to use, alcohol based on your relationships with friends and classmates?
3. What are any family factors that play into the reasons that you choose to use, or not use, alcohol?
4. What are any school-related factors that contribute to your decision to use, or not to use, alcohol?
5. What factors in your community contribute to your decision to use, or not use, alcohol?

Procedure

Student interviews were audio-taped on two digital tape recorders, using one for back-up, and took place in a private office setting at the student's school. Interviews were approximately one hour in length and took place during a student's free period during the school day or after the

school day had ended. Audio-taped interviews were then by transcribed by the by the researcher, and reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. Using the procedure outlined by Creswell (2007), the researcher thoroughly read the transcripts in their entirety several times to get a sense of the data as a whole with notes being made in the margins about key concepts, phrases and ideas. The researcher then extracted significant statements from the data which were then analyzed by the researcher for their essential meaning. These meanings were then be used to form themes. Color-coding of the data allowed the researcher to group the statements around the identified themes. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection, which allowed the researcher to make adjustments, such as redirecting data collection and testing emerging concepts, themes, and categories (Merriam, 2002), for example, the interviewer began to question students about local law enforcement's role in underage alcohol use when this theme repeatedly emerged during student interviews. After the interviews were completed, units of data were compared to other units of data, within and across interviews, in order to look for common patterns. The results were described and interpreted in a narrative form with direct statements from the participants being used to highlight key themes which allowed a rich, thick description of the participant's experience to emerge (Cresswell, 2007). The researcher's advisor followed closely the interviewing, transcribing and coding processes, as well as thematic development to ensure that the outlined procedures were followed.

Participant and schools were assigned a code to ensure their confidentiality. Audiotapes were kept in a locked file cabinet at NDSU for one year after the study results were completed while the transcribed interviews and the researcher's written notes were kept indefinitely in locked storage at NDSU. It is hoped that the themes that were identified in this study will help researchers gain a better idea of why rural adolescents choose, or do not choose, to engage in alcohol use.

RESULTS

Twenty students were interviewed for this study; fourteen are female and six are male. Table 1 provides student demographic information in the order of which they were interviewed. The students are categorized based on the amount of alcohol that they indicated they currently consumed. Students who used alcohol on a regular basis, once or more a month, are indicated by FU (frequent user). Students who used alcohol less than once a month are indicated by OU (occasional user). Any student who did not use alcohol at the time their interview was identified as AB (abstainer), although they may have used alcohol in the past.

The information is grouped into three categories: Context of Rural Adolescent Alcohol Use, Reasons That Rural Adolescents Choose to Use Alcohol, and Reasons That Rural Adolescents Choose Not to Use or Limit Alcohol Use. The categories are further divided into themes. The two latter categories have their themes put into the sub-categories of internal (personal) and external (environmental) reasons.

Table 1
Student Demographics

	Gender	Age	Grade	School Code	GPA	Household #	Job	Activities	Location	Miles ^a	Income ^b	Alcohol exp. ^c	1st use ^d
Adam	M	18	12	1	3.3	3	no	3	In Town	--	A	FU	14
Beth	F	16	11	2	3.5	7	yes	4	Out of Town	3	B	OU	15
Christa	F	17	11	1	2.0	4	yes	5	Out of Town	10	NA	AB	---
Devon	M	18	12	3	2.7	3	yes	3	In Town	--	B	AB	---
Edward	M	19	12	3	3.0	5	yes	6	Out of Town	10	B	AB	---
Frank	M	18	12	3	3.0	4	yes	3	Out of Town	2	E	OU	16
Garrett	M	17	12	3	3.3	5	no	6	In Town	--	NA	OU	11
Hunter	M	17	11	3	2.9	5	yes	0	In Town	--	E	FU	15
Isabelle	F	17	12	2	3.7	3	yes	6	In Town	--	B	AB	---
Jennifer	F	17	11	4	3.5	4	yes	4	Out of Town	12	NA	AB	---
Kayla	F	18	12	4	3.0	3	no	6	In Town	--	NA	OU	16
Lindsey	F	17	12	2	4.0	3	yes	3	Out of Town	16	NA	AB	---
Mindy	F	16	11	2	3.5	3	no	4	In Town	--	C	OU	15
Nora	F	17	11	3	3.2	4	yes	5	In Town	--	NA	AB	---
Olivia	F	17	11	4	4.0	5	no	6	Out of Town	4.5	C	AB	---
Penny	F	17	12	4	3.7	3	yes	6	Out of Town	12	B	OU	14
Rena	F	17	12	1	3.8	6	yes	6	In Town	--	NA	AB	---
Sara	F	16	11	3	3.4	3	yes	12	In Town	--	NA	AB	---
Tessa	F	17	11	2	3.5	7	yes	4	Out of Town	1.5	NA	OU	16
Vickie	F	17	12	3	3.5	4	yes	7	Out of Town	5	NA	AB	---

Note: Student names are changed to protect their identity.

Note: Students are listed in the order of when their interview occurred.

^a--Student did not live out of town, so no miles are reported.

^b Family income: A. \$0-24,999 B. \$25,000-49,999 C. \$50,000-74,999 D. \$75,000-99,999 E.\$100,000 and over N/A. Income not available.

^c--Alcohol experience: FU=Frequent user, OU=Occasional user, AB=Abstainer.

^d--Student did not use alcohol, so age of first use is not indicated.

Context of Rural Adolescent Alcohol Use

Who is using alcohol in rural communities. The interviewees identified that adolescents as young as twelve were using alcohol in their communities. They perceived that many of their peers were “drug” into alcohol use by their older siblings. More commonly, however, they believed that adolescents who had a driver’s permit or license were more likely to use alcohol than those who were not able to drive a vehicle, as this corresponds with the increasing freedom that adolescents have at this time in their lives.

The interviewees did not appear to differ in any noticeable way in the number of activities that they participated in, their grade point average, or whether they lived in town or out of town. Family demographics (i.e. family income, parents’ occupations, and number of children in the home) did not appear to be associated with an adolescent’s decision to use or not to use alcohol.

Where adolescent alcohol use occurs. Alcohol use by adolescents most often occurred in a party environment. These parties were set up randomly, without significant planning. Adolescents invited each other to attend these parties through Facebook, texting, and face-to-face contact. Sporting events between neighboring towns allowed adolescents to meet and interact with their peers, and they were a popular way to organize parties and invite more people. Beth (OU) explained her perception of the party environment by saying, “It’s like bonfires, you know, houses, farm houses, wherever. If there’s an apartment out there and no adults there, that’s where you’ll (find the party).” Garrett (OU) said that adolescent alcohol use occurred even when adults were present, especially at events such as weddings, birthday parties, and graduations. A common location for adolescent alcohol consumption was at the “lakes area”, of the neighboring state, a common vacation spot for people from this area, during the summer time, because of the more relaxed atmosphere and the perception that there would be fewer consequences at this time and

place. In fact, Tessa (OU) stated that some adult family members encouraged adolescent alcohol use while vacationing in the “lakes area”. Devon (AB) confirmed that some parents supplied the alcohol that the adolescents drank while vacationing.

Adam (FU) indicated that he liked going to “drinking” parties in larger towns because he was more likely to meet new people. He said, “It (alcohol) kind of adds to the enjoyment, you know, meeting new people, and it’s kind of easier when you are drinking.”

Using alcohol while driving or riding in a vehicle seemed to be an unpopular way to consume alcohol, according to most of the students interviewed. Only Adam (FU) indicated that this was a common occurrence within his group of friends. He commented,

A lot of the people who drink were fine (with drinking and driving). You know there is not as much police patrol (in the rural area)...a lot of people feel like they can handle it. A lot of the guys do, you know, and I don’t trust a lot of the girls (with drinking and driving)...they don’t seem like they pay enough attention...the guys seem to hold themselves up a little better.

He goes on to say that when he and his friends would attend drinking parties in a nearby city, “We usually find a designated driver. There’s more traffic, there’s more people, the chances of getting pulled over is better.”

Penny (OU) shared a more negative view of “drinking and driving”, which was common for the majority of the students interviewed. She stated,

I won’t ride with a drunk driver or I won’t drive if I have been drinking because I have had people close to me die because of drunk driving or a drunk driver, so I am really against that. If I have a friend there (at a drinking party), then I won’t let them drive drunk.

She went on to say that she and her friends watched out for each other at parties and had the same views on “drinking and driving”. She said,

Well, of course, my friends (and I), we have the same views, but, like, when I don’t think about things or I’m, like, ‘I want to go here’ or I

remember one time I'm drinking...and I thought, 'Well, maybe I'll drive' ...I was going to go see my cousin and they (my friends) are, like, 'No, you are not leaving.' You know, if it was just one person telling me that, I probably wouldn't have cared, but, since three or four of my friends were, like, 'No.', you know, I'm going to listen to them because what they say matters to me.

Where adolescents obtain alcohol. The students frequently indicated that the alcohol came from older friends and siblings who were of legal age to purchase alcohol. Several students believed that some of their peer's parents supplied alcohol to their children. However, most of the students that spoke about this topic were of the opinion that the alcohol that adolescents got from parents was taken without the parents knowing about it.

Changing attitudes and patterns of use. Most of the students believed that the decision to start using alcohol occurred in the junior high years, when they became aware of the implications of use, both good and bad. This was also the time period when these adolescents perceived that young people would be most influenced by peer pressure to use alcohol.

Sara (AB) said that she really started to understand what alcohol use was all about around the age of ten or eleven, while Vickie (AB) said that she made a conscious decision not to drink alcohol in about 7th grade, when she saw her peers starting to use alcohol. Penny (OU) also realized in junior high the impact that alcohol could have on her life. Other students started thinking more about alcohol when they saw older peers and siblings begin to use it, as well as when they were given more freedom to interact with their peers outside of the home environment.

Adam (FU) believed that younger adolescents need to adjust to the "drinking atmosphere" and that, as a person becomes more accustomed to using alcohol, getting drunk is not as exciting anymore. He said,

When I got older...a difference in my stability (occurred), like, (when I was younger) I wasn't able to tell how bad it (my alcohol consumption) was until morning...(now)it's not an exciting feeling (to get drunk)

anymore. It's not something new to you, and I think that's why you're able to control it, because it's more of a natural feeling, instead of just a shock.

Garrett (OU) stated his opinion that adolescents learn to adjust their alcohol use patterns over time, saying, "You (learn to) understand it and know how to work with it to have a good time or get a light buzz, then there's no problem." Tessa (OU) was one student who indicated that she felt she had learned to control her alcohol use and handle it in a more mature manner than many of her peers. She said, "I think that I'm different because I know where there is a level and where to stop and where to begin, and who I'm around with."

General beliefs about adolescent alcohol use. There was a variety of opinions about the consumption of alcohol by adolescents. Garrett (OU) commented,

Alcohol isn't good when people use it for something to get away from problems, and if it's being used improperly... it's not a good thing, but if you understand it and know how to work with it to have a good time or get a light buzz, then there's no problem.

Penny (OU) also rationalized adolescent alcohol use, stating,

Rarely do I think that high school students around here in these communities ever become alcoholics. Yes, we drink, and, yes, we might drink every weekend...but I don't think it's to the point where I'm going to be addicted to this. You know, it is more the fun of having fun...now (that we are older) we think of the consequences (of using alcohol) and things are more important to us.

Only Vickie (AB) addressed the seriousness of occasional adolescent alcohol use, surmising that her peers that used alcohol would be likely to minimize the risks involved. She said,

(They would say) 'It's fun', um, (or) 'I was pressured into it.' That would be most of the normal excuses, and then they are, like, 'Oh, I just tried it once. It's not like I'm going to go out and be drunk all my life'. (I want to tell them) Well, if you start using (alcohol) now, eventually you will get in a habit.

Student perceptions of interventions. Many of the students interviewed had ideas on ways to intervene with adolescent alcohol use. Several students felt that addressing the issue through working with parents was the best approach. Jennifer (AB) believed that it was important to give parents more information about ways to deal with adolescent alcohol use. Olivia (AB) was of the opinion that parents needed to first change their naïve attitudes that their adolescent children did not use alcohol. Rena (AB) said that, in general, parents need to pay more attention to what their adolescent children are doing and be more willing to restrict their activities which could lead to alcohol use or other risky behaviors. Vickie (AB) said that it was important for parents to talk to their children about alcohol use before the children entered the teenage years while Beth (OU) believed that parents who fostered a more open relationship with their teenage children could potentially alter their child's decision to use alcohol because these children were more likely to care what their parents thought. Jennifer (AB), Olivia (AB), and Penny (OU) commented that parents should be more involved in helping their children find acceptable activities to participate in when they entering the adolescent years as they felt that, if adolescents could hold off from using alcohol when they were young, then they might be more likely to make wise decisions about its use as they matured. Jennifer (AB) also felt that parents in the community should join forces together to collaborate on ways to reduce adolescent alcohol use, while Kayla (OU) believed that the community should address this use with organized, long-term efforts.

Alcohol education was also discussed by several students as a way to curtail adolescent use of alcohol. Most students believed that the most effective alcohol education was having an outside speaker, whom adolescents could relate to, come into the school to talk about his or her own personal experiences with alcohol use and the consequences he or she experienced as a result of that use. Messages that focused only on the message not to use alcohol or on alcohol statistics

were viewed as not effective. Developing good decision making skills was seen an important part of alcohol education, while only Jennifer (AB) discussed how important it was to teach the skill of resisting peer pressure. She also felt that assisting young people to find supportive, non-drinking friends during the years when they were most influenced by peer pressure would be a way to potentially decrease adolescent alcohol use.

Addressing alcohol use as a privilege, not a right was a part of the alcohol education in schools, as well as the importance of not consuming alcohol while driving a vehicle. Isabelle (AB) believed that alcohol education would have the most effect after a recent incident where the use of alcohol had impacted the lives of someone they knew.

Olivia (AB) believed that alcohol education should be concentrated into the years when students were in junior high because she felt younger children would be more open to internalizing the message before they had received peer pressure to use alcohol. Vickie's (AB) opinion of the timing of alcohol education was,

I don't remember a lot (about alcohol education) from elementary. I know they (school personnel) would have cops come in, and they would discuss the hazards of drunk driving, but, when you are in fourth grade, you know, you are not out on the roads driving, so it's just kind of like, 'O.k., don't drink when you are in a car...It's really hard to pinpoint the perfect time to tell them (students about alcohol use) because when you are in high school, it's like, 'Oh, I've already tried this; it's too late.' And when you are in elementary it's 'Oh, I am too young, I can't do any of that, yet.' And so it's just kind of hard (to know when the best time to present alcohol information is).

A number of students believed that stronger consequences for adolescent alcohol use would likely impact its use. The consequences that were mentioned were larger fines, removal from school activities, especially sports, and ineligibility for scholarships. Jennifer (AB) believed that establishing fines for parents who allowed adolescent alcohol use in their home might be an effective way to stem alcohol use, at least to some degree. In addition, several students felt that

more consistent law enforcement efforts and encouraging the public to report adolescent use of alcohol might be ways to control it.

Reasons That Rural Adolescents Choose To Use Alcohol: Personal (Internal) Reasons

It is important to note that the students who had never used alcohol at the time of their interviews would sometimes speculate as to why their peers would use alcohol rather than speaking about their own past experience. Others who had used alcohol in the past but were not using it at the time of their interview would often talk about their past use, as well as that of their peers. Seven students who indicated that they used alcohol infrequently (one time a month or less) at the time of their interviews participated in the study, while only two students who used alcohol on a regular basis (more than once a month) participated. The reasons for using are listed according to the number of students who contributed to the theme, in order from more to less.

Figure 1 highlights both the reasons that rural adolescents choose to use alcohol as well as the reasons they choose not to use alcohol. The themes are listed in order from those that were given by the most students to those that were given by the fewest students.

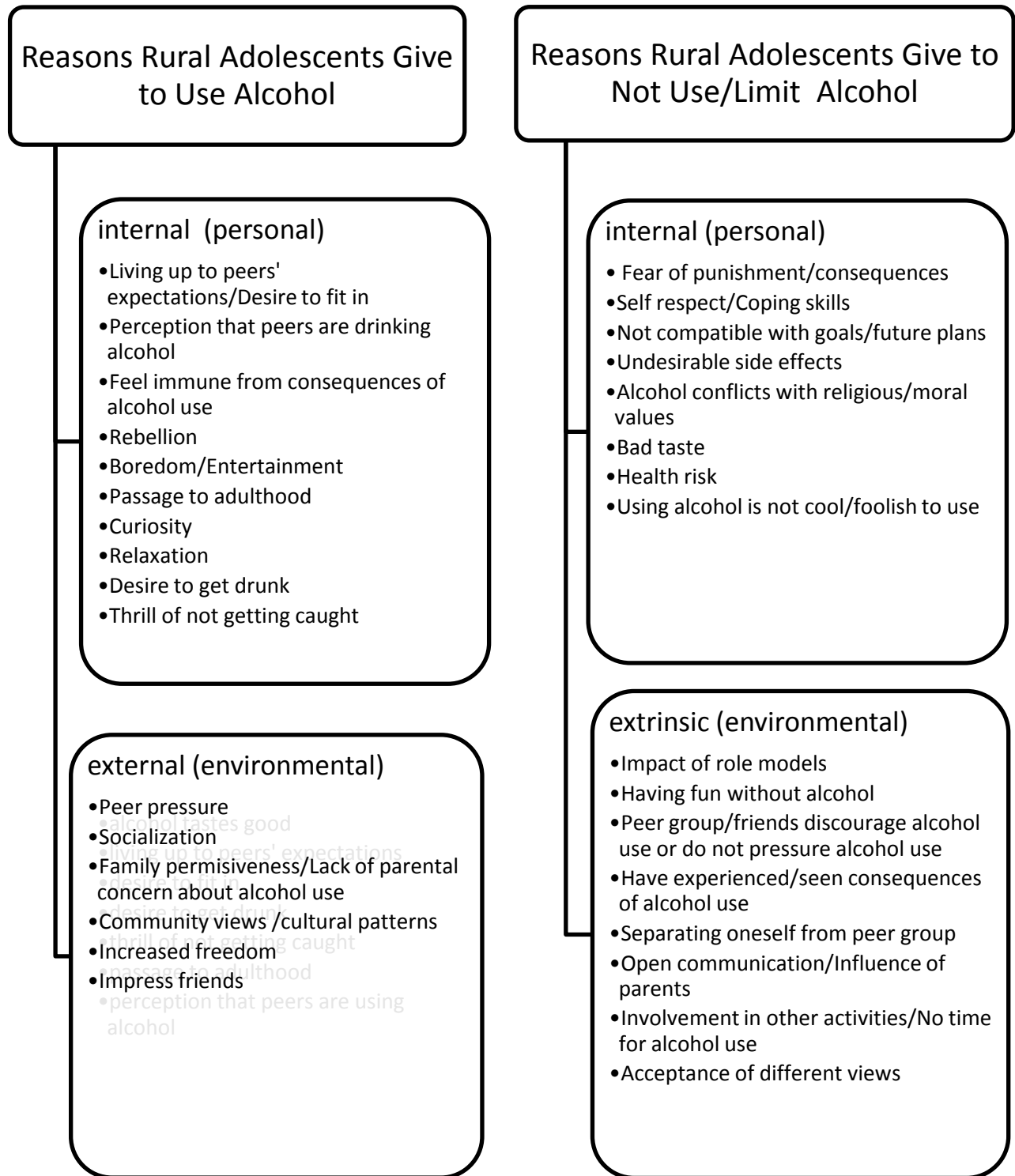


Figure 1. Reasons that rural adolescents give for using or not using alcohol.

Living up to peers' expectations/Desire to fit in. The researcher found that, for some adolescents, there is an internally motivated reason to use alcohol which is based more on their own beliefs that their peers would not like them or include them in activities unless they used alcohol, rather than the actual peer pressure they experienced. Thirteen students addressed the issue of desiring to fit in with their peers. Mindy (OU) vocalized this desire more than the other interviewees. She indicated that her friends' perceptions of her were the only thing that contributed to her decision to use alcohol. Nora (OU) further elaborated on this subject, saying, "I think that it's just friends (that influence adolescents to use alcohol) because, if you want to show off to your friends, then you are going to do it, too".

Perception that peers are drinking alcohol. As a general rule, students from three of the four schools where interviews took place believed that most of their classmates used alcohol. The differences that make students from the fourth school unique will be addressed later in the report. Kayla (OU) said, "It's pretty much everybody in high school, um, all the seniors...all the seniors, but maybe one person, a girl, drinks." Penny (OU) also had this opinion. She said,

It's not just me and my clique of friends (that drink alcohol). It's me and everybody, like, I have friends from that school, that school, that school, and we hang out every weekend. It's more than one school, and everybody is accepting of alcohol. I mean, I don't really know anybody who opposes it.

Jennifer (AB) and Vickie (AB) believed that alcohol use by adolescents in their communities was increasing, while Kayla (OU) was also of the opinion that younger adolescents in junior high were using alcohol more than adolescents in the same age group had used it in the past. Sometimes there were conflicting views of adolescent alcohol use patterns by students in the same school. For example, Adam (FU), a senior, stated, "My class, in particular is based around

the drinking. They'll talk about partying and going out." Christa (AB), who from the same school but in the junior class, said, "Our school isn't based on parties or going out to drink."

Feel immune from consequences of alcohol use. Eight of the students interviewed felt that many adolescents have an attitude that consuming alcohol would have no consequences for them, even if they had heard or seen other young people experience consequences. They believed that many of the adolescents they knew who used alcohol would not significantly change their alcohol consumption habits if one of their peers received legal consequences for using it, other than being more secretive about their alcohol use.

Frank (OU) believed that some adolescents might temporarily limit their alcohol use if they saw others experience consequences, but not permanently alter their behavior. Penny (OU) said that she and her friends did not think about the consequences, because they rarely got caught using alcohol. In addition, Vickie (AB) felt that most consequences that were in place for under-age alcohol use were not all that effective because they were not strong enough to alter an adolescent's behavior. She stated, "We don't really know what it's like to lose our jobs over it or get our licenses permanently taken away or (what it's like to have someone) killed. We don't have that experience behind us."

Tessa (OU) felt that an individual's personality contributed to the ability to consider the consequences of his or her actions. She compared her personality to her brother's personality (he regularly used alcohol) when she said,

He just thinks, 'Oh, I can't get in trouble for that.' or 'I won't get hurt doing that.' That's just the way he is, but me, I think about everything...He is like my dad, and my dad doesn't care that much, and I'm more like my mom. She thinks about stuff before she does it.

Adam (FU) believed that the alcohol messages in school that focused on the potential consequences of alcohol use were not effective or only selectively effective with certain students in preventing or limiting their alcohol use. He said,

They just kind of blow it off, and they kind of look at it as ...yeah...they tell you the effects of it and what can happen, but not too many people care. They (adolescents) do it (use alcohol) until it (consequences) actually happens to them, and, for the most part, it usually turns out o.k.

Devon (AB) was in agreement that the alcohol messages that focused on the consequences of alcohol consumption did not work. His opinion was,

Honestly, for the people that I know who drink, I really don't think it (the anti-drinking message) changed their decisions at all. I'm pretty sure that they could probably go home and drink right after that, after hearing that message.

A final thought on the effectiveness of education that was provided to adolescents which was focused the consequences of alcohol consumption came from Jennifer (AB), who said,

For most people, I don't really think that it occurs to them; it (the message) doesn't matter for them because they are still going to do it (drink alcohol), but, for me, I take things more into consideration...but, to other people, I'm sure when they are watching those videos, they are, like, 'Oh, that can't happen to me.' They are like nothing can happen to them.

Rebellion. Eight students interviewed felt that younger adolescents, in particular, chose to use alcohol because of a desire to separate themselves from their parents' values. Penny (OU) confided that, when she was in eighth or ninth grade, she remembered thinking, "This (using alcohol) is what I want to do. This is where I want to go. I want to be at this party...I kind of had my rebellious stage, whereas (in the last couple of years)...I have settled down."

Beth (OU) contributed to this theme by stating that she believed that many adolescents' attitudes towards their parents' attempts to stop them from using alcohol was, "What are you

going to do about it?” Nora (AB) speculated, “The stricter the parent, I believe, that the more rebellious the kid’s going to be.” She also said, “Strict rules don’t work because all it does is make me angry, and I’m, like, ‘Why? I do this, yeah, I know it’s wrong, but what are you going to do about it?’” Kayla (OU) added her opinion about the influence of adults on her alcohol habits, saying, “Adults were telling me what to do...I wasn’t trying to be mean, but, sometimes it doesn’t affect me much.

Adam (FU) did not believe that his parents had a say over his use of alcohol. He said,

I feel that my decisions (while using alcohol) were o.k. I mean, I know what is right and wrong and what I shouldn’t do, but, if I feel that I want to do something, then I can do it, but I know my limits on what I should do. I kind of feel that it’s my decision (rather) than what other people tell me (I can do).

Boredom/Entertainment. Seven students contributed to this theme. Isabelle (AB) commented that she thought adolescents from small, rural communities drink alcohol because of limited activity options, and that parties in these small communities are the main weekend event for young people. Kayla (OU) also stated that there are few things for young people to do in the area where she lived and that this contributed to their decision to use alcohol. Using alcohol was “a reason to call up friends and go out and do something”. Adam (FU) stated that “drinking” games, such as Beer Pong, were seen as an important part of parties and were played by many adolescents.

Penny (OU) believed that many young people used boredom as an excuse to use alcohol, stating, “There really is not a whole lot to do, I mean, you can be creative, but a lot of kids aren’t going to sway that way...(but) there are other alternatives.” This idea that boredom contributed to alcohol use patterns did not appear to be related to the number of activities that these students participated in, as the average number of activities they indicated they participated in was five, with a range from zero to twelve, from information taken from the student demographic form.

Passage to adulthood. Three students believed that they might try alcohol as they got older and left their home environment, even though they did not use it at the time of their interview. However, they seemed confident that they would be able to make wise decisions regarding its use if they did start using alcohol. Olivia (AB) said,

I don't know if I ever will drink at all, because, if you go so long without it, it's like you don't need it...maybe when I'm twenty-one I might have a drink here or there, but I don't think that it (my attitude about drinking alcohol) will change drastically.

Isabelle (AB) said that, although she does not use alcohol now, she was open to using it in the future, saying,

I think I might try it more when I'm in college, but I think my thoughts about alcohol will be the same (as I have now). I mean, I know that it's bad. It's not good for your body, so that (belief) won't change, but it might change whether I do it or don't...I'll be smart about it, you know, be with your friends, be with other people that you could trust.

Curiosity. Three students discussed how being in an environment where their peers were using alcohol enticed their curiosity to try it. Garrett (OU) felt that, as long as a young person understands the risks involved with alcohol consumption, that experimenting with it was an opportunity to learn about one's limits and decide about how one wanted to view alcohol use for him or herself. He also stated his belief that some anti-alcohol consumption messages presented in the home and school environments might cause an adolescent to give alcohol a try.

Relaxation. The need to relax seemed to be related with the desire to use alcohol for two students who were interviewed. Garrett (OU) stated that, on occasion, he and his friends used alcohol because they had an attitude of "Let's celebrate, let's have a good time, and let's let go of some of our inhibitions and unwind." Adam (FU) also used alcohol in this manner, saying, "A lot

of the time now, it's not necessary to get drunk. I do it (use alcohol) to sit back and relax and have one...just kind of a sit-down thing with a friend.”

Desire to get drunk. None of the students interviewed directly indicated that getting drunk was a reason that they used alcohol. However, two of the students gave information that fell into this theme. Adam (FU) believed that he thought younger adolescents were more likely to drink alcohol to get drunk when he said,

Younger kids don't know how to control themselves...they don't understand that they are goofing off and need to stop (drinking alcohol). With older people, you can actually talk to them and it's (their drinking patterns) are not so reckless.

He also stated his belief that younger adolescents were less emotionally stable and would need to learn to control their alcohol use over time. Once they adjusted to the “drinking atmosphere”, he believed that they would find getting drunk not as exciting as they once did.

Thrill of not getting caught. Vickie (AB) speculated that some adolescents used it for the thrill of not getting caught by authority figures and was the only student to address this theme. She said, “There's cops around, but we get away with this (consuming alcohol). It's just kind of like, ‘Oh, we might get caught, but probably not.’ It's just kind of an adrenalin thing.”

Reasons that Rural Adolescents Give for Using Alcohol: External (Environmental) Reasons

Peer pressure. Peer pressure was seen as a powerful reason that many adolescents used alcohol, although the students interviewed varied in their ability to withstand this pressure. Frank (OU) said “The people I was doing it (using alcohol) with before...I feel that I could have resisted the pressure, avoided it, or done something about it instead of giving in to it.” Kayla (OU) said, “I felt that I had to drink all the time...if you didn't drink...people wouldn't have invited you anymore (to parties). People would be, like, ‘Oh, yeah, she isn't coming to drink anymore’.” Later

on she says, “People think peer pressure is probably just a joke, but it’s actually not. It does affect that you do. It makes you decide what your decisions are.”

Beth (OU) also expressed concerns about being left out of her group of friends if she did not drink alcohol. She said, “I don’t really judge them (peers who used alcohol), but I think most people judge me because I choose not to drink.” Isabelle (AB) expressed this same concern about her friends. She said, “Most of my friends use (alcohol). So it makes it hard sometimes. It really hard not to decide to do something, but I just decided not to (use alcohol).” She goes on to say about her friends,

They always talk about there’s nothing bad (about consuming alcohol); it’s always fun (for them)...so I am thinking ‘Is it so much more fun?’ and it makes me think that it might be fun to go and try and do it.”

This indirect pressure from her friends is voiced once again in statement, “If I have my other friends around (who do not consume alcohol), it’s not so bad. If I am by myself, it’s just that I kind of feel left out.”

An alternate view on peer pressure is voiced by Beth (OU), who felt that if an adolescent was able to withstand peer pressure, it would eventually subside. She said, “Peer pressure is always peer pressure. Most of my friends, like, say ‘Hey, do you want to have a drink?’ and, once you say no once or twice, they don’t really say any more.”

Socialization. Ten of the students interviewed indicated that drinking parties are a good way to meet people and to visit with friends. While some students indicated that consuming alcohol at these parties was not absolutely required, most felt that it was expected. Penny (OU) gave the following statement about the reason she liked to go to these parties,

Why I go to parties is that I love the atmosphere, and there are other people who hate the atmosphere around drunk people, but me and my friends, we love it. I think that it is fun because it’s more of a social event for me...if you are in that atmosphere; it’s the time when you are with

your friends. It's a good time, so, I guess, maybe in a subconscious kind of way, alcohol represents a good time.

Family permissiveness/Lack of parental concern about adolescent alcohol use. This theme is separated from the theme of increased freedom, as the nine students who spoke on this topic indicated that their parents or parents of their friends who used alcohol allowed them to consume it throughout the years that the children grew up, rather than gradually allowing their child to make his or own decisions about the use of alcohol. Most of the students interviewed believed that family attitudes towards alcohol significantly influence adolescent alcohol use patterns. They did have different views as to why parents were permissive toward their child's use of alcohol. Devon (AB) said,

I think it has to do with how your parent grew up and what that was like. You know, I'm sure that will reflect on the next generation, too, what they are going to be like...I'm speculating again here, but I can see a lot of my friends who (when they become parents), actually, proactively drink with their kids.

Adam, who lived with his friend's mother, talked about her permissive attitude toward adolescent alcohol use. He said,

I think it's cool that parents are like that, that they let their kids out and (they realize that) sooner or later when they're exposed to people, that they are going to attempt to try it (alcohol), and it's pointless to keep them at home so they can't hang out with their friends. I think that would probably be worse.

However, he also realized that his friend's mother had tried to control her children's drinking in the past. He said,

She's come to a conclusion. She doesn't like to know about this stuff. She's against it (underage drinking), but she understands that, if a kid wants to do something, you really can't stop them unless you totally shelter their life.

Isabelle (AB) said that she had parents who were open to allowing her to make her own decisions, including about alcohol use, even though they preferred that she did not use it. She said, “Well, my parents, you know, have always told me ‘It’s your decision, but it’s not good (to use alcohol). It’s probably not something that you’re going to do when you are young, and you should wait until you are twenty-one’.”

Some parents offered their children a chance to try alcohol. Adam (FU) related an incident where his father offered him a drink of alcohol when he was a grade school student. He said,

I was, like, ‘What does this taste like? And I didn’t really like it and he (dad) was, like, ‘If you don’t really like it, you don’t have to try it.’ Ah, he never really steered me toward it or away from it, like, (he) put it out there as something people do, and, ah, it’s kind of a choice for you to make, you know.

Adam believed that his father’s lenient view on Adam’s alcohol use was due the fact that his father had used alcohol when he was young. Adam said about his father,

With my actual dad, when I’m around him, he kind of grew up in a more relaxed time when he did the partying and drinking when he was younger, and he doesn’t make a big deal if I do it. He knows he did it, and he doesn’t want me, if I’m doing any kind of drinking, to do it out of control, do any kind of driving, stay where I’m at. So he’s never against it, he doesn’t make a big deal if, you know, like, if I would drink with him or have a couple of beers.

Hunter (FU) offered a view of drinking alcohol that could be seen as a bonding experience between father and son. He commented that he wanted to emulate his dad when he said,

He drinks a lot, and I’m around him a lot. So, I don’t know, he’s doing it, so I’m doing it. He’s doing it, so I pretty much want to do it. That’s what I’m saying; I like to be like my dad, so what he does, I like to do.

Beth (OU) had a step-father who also had a view that adolescent alcohol use should be monitored at home by adults. She said,

When I first met him, well, the second summer, like, he did come home drunk once, and I was, like, ‘That’s a little scary.’, but he apologized, you know, he said, ‘You shouldn’t have to deal with people who are drunk like that.’, but he (also)

said, 'Hey, if you want to have a beer, you can sit home and have a beer with me. I'd rather that you would not go out and drink with your friends, you know'. He'd really rather I would stay home (to drink alcohol) than go out and drink.

Nora (AB) said that she had friends whose parents had a more relaxed attitude about adolescent alcohol use and were not so concerned enough about it to monitor their children's use of alcohol. She said,

There are those (parents) who don't care. Some of my friend's parent are like, 'O.k., you get to try and see what happens, and then you get to choose what you want to do from there'. Like, they let them have that experience.

On a slightly different vein, Vickie (AB) thought that some parents were hypocrites when it came to their adolescent child's use of alcohol, telling their children not to drink when they modeled drinking behavior for them and acted unconcerned about their adolescent children's whereabouts. She said,

A lot of people claim it's bad, but you can claim to say anything. One thing that bugs me is when parents say 'Don't drink', and they have their kids at home and drink (themselves). I know a lot of parents who don't care where their kids are on Friday or Saturday nights. Well, chances are the parents are up at the bar, so the kids just do whatever they want and go out with their friends. So I think parents need to pay closer attention to their children, especially our age, because once they are eighteen or nineteen, you don't have them anymore...you only have them until they are out of high school, then they make their own decisions when they are in college, so, I think, if parents started (discussing alcohol use) when they are young, then they might have a greater chance of influencing them in a positive way.

Kayla (OU) provided an interesting example of how she perceived her immediate family, as well as her extended family's, permissiveness toward adolescent alcohol use. She also described some of the limitations on alcohol consumption that they had set for their children, which centered on the avoidance of consequences. She said,

My family, ah, we're kind of a big drinking family. We, ah, their drinking age is around eighteen where we can actually drink as a family. It's also, like, eighteen,

but (also) out of high school, too, so then it doesn't affect you if you get a minor or something like that. It doesn't affect you not playing sports and stuff like that...but, yeah, it has influenced us. Whenever our big family is together...there's always alcohol.

She also indicated that her divorced parents presented conflicting attitudes toward adolescent alcohol use to their children. Her comments on this issue were,

My dad, he's completely against everything like that. He's completely against drinking... although he drinks...and my mom kind of believes differently...she knows more how high school life is. She knows that, you know, she knows that teenagers are drinking. She's not going to pretend that they are not. You know, she knows what goes on in high school. She knows the things, the choices teenagers make. She believes in, um, you learn from your own mistakes.

Garrett (OU) felt that his parents had a relaxed attitude about adolescent alcohol use in order to use it as a learning experience for their children so that they would use it in a responsible way. He said,

I have consumed alcohol previously, and I can't say that I have had a totally bad experience from it, but I understand the risks and dangers of it. Probably because the way it was introduced to me was not in a hostile environment, so I was given the opportunity to, not to say experiment, but to understand and learn (about alcohol) on my own.

Community views/Cultural patterns. For some of the students, alcohol consumption was seen as part of their community lifestyle. Penny (OU) spoke about the lifestyle that she grew up with as a 'rodeo' family, saying, "Everybody always drinks during the rodeo; after the rodeo...we even go riding horse all the time and people were always drinking. It wasn't a big deal to me.

Adam (FU) spoke about his local community on a more general level when he discussed this topic. He said,

I guess it's just part of the lifestyle around here, you know, you've got a lot of hicks and stuff, you know. They like to go drink and drive, and it meshes with the whole...there's, like, hunting, and after hunting, there's, think, um it's like part of

the lifestyle people grow up around and that's kind of the lifestyle here. A lot of people, parents and stuff, drink at social gatherings. You go out hunting and stuff, and you probably see your uncle out drinking and stuff, you know, and the day's ending. It's kind of something you grow up around, and it's something you get into.

Another attitude presented by students about community views on adolescent alcohol use is that it is acceptable if used 'right' and if the adolescents are careful who they consume it with. Devon (AB) believed that early use of alcohol was not advocated by people in his community but that it became more acceptable as adolescents matured. Some students believed that adults in their community would ignore adolescent alcohol use as long as no one was seriously hurt or killed due to its use. Overall, students believed that there was a community mentality of 'we used alcohol when we were younger, therefore it's o.k. if they (adolescents) use it now'.

Vickie (AB) said that influential community members might not approve of adolescent alcohol use, but would not do anything about it. She said, "Everyone in our community knows each other so well that it's just kind of like, 'Oh, I know them (certain adolescents who are using alcohol). I don't want to get them into trouble.', so they let it go."

Edward (AB) and Rena (AB) expressed their opinion that people in their community believed that adolescent alcohol use was a 'parental issue' that should be dealt with in the home environment by the parents. Kayla (OU) believed that her community focused more on delivering consequences to adolescents than teaching them responsible alcohol use. She said,

They don't really care. They don't really care at all. They know it's happening. Everybody knows it's happening. No one really cares except teachers and stuff like that, but, I mean, it's not really that big of a deal (to them). They go 'Every high school student drinks; it doesn't really matter'. You know, it just depends on if you get caught or not.

Olivia (AB) felt that both school personnel and other adults in the community felt helpless to deal with adolescent alcohol use when she said,

They kind of have a blind eye (about adolescent alcohol use), the same with the community. I mean, they are aware of it, but either they don't care or they don't try to stop it because they don't think that they can.

Increased freedom. Four of the students felt that they would start using alcohol or their alcohol use would increase once they were no longer living in their parents' home. Edward (AB) said,

You are not grounded as much. You are not at home where the parents are. You are in a world by yourself, and you kind of tend to do what your friends are doing. So it just kind of depends on the environment...on what your friends are doing.

The physical environment was not the only aspect that changed when an adolescent moved out of his or her parent's home, as there was also a desire to separate from parents emotionally. Beth (OU) said,

To a certain point I care about what she (my mom) thinks, but in the long run, it's my life, you know what I mean? It's not her that's going to have the consequences for what I do. It may hurt her, and she may be disappointed, but she's not going to have to live through it. It's going to be my life. I've told her before, it's mine.

She felt that most parents would ease up on their rules about drinking alcohol as their child got older. Her comments about this issue was,

I think my mom thinks that you can't really stop a person from drinking, but, if you let them, some people can realize on their own that it's bad and otherwise, but, in the long run, my mom's always said that it's (drinking alcohol) bad, but it's not her responsibility to turn the person around.

Other students identified this same increasingly relaxed attitude that their parents had toward their children's use of alcohol. Penny (OU) made the following statement about her mother's view of her daughter's use of alcohol,

My mom, she knows that I go to parties. I tell her where I'm going...she'll be, like, 'Well, you know, call me later and tell me for sure what you are doing'...so it's like she understands, um, but she

would never, she would probably, like, never approve (of my use of alcohol).

Rena (AB) also discussed the more lax attitude that some parents develop about adolescent alcohol use over time. She said,

I think that they (parents) discourage it (adolescent alcohol use) at first, like a lot more, but after they realize that it's not doing a whole lot, then they (the adolescent children) are still going to do it, they (the parents) just go along with it for the most part, but, if they, like, violate it too much and stuff, they (the parents) will step in and stop it.

Impress friends. Three students discussed their opinion that younger students in seventh, eighth, and ninth grades were more likely to consume alcohol in order to gain acceptance from their older peers. Adam (FU) said that impressionable younger students were likely to be encouraged by older adolescents to use alcohol. Jennifer (AB) felt that younger adolescents would be more likely to believe that alcohol use would be a way that they could hang out with older peers that they looked up to. Interestingly, Adam (FU) felt that, for him, he would try to avoid consuming it with younger adolescents because he had a concern that they would be more likely to report adolescent alcohol use to adults.

Reasons that Rural Adolescents Give to Not Use Alcohol/Limit Alcohol Use: Internal (Personal) Reasons

Students who did not use alcohol and those who used it infrequently, which is identified or one time or less in a month, made statements during the interviews that indicated that their views and beliefs about adolescent alcohol use were similar in some ways. Most of the students interviewed did not believe that abstaining from alcohol use was necessary for adolescents, but that it was more important to be able to make smart decisions about its use. In addition, awareness of the consequences of alcohol use seemed to be a factor in the decision to abstain from alcohol or

to limit its use. However, the adolescents who were adamant about their belief that adolescent alcohol use was wrong in all situations were more likely to be ostracized by their peers.

Fear of punishment/consequences. This theme is included in the category of internal reasons for rural adolescents not to consume alcohol because the focus is on the adolescent's perception of the possibility of punishment or consequences, not consequences actually received in the past as a result of alcohol use. The potential for consequences as a result of alcohol consumption was a significant factor for seven of the students interviewed who did not use alcohol or who limited their alcohol use. For example, Devon (AB) rationalized his decision to not use alcohol by saying to himself,

I really don't need something like this (a legal fine) to happen to me right now, so I really just didn't take the risk in the first place, because I can see what happens. They'll (my peers) sometimes talk about 'there's this party going on and there's going to be alcohol there. Are you going to come?', and I've gone to a couple of them, but, for a lot of them, I've had better things to do...I've seen, even before they've got caught, that that was a risk you took when you are drinking.

Some interviewees believed that adolescents who did not limit their alcohol use did not seem concerned about potential consequences of this use. Jennifer (AB) made a comparison of how students who did not use alcohol or limited their alcohol use viewed consequences compared to those who did use alcohol, saying, "For other people, I don't really think that it occurs to them (the consequences of alcohol use). It doesn't matter for them because they are still going to do it, but for me, I take things more into consideration."

Even for the students that used alcohol to some degree, the fear of consequences had only limited effect, as most of them indicated that their use of alcohol would likely return to normal patterns a short period of time after receiving a punishment or consequence, although they might be more careful about not getting caught. Some admitted that, if the consequences of their alcohol

use were more severe, they would be more likely to stop using it as a result. One such consequence that might make them discontinue alcohol use that was discussed by the interviewees was being removed from a school extra-curricular activity for a year, rather than several weeks.

Self Respect/Coping skills. Self-respect and the ability to cope with problems were factors in preventing or limiting alcohol consumption for six students. Nora (AB) felt that she would never want to humiliate herself by getting drunk while Olivia (AB) believed that using alcohol and getting drunk would not allow a person to “stay true to yourself”.

Students who indicated that they believed that they could abstain from alcohol use reported a sense of self-assurance, maturity, and self-respect. For example, Vickie (AB) compared herself to her peers who did use alcohol when she said, “A lot of kids in my class...aren’t very confident in themselves and that seems to be a thing about drinking: if you are not a self-confident (person) and you drink it (your life) away, and that’s another reason that I don’t drink is that I’ve been confident all my life.”

Vickie (AB) was also eloquent about her belief in herself and her ability to stay on task to reach her goals. She also hoped that she could be an inspiration to others to stay committed their own beliefs and goals. Her opinion was that her confidence in herself had been passed along through family members and was strong enough not to be altered by other influences. She said,

I want to have the best life that I can possibly have, and, if it means having strong opinions on things, then I will do that, and if people notice that along the way, that’s great because then it shows that I’ve been an influence over the years, but I’m only one of a very few who have very strong opinions. A lot of kids in my class, in the senior class, aren’t very confident in themselves and that seems to be a thing about drinking (alcohol), too, if you’re not self-confident, you will drink.

Kayla (OU) admired the only student in her class that she believed did not use alcohol and who, she felt, was very confident in her beliefs. She said about this student,

All the seniors (use alcohol), but maybe one person, a girl, doesn't drink...she is actually really nice, and I wish I was a lot more like her...I would rather be like her in the fact that she sticks up for her own opinions and she doesn't let anybody intrude on her.

The students who did not use alcohol or who used it infrequently also felt that they were less influenced by peer pressure and had more confidence in their ability to handle different situations. These students believed that their decision to not use alcohol or to consciously limit their alcohol use was made on their own volition. Garrett (OU) stated, "I am very independent from other people's opinions." It might not be so much that these students did not receive peer pressure to use alcohol, but that they had the coping skills to rationalize and interpreted it differently. For example, Penny (OU) made the following statement about the encouragement she had received from her friends to use alcohol, "It's more like an option. It's not really like (my friends say) 'You have to' or 'I want you to'. Students who felt more pressure to consume alcohol from their peers seemed to believe that they would be left out of the activities that their peers engaged in if they did not use it.

Not compatible with goal/future plans. Six of the students interviewed indicated that they chose not to consume alcohol or limited their alcohol consumption because they had goals and plans not compatible with alcohol use. Beth (OU) believed that having a passion for something in life was important for adolescents to focus on and was linked to less alcohol use. Frank (OU) stated his opinion about how alcohol would interfere with his future plans when he said, "I really made it pretty clear to myself that I don't want to do that (use alcohol). I want to focus on my career." Garrett (OU) had similar views and stated, "I have made a decision already (to limit my alcohol use)...and that is only because I have made the decision that alcohol is only

going to keep me from college.” Vickie (AB) felt that using alcohol would limit her ability to “have the best life that I can possible have.” Tessa (OU) was thinking about how alcohol use could alter her future plans when she said, “It made me not drink because my dad (who used alcohol when he was younger) didn’t go to college, really, and so it’s made me want to go to.”

Undesirable effects on body. While some students felt that hangovers due to alcohol consumption would not alter their decision to consume it, Adam (FU) indicated that he moderated his alcohol consumption when he noticed certain physical symptoms. He said,

A lot of people don’t seem like their bodies tell them when (to stop); they just keep drinking. I, for some reason, my stomach just kind of gets, like, upset when I’d keep drinking, so I usually stop, and I usually end up o.k. in the morning.

Others were concerned with blacking out due to alcohol use. Mindy (OU) said that she would stop consuming alcohol in order to recall what took place during the drinking episode, and Olivia (AB) stated that she did not use alcohol at all because “I don’t really call it fun when you don’t remember the next day... and you do stuff that you wouldn’t normally do, so it’s not really you.” She also said that when she was asked to consume alcohol with her friends that she considered the potential side effects of alcohol. She commented,

They say (to me) ‘Well, like, come on, just do it.’ and I was, like, ‘Why... what do you get out of it? What are you getting out of this except a fun night for a few hours and then you don’t remember the next morning. You have a headache, and you are throwing up.

Alcohol conflicts with religious/moral values. Five of the students interviewed discussed how their religious views and moral values prevented them from using alcohol, or at least encouraged them to limit their alcohol use. Garrett (OU) stated that the rural community where he lived was a “very Christian environment” which, he felt, contributed to his family’s, as well as other family’s, attitudes about abstaining or limiting alcohol use. He said, “A lot of the parents (in

this community) say the Bible, the law and all, influences their decisions greatly, lots of the parents think that if it's (an) illegal (activity), then 'I don't want it happening with my kids'.

Nora (AB) also believed that she, as well as a number of peers in her school, had religious attitudes that related to their decision to not use alcohol because of how it might impact their judgment.

Bible camp really hit me, too, because they (the camp counselors) would talk about things that could be qualified as sins and, like, they didn't say drinking was a sin, but you could do stupid things (when you drink alcohol).

Beth (OU) also spoke about how her religious views affected her decision about using alcohol. She stated, "I was raised in a very religious setting, and I've always been taught, basically, to not do it (consume alcohol)." Vickie (AB) said that she and her friends with similar views had shared their conservative beliefs with other students, saying,

They know our conservative beliefs and everything, and they notice that we're more conservative...and they just kind of wonder. They would ask, like, 'Why do you do this?' (or) 'Why do you believe in this?', and we have to give reasons for it, but we just give the honest truth and just say what we think, and if they don't like it, they don't have to listen.

Edward (AB) expressed his view about why he chose not to consume alcohol, believing that his values came from his family members. He said, "I feel that it's (using alcohol) not part of life. It's just kind of something you choose to do. For me, I say it's a waste of money, and, for me, I think it's just something I don't want to get into."

Bad taste. Those students who had tried alcohol generally found the taste unpleasant, at least, initially. Beth (OU) stated, "It's kind of gross." but, that when she got past the first sip, "It's not that bad at all." Usually, this was not enough to discourage them from trying alcohol in the future, but it did contribute, for a few, a reason to not use alcohol at the time of the interview.

Frank (OU) said, “I don’t really like the taste (of alcohol). I don’t really like anything about it, so I’d really just rather not (use alcohol).”

Health risk. Three students reported that much of the information that they had received about the health risks of alcohol consumption was passed along in the school setting. The main concern addressed by students during the interviews was that alcohol could be addicting. Edward (AB) commented that he had learned that alcohol is a ‘gateway’ drug that will lead to “other things down the road”. Olivia (AB) rationalized that, while some of her classmates used alcohol every weekend, she felt that most of these people believed that they would not become addicted to alcohol even though, for herself, she said, “Once you have tried it; it’s kind of addicting.”

Using alcohol is not cool/Foolish to use. Olivia (AB) felt that hearing about what her classmates had done while they were under the influence of alcohol contributed to her decision to not use it. Vickie (AB) had similar feelings about her peers who consumed alcohol. She said, “They just act so foolishly, and it’s completely asinine as to why they do that, and it kind of confuses me, and it actually makes me more sad than it does angry because I don’t like seeing people get hurt like that.”

Reasons that Rural Adolescents Give to Not Use Alcohol/Limit Use: External (Environmental) Reasons

Impact of role models. Fourteen students mentioned a number of different individuals who they described as role models who had helped them make a decision to abstain or limit their alcohol use. Devon (AB) referred to law enforcement officers and their role in helping adolescents abstain or limit their alcohol use. He believed that younger students would be influenced more, as they would view the officers more seriously than older students. He said,

You know, law enforcement, in general, can be used two different ways, I think. One is in their preventative measures, like a scare tactic, and the other, as a friendly awareness, I guess you could say, because we have had

police officers when I was younger (who) would come and talk to the class...about alcohol use...they always try to be friendly, but, you know, they also touched on the consequences of alcohol, you know, and, when you are in sixth grade, people like that scare you.

Four students discussed how well-liked, respected teachers could act as mentors for students, exerting a positive influence on them not to use alcohol. However, several of these students believed that teachers and other school personnel did not try to find out about the alcohol use or avoided the topic of adolescent alcohol use, even though the students thought these adults were well aware of this use. Beth (OU) said,

The teachers are, like, 'It's unfortunate, (but) it's their choice.' You know, they can't really say anything because, it's, you know, it's school...I honestly think half the school stuff is crap because, I mean, you know teachers should be able to talk to their students about their beliefs, too...they shouldn't be able to push a certain issue on them, but talking to the is different than pushing the issue...most of the teachers are, like, concerned about their jobs and stuff. They don't want to (talk to students about alcohol) because they don't want to speak openly because they can get into trouble.

Sometimes, students were encouraged by people in authority to not use alcohol because of the potential consequences. Adam (FU) said,

It's my coaches, that's about it, that has kept me out of drinking. I usually never drink during a sport...the football coach is really a big influence not to (drink alcohol), you know, (he says) 'You shouldn't get in trouble; you've got something you're working on.' Like, if I ever got a minor, I would be ruined on that (playing sports), and, um, looking to college scholarships, that kind of made my decision not to drink sometimes.

He said that other messages that coaches gave student athletes about the consequences of using alcohol included, "You guys can actually throw your record away; you're doing good this year (but) you can waste it tonight (if you go out and drink).", "Don't do anything stupid. Stay at home." and "Don't go to any places where you can get into trouble."

Older siblings also act as role models to discourage adolescent alcohol use. Edward (AB) talked about his discussions about adolescent alcohol use with his older siblings. He said,

You just kind of ask them about it (alcohol), and you kind of hear about the experiences (that they had while using alcohol). They might have stories, and they kind of warn you. Because I'm a senior, they kind of warned me about it. I think we just watch out for each other.

Some students discussed how their friends had been an influence on them to not use alcohol or how they had been an influence on their friends to abstain or minimize their use of alcohol. Christa (AB) said that she and her friends who did not use alcohol influenced other friends to not consume it. She said,

We'll say (to them), 'You've been drinking.', and we could tell in their eyes, and we'll be the ones helping them, and we'll just tell them, 'Well, if you are going to be doing this, we'll not always be here for you', and then, like, 'What's going to happen to you later then, like when we're out of school?' and 'Who's going to help you?', and that has kind of influenced them, and they'll be like, 'Oh, maybe I shouldn't be doing this.'

Ten of the students interviewed discussed the importance of parents modeling responsible use of alcohol for their children, but not necessarily abstinence. Nora (AB) speculated that the manner in which parents used alcohol, as well as how much they used it, would influence some adolescents' alcohol consumption habits. She said,

I think that parents have a big impact on it (adolescent alcohol use), too, because there are those parents who have those thoughts (about not using alcohol) that pass those thoughts that they don't want to drink onto their kids, and there are those parents that drink a lot, and their kids don't want to have anything to do with them, like, because it's just a bad influence.

Sarah (AB) was a good example of how her mother's alcohol use patterns had contributed to her child's decision not to use alcohol. She said,

I grew up for, like, the first six years of my life, my mom was an alcoholic, and we finally got away from the situation, but the fact that, since she drank when she was pregnant with us, so we have that much higher a chance of becoming alcoholic, and so that just kind of scared me off the whole thing. I just didn't want to risk it.

Sometimes a boyfriend or girlfriend acted as a role model to prevent a young person from using alcohol. Frank (OU) said, “My girlfriend is all no drinking...she doesn’t really like it, so I have been staying away from it to.

Having fun without alcohol. Both those who consumed alcohol and those who abstained admitted that they could have a good time without it. Penny (OU) explained,

You can have fun without alcohol, it’s true. I just did it last weekend, and we were at my friend’s place. We actually played board games and Wii (an electronic game) and stuff, and I was, like, ‘Hey, I actually had a lot of fun.’ I was having a party! It was actually kind of weird.

Vickie (AB) also had comments about this topic. She said,

If I feel pressured into it (using alcohol), I give them (my friends who do not use alcohol) a call, and we can find out what’s going on...we have tons of fun without alcohol...going to a movie or going shopping.

Beth (OU) said that she enjoyed hosting parties without alcohol. She commented,

I don’t have alcohol at my parties...I think that people have more fun at my parties because we are playing, like, Red Rover and Hide and Seek, and people forget that the childhood games are funner when you are adults.

Peer group/friends discourage alcohol use or do not pressure alcohol use. In one of the schools where students were interviewed, a distinct and important difference in the influence of peers to use or not use alcohol was noted. Edward (AB), a student in this school, stated, “I think, with our school, we don’t see a lot of that (peer pressure to use alcohol). I think when we say no, it’s just no. So we don’t have that peer pressure.” Later on in the interview, he said about his classmates,

Everyone talks to one another, and it keeps us all in the loop, so it’s like a support group...we all get along, and I think that influences us all to not do it (use alcohol)...when we do have parties, it’s pretty much alcohol-free. We have the bonfires and all that without the alcohol.

Nora (AB) also was a student in the same school. She commented on this subject, by saying, “We have nicer people and we have better thoughts on things because I know I can name two party schools...and it’s different (in our school). I’m glad I don’t go to those schools.”

Another student from this school, Garrett (OU), stated his viewpoint on this subject, saying,

Everyone’s more of a family than a classmate. I came here six years ago. I didn’t really get that this was more than just a school; that this was a community inside the school, and, being a part of my class, it not just a class anymore. It’s more like a family...they are more like my family now.

Although Hunter (AB), who indicated that he used alcohol on a regular basis, was also a student here, he felt that he was out of the mainstream among his peers, mostly because of his alcohol use. The following comment he made illustrated his position, “Nobody in my class really does that (consumes alcohol)...I’m kind of the outside person, so I don’t really talk to them that much...They just don’t like the things that I do.”

Penny (OU) was from a different school but had made a statement that sums up how peer pressure can be either positive or negative. She said, “If a majority of the students in this community weren’t into partying (with alcohol), everyone else that comes to that school would be more apt not to drink (alcohol) and party.”

Although the atmosphere in this school appeared to be significantly different than other schools, Edward (AB) presented another factor that could have contributed to the students’ viewpoints in this school. He said,

I think our little, close-knit community is pretty good when thinking about (other) towns, there seems to be a lot more alcohol use down there (in other parts of the county), and I don’t know why, because we are all in the same boat, and we all farm and all, and, so, for me, I think it just depends on the people. I think it just depends on how they were brought up...I had a friend (from another community in this county) and he said that all there was to do was to go to parties and drink...and so I asked him why there couldn’t be parties without drinking, and he said ‘That’s just a way of life,’ so it kind of made me think our community isn’t so bad...I

think it kind of depends on the community support...and, also, the environment, how do people perceive it.

Have experienced or seen consequences of alcohol use. Traumatic incidents involving alcohol that had happened to them or someone they knew were contributing factors that discouraged six students from using alcohol or changed how they used it. Penny (OU) said that she would not “drink and drive” because a friend had died in a car accident while consuming alcohol. Sara (AB) stated that, because of her mother’s past history as an alcoholic, she would never use alcohol. Kayla (OU) spoke about her own past experiences that had occurred while she was using alcohol that had convinced her not to consume it as much as she had previously. She said,

I made a lot of mistakes when I drank. I almost, like, ruined every single relationship that I had with everyone when I started drinking, and I made a fool of myself a lot of times. Like, one time, I actually made a big mistake and cheated on my boyfriend...so I almost lost him. So, that kind of makes me not want to (drink alcohol) anymore, because it makes me do things that I regret afterwards so that’s an outcome that’s actually good out of it. So making mistakes a lot really changed what I wanted.

Sometimes, outside speakers who came to the schools presented a graphic view of their past experiences of alcohol use. Some students found these speakers to be quite inspirational and had their views about alcohol altered, at least temporarily, by these presentations. Devon (AB) said,

I think they are really good, I mean, they are a prime example of things that happen every day, and you know, this guy who came in the other day, he wasn’t a professional speaker. He was, you know, just an every day, average guy. He wasn’t very loud, he seemed kind of nervous, but, you know, that impact because of a night of drinking...he got into a car with his friend, you know, and he went through a stop sign, and, unfortunately, killed him. There’s a tragic story, you know, that you hear about in the news every week and hearing that type of thing coming from another person, I think is a great way to educate people of the risks, you know, the down side of drinking.

Penny (OU) also felt that this type of delivery method to present an anti-alcohol message was effective. She said,

Those real stories that kind of leave you with the impact of ‘Wow, that’s stupid!’ I don’t want to do that, and I don’t want to end up like that...it is a very effective way (to present an anti-drinking/driving method), when you can put yourself in that situation of either you get in the car with that drunk driver, or something, and be, like, ‘Wow , I’m thankful that that didn’t happen to me!’

Beth (OU) was not as convinced that alcohol education which focused on the consequences of alcohol use would be enough to convince her peers to make smart decisions about alcohol use. She felt that adolescents would need to be able to relate to the speaker and carry the speaker’s message into their own lives. She said,

Half the time we have a presentation on drug abuse, or, like, alcohol use...we laugh at them, honestly, because we find it funny that they (school personnel) think a little conference is going to fix it, ah, because it’s not, you know...we know more (about the consequences of alcohol) already and we know what’s going to happen. It’s like, ‘We know that already, so why are you giving it to us again? Why don’t you have someone come in with experience or, like someone our own age who went through an ordeal, you know...something more traumatic, not like in the conference (where) you tell us ‘Don’t do it.’, you know. You say (if we) do it and get in trouble, we are going to get all the (consequences), blah, blah, blah. It’s like, threatening, and we find that we should rebel against it.

Of the students who spoke on this topic, most believed that, even with the most dramatic and meaningful presentations, the message to abstain or limit alcohol use would not create a permanent change in an adolescent’s behavior. Penny (OU) commented on this, saying, “The problem is that you go to these things (alcohol education programs), and you feel like a different person right away, but you get back to your little town, and it’s like, ‘So where’s the party tonight?’ It appears that the consequences of alcohol use must directly impact an adolescent’s life to create a permanent change in their attitude and behavior.

Separating oneself from the drinking group. Non-drinking students who excluded themselves from their peers, either voluntarily or involuntarily, seemed to have more difficulty

coping. Beth (OU), who rarely drank alcohol, said, “If I have my other friends (who do not use alcohol) around, it’s not so bad...if I am by myself, it’s just that I feel kind of left out.

Other students mentioned that many adolescents felt that they needed an invitation to attend the “drinking” parties that their peers held and that their alcohol consumption patterns might change if they did attend. Jennifer (AB) said that she and her friends would probably consume some alcohol if they were invited these parties. Nora (AB) said that, in a small town, people know what their peers will or will not do as far as using alcohol, and that this contributed to whether or not they would be invited to parties where alcohol use was likely to occur. Olivia wished that she was invited to more parties as it would be nice to be included in the activities that her peers participated in, but that she would probably turn down the invitations, anyway. As stated earlier, Penny (OU) said that her peers that did not use alcohol were only singled out not to be invited to parties because others did not believe that they would come anyway.

Open communication/Influence of parents. The ability to keep the lines of communication open with their children was an viewed as an important factor in limiting alcohol use by four adolescents, however, the open communication needed to be an on-going aspect of the relationship from the time their children were small in order for the adolescent child to really listen and respect what his or her parent was saying about alcohol use. When Beth (OU) was asked what parents could do to help a young person from getting involved with alcohol, she said,

I would say open relationships with your kids. I, honestly, I’m appalled by my friends and how they treat their parents. They treat their parents like rags, and I think it’s wrong because all the parents are trying to do is help. I mean, granted, there are some bad parents out there, you know, that deserve the attitude that their kids give them, but, some of them, they just want to help and they are trying to talk to their kids, but they don’t know how, and the kids have grown into teenagers who have learned to not talk to their parents, and they would just rather not talk to their parents because, you know, they don’t want to listen anymore.

Although several students indicated that their parents had not talked to them about alcohol use, three students said that they were told by at least one of their parents that they could not consume, even though the parent used it. Others said that their parents had told them to “Stay in control” and to “Stay safe” if they did choose to consume alcohol, as well as to not “drink and drive”. Some ways that parents imparted alcohol information was by speaking to their children about their own past use; while others used their child’s older sibling’s alcohol use as an example of what not to do. Mindy (OU) said her father, who was a police officer, used his experiences with adolescent alcohol use on the job as a spring board for discussions with her about alcohol use, while Lindsey (AB) said that her mother spoke to her about her daughter’s friends’ use of alcohol when they were looking at Facebook together. Lindsey also indicated that her mother had offered her five hundred dollars if she did not drink alcohol before she turned eighteen years of age.

Involvement in other activities/No time for alcohol use. Edward (AB) felt that adolescents who were involved in activities in their community were more likely to abstain from alcohol use or limit their alcohol use. He said, “A lot of students (in my school) are involved with extra-curricular activities. We’re pretty involved with church groups and a lot of organizations and volunteer work. So I think that kind of helps us (abstain from alcohol use). It kind of helps us through the peer pressure and making sure you’re clean.”

Christa (AB) said that adolescent alcohol use was discussed in organizations that she attended such as 4-H, while Nora (AB) and Olivia (AB) said that the subject was discussed at youth church activities. Nora (AB) also said that church leaders would get involved in talking to adolescents about alcohol use when an incident involving young people had occurred in the community, such as a car accident due to alcohol use.

Acceptance of different views. Some students felt that adolescents who used alcohol and those who did not could find acceptance within each other's peer group, and that this might lessen peer pressure for some adolescents to use alcohol or discourage its use for others. Garrett (OU), from the school where underage alcohol use was not the norm, was of this opinion. He said,

I wouldn't say (that alcohol use is) expected or accepted, either. It's not entirely frowned upon, but alcohol will play a part (in our lives) sometimes, and no one is going to totally hate you for (using) it or think that you are a horrible person, but some people will voice their opinion and even say 'I don't like it.' and 'I don't like that you do it, but I'm not going to hate you or say that you are a totally bad person, but I want you to know that I don't like it'.

Vicki (AB) was also from this school and agreed with Garrett's opinion, and she said,

We just give them the honest truth (about how we feel about alcohol) and just say what we think, and, if they don't like it, they don't have to listen. They know my viewpoints on it, and if they ask me, I give them an answer, but I don't walk around preaching to people about it.

Several students who used alcohol agreed that those who use alcohol and those who do not could co-exist without major issues. Kayla (OU) felt that peers who did not consume alcohol were accepted by those who did consume it as long as they did not "put themselves above us." Penny (OU) also felt this way. She said,

Students who don't drink, we are completely fine with. It's students who are opposed to drinking and refuse to be around it (that) I have problem with because we can't hang out with them...that's the only time when a person (who doesn't use alcohol) is really singled out from it is, like, when they won't come (to drinking parties) because they are completely against it and we're like 'What's the big deal?'

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions that rural adolescents have about their alcohol use or nonuse and the social-contextual factors that contribute to their decision. The findings suggest the reasons that the participants gave to use or not use alcohol were similar to what other researchers have found with both rural and urban adolescent samples and which are outlined in the following discussion. However, as the majority of past research on adolescent alcohol use has used quantitative approaches, this qualitative study offers a different perspective as it provides insight into the meaning that these adolescents have constructed regarding their experiences with alcohol use in the communities where they live.

Peer influence was, perhaps, the strongest influence for the students in making the decision to use or not use alcohol. Thirteen of the twenty participants believed this influence would be a determining factor in their decision for both themselves and their peers. This finding corresponds with research that found that the greatest reward that adolescents strive for is the desire to gain respect of peers, regardless of any perceived risks inherent in the activities they pursue in an attempt to gain acceptance of their peers (Gopnick, 2012). A number of other researchers studying adolescent alcohol patterns have also found that social pressure from peers is an important influence on the decision to use alcohol (DeHaan & Boljevac, 2010; Epstein, Botvin & Spoth, 2003; Griffin, Epstein, Botvin, & Spoth, 2001; Jenkins, 2001; Windle, et al., 2009). Some of the participants in this study felt that the encouragement from their peers to engage in alcohol use was not peer pressure, but a mutually agreed upon behavior, which has also been documented in past research (Oetting, et al., 1997, Scaramella & Keys, 2001).

While peers influenced some participants to use alcohol, others had peers who discouraged alcohol use. Making a decision not to use alcohol was easier when the adolescents

felt that they had the support of their peers, a finding that was most noticeable in the school where the highest number of participants indicated that they did not use alcohol. Participants in this school were more likely to indicate the majority of their peers did not use or condone the use of adolescent alcohol use. This finding is supported by other research which has found that positive peer influence is related to less adolescent alcohol use (Dunn, Kitts, Lewis, Goodrow, & Scherzer, 2011) and that the quality of an adolescent's friendship network is important in determining his or her alcohol use behavior (Ramirez, Hinman, Sterling, Weisner, & Campbell, 2012). There was some uncertainty why non-alcohol use identities prevailed among students in this school as compared to neighboring schools, as this community exhibited the same general features as the other communities where interviews took place. It is possible that the differences were more subtle and could be related to minor differences in ethnic compositions and the corresponding views on alcohol use (although people in these communities are predominantly northern European, especially of German and Norwegian descent as indicated by the U.S. Census Bureau), the movement of people in or out of the communities, the strength of peer bonds within the schools, or the degree of religiosity and traditional family attitudes in the communities. Regardless of the reasons for these differences in adolescent alcohol use within the communities, this finding indicates that even communities that are similar in size and close in geographic location can exhibit considerable variability in adolescent alcohol use, a conclusion supported by past research (Edwards, 1997, Oetting, et al., 1997).

The ability of some of these participants to withstand negative peer pressure to use alcohol may have been related to their intrapersonal skills such as self confidence and coping skills. Adolescents who believed that they could abstain from alcohol use exhibited a sense of self assurance, maturity and self-respect. They felt that they could cope with situations where alcohol

was present and rationalized their decision not to use alcohol to both themselves and their friends. They also believed that their friends would accept their decision to not use alcohol. Other research has shown that developing resistance strategies to alcohol is a part of the process of establishing a non-user identity (Pettigrew, Miller-Day, Kfieger, & Hecht, 2011). Developing good communication and assertiveness skills is also a part of this process (Goldberg-Lillehoj, Spoth & Trudeau, 2005, Griffin, et al., 2001), as well as building a sense of self-worth (Backer-Fulghum, Patock-Packham, King, Roufa & Hagen, 2012, Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). The participants who stated that they had personal goals and a sense of direction in their lives were also less likely to use alcohol, which has also been found by other researchers (Drixler, 2001, Dunn, Kitts, Lewis, Goodrow, & Scherzer, 2011, Scaramella & Keyes, 2001, Shears, et al., 2006). Another factor which appeared to be protective for these participants against alcohol use was having established religious and moral standards, a finding that is supported by others (De Haan & Boljevac, 2010, Desmond, Koper, & Krause, 2011).

A number of participants discussed how their family and mentors in the community encouraged them to develop the beliefs and skills they needed to withstand the pressures to use alcohol. Fourteen of the twenty students referred to the support that they had from important people in their lives. These support people acted as positive role models, sounding boards, and resources for education. Parents were the most frequent people to turn to for support. Many of the students who were non-users or limited their alcohol use described their relationship with their parents as positive. Open communication with parents, including about alcohol use, was important for many of them, consistent with research that found that parents who communicate values and norms against using alcohol is a factor that decreases adolescent alcohol use (Windle, et al., 2009, Griffin, et al., 2011, Oetting et al., 1997, Sieving, Maruyama, Williams & Perry,

2000). However, it has also been demonstrated that adolescents must hold their parents' views in high esteem in order to benefit from their parents' insight (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001).

Although the majority of the participants indicated that their parents used alcohol to some degree, most said their parents modeled responsible use and did not actively encourage their offspring to use alcohol before they reached legal age. These students seemed particularly aware of the attitudes and behaviors of the adults in their lives surrounding alcohol use. Some participants knew of situations where parents of younger adolescents did not monitor their adolescent's behavior or reinforce more acceptable activities, which also has been found to lead to increased adolescent alcohol use (Scaramella & Keyes, 2001). As they advanced into their teen years and became more independent, they felt that the parental sanctions against adolescent alcohol use weakened, which some researchers have indicated is partially because alcohol use is legal for adults (Oetting, et al., 1997). Some of the participants also felt that a number of parents they knew would allow their own and even other adolescents to consume alcohol in their home because the parents felt that it was safer than allowing the adolescents to use alcohol unsupervised, which has been found to inadvertently show approval for underage alcohol use (Wagenaar, et al., 1993).

A number of participants addressed community attitudes about alcohol, with the majority feeling that many people in their community ignored adolescent alcohol use. Past research has found that community alcohol norms and the perceived enforcement of alcohol laws in communities have been shown to affect adolescent beliefs and behaviors about alcohol (Lipperman-Kreda, Grube, & Paschall, 2010, Scheer, et al., 2000). In addition, some of these participants believed that there would be minimal consequences for alcohol use violations for underage alcohol use in their communities and, even if they or their peers received consequences

for alcohol use, their patterns of alcohol use would not change over the long-term. This finding may be related to the perception of some adolescents that the rewards of alcohol use are greater than the actual or perceived consequences for use (Lipperman-Kreda, et al., 2010).

Implications

The information supplied by the participants in this study supports the view that social-contextual factors are important to consider when attempting to understand underage alcohol use within a given community. These study results may be useful for researchers who wish to compare and contrast similarities and differences between alcohol use beliefs and behaviors between this sample and other groups of adolescents. Parents, educators, and other people who work with young people, especially in rural areas, may use this information to create more effective alcohol prevention and intervention programs that meet the needs of young people in their community. It is important for community members, especially parents, to consider how their beliefs and behaviors impact the decisions that adolescents make and engage in meaningful discussions with them about the choices that they make. This view point is supported by others as evidenced by the development of a web-based, comprehensive information program in North Dakota called Parents LEAD (Listen, Educate, Ask, Discuss) which has been developed by the North Dakota Human Services Department, along with other state organizations. The program's goal is focused on helping parents engage in age-appropriate ongoing discussion with their children, from the preschool years to young adulthood, about under-age alcohol use (Parents LEAD, 2012).

Limitations

This study was an attempt to gain insights into the reasons a rural sample of high school students gave for using or not using alcohol. Although this goal was met, the opportunity to

generalize results to adolescents in other settings is limited. The adolescents who participated in this study may have different views about adolescent alcohol use than those who did not choose to participate, and they may also have differed in the amount of insight they had regarding the reasons that they had for their choices to use or not use alcohol. Although the participants appeared to make an honest attempt to describe their perceptions about adolescent alcohol use in their communities, it is possible that some may have consciously or unconsciously misrepresented information they gave during the interview and on data collection forms. In addition, a number of participants speculated about the reasons that their peers had for using or not using alcohol, instead of speaking strictly about their own experience. Also, adolescents who used alcohol on a regular basis were under-represented in the sample. Some might have been concerned about their alcohol use becoming public knowledge, although the researcher assured them that their identity would remain anonymous and a Certificate of Confidentiality was in place to protect them. Finally, although the researcher attempted to identify and consider all of her own biases about adolescent alcohol use, it is possible this did impact some elements of the research.

Conclusion

As addressed previously, it is important to remember that differences in adolescent alcohol use patterns can exist within similar communities in the same geographic area, making it necessary for each community to individually assess their own needs and concerns in order to develop programs that are effective. This qualitative study's major contribution is that it highlights the importance of considering the insights that adolescents have about the behaviors that they engage in. Future studies might be designed to use qualitative interviewing techniques with youth to complement quantitative research processes in order to better understand their

perspectives and develop more effective programming to meet the unique needs in individual communities.

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APPENDIX A. LETTER TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

I am a graduate student in the Human Development and Family Science program at North Dakota State University, and I am writing to you to ask for your help in completing my thesis project which is under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Brandy Randall. I am conducting a research project to learn about rural adolescents' reasons for using or not using alcohol, with a focus on the personal family, peer, school, and community factors that influence this issue. Specifically, I am looking for your permission to recruit junior and senior high school students to participate in this study and to use a private room at the school in which to conduct the study right after normal school day hours. It is my hope that with this research, I, along with others who are concerned about rural youth, will learn more about the influences on adolescent alcohol use.

These interviews will be scheduled individually at a time that is convenient for the student and school personnel and will take approximately one hour to complete. I would like to come to your school in October of 2009 to address the junior and senior high students directly to explain the research project and obtain parent/guardian contact information from those who would like to participate. Parents/guardians must give written consent prior to any additional contact with their child. Students' participation is entirely voluntary, and they will be given the opportunity to stop participating at any time. Information that would reveal the identity of a student or a school will be kept strictly confidential. Students who complete the research project will be given a \$10 gift certificate as a thank you for participating.

Enclosed is a complete description of the study. I will be contacting you by telephone within the next week to discuss the possibility of conducting a portion of this study at your school. If you agree to allow this research to be conducted in your school, I will need a letter from

you indicating your consent before I can move forward with IRB approval. I appreciate your consideration of this matter and look forward to speaking with you. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either myself (phone number) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Brandy Randall (phone number) Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Tamara A. Metzen

Department of Human Development and Family Science

North Dakota State University

APPENDIX B. DISCRIPTION OF PROPOSED STUDY TO ADMINSTRATORS

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

Purpose

The goal of the proposed study is to examine rural adolescents' perceptions of the reasons they choose to use or not use alcohol. More specifically, the goal of the proposed study is to examine the social contextual factors (i.e. personal, family, peer, school and community factors) that contribute to this decision. Previous research has shown that the rates of binge drinking by adolescents in North Dakota are the highest in the nation (SAMSHA, 2005). I believe that it is important to address the reasons for this phenomenon directly from the adolescents' perspective; therefore I am conducting interviews with them on a one-on-one basis.

Participants

Study participants will be 20 juniors and senior high school students (approximately 10 males and 10 females) from four rural county Schools. Participants will be recruited from the classroom setting after being given a brief review of the goals, purpose and methods of the research study. Parents will be sent a letter explaining the study, and parents of adolescents under the age of 18 will need to return a signed informed consent in order for their child to participate in the research study.

Methods and procedures

The interviews will be conducted after the school day in a private office setting at the school. Six research questions will be asked that focus on the social contextual factors that contribute to the decisions that adolescents make regarding their alcohol use. A semi-structured interview style will be used to allow the researcher to explore individual issues further. Interviews

will be audio taped and transcribed by a member of the research team. The researcher will be looking for themes or patterns that emerge from the interviews.

Risks

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks. These known risks include loss of confidentiality or possible emotional distress. Should a participant exhibit emotional distress, he or she will be referred to the school counselor to address the issue. A list of community resources that outline the local agencies that might be of assistance to the adolescent will also be provided.

Benefits

By allowing students to take part in this research, you and your staff may benefit by gaining a greater understanding of the reasons that rural adolescents in this area choose to drink or not drink alcohol. Benefits to the students, parents, and the community are likely to include the awareness and empowerment of being able to consciously make decisions that will impact rural young people's decisions regarding alcohol use.

Compensation

The participants will receive a \$10 gift card to a local video store as a thank you for their participation in the study.

The researcher will make every attempt to maintain the confidentiality of the students. The researcher will keep private all research records that identify students, families, the school district, and the community. The students' information will be combined with information from other students taking part in the study, and the researcher will write about the combined information that she has gathered. Students will be identified by pseudonyms in the written results. The results of the study may be published; however, all identifying information will be kept private. The

researcher will also apply to the National Institute of Health for a Certificate of Confidentiality that will not allow any student information to be subpoenaed by a court of law.

APPENDIX C. ORAL SCRIPT FOR YOUTH ASSENT

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your class today. My name is Tami Metzen, and I am a graduate student in Human Development and Family Science at NDSU. I am completing a research project for my thesis which is focused on exploring the personal and environmental factors that influence the choices that rural teenagers make to use or not use alcohol. I am looking for juniors or seniors in high school who would be willing to spend about one hour to be interviewed privately about this subject. All information I receive from students during these personal interviews will be combined in order to develop themes. Personal identifying information will be removed from the collected data so that individuals can't be identified.

By agreeing to participate in the research, you can potentially help yourself, your family and community, as well as people who work with youth, gain a better understanding of the issues affecting alcohol use by teenagers in rural areas. Your participation in being interviewed for this research study is completely voluntary, and you may quit at any time. Those who complete the interview will be given a ten dollar gift certificate to a local video store as a thank you for participating.

If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please mark the appropriate box on the ballot being passed to you at this time. Also, if you are under the age of 18, please include your parent(s) or guardian(s) name, address and phone number so they can be contacted for their permission for you to participate. They will be sent a consent form that must be returned to me before you will be allowed to be interviewed for the research.

Once again, no personal information that you report to me will be given out to anyone, including your parents. All identifying information will be removed from the research report. Your participation will be greatly appreciated. Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX D. BALLOT

Would you be interested in participating in this study? (circle response) Yes/No

If yes, answer the following questions:

Name: _____

Age: _____

Phone number where you can be reached in the evening to set up an interview:

If under the age of age of 18, what are your parents/guardians' names, address and phone

number: _____

APPENDIX E. LETTER TO PARENTS OUTLINING GOALS AND PROCEDURES

Dear _____.

Hi, my name is Tami Metzen, and I am a graduate student at North Dakota State University in the Human Development and Family Studies program. I have permission from the principal of your child's school to conduct a study with juniors and seniors in the school district to explore the reasons that teenagers in rural areas choose to use or not use alcohol. When I spoke with the juniors and seniors recently, _____ indicated an interest in interviewing with me about this subject. As he/she is under the age of 18, I need your permission to speak with them. This interview will last about 1 hour and will take place either during the school day or right after school in a private office at the school, but every attempt will be made not to interrupt their school day. The information that I receive from them will be audio-taped and transcribed, but all identifying information will be removed from the final report. A special document called a Certificate of Confidentiality is in place to protect their privacy so that no one, other than those involved with the research, will have access to personal information. I am sending you a parental consent form which will explain the study further. In order for me to move forward with interviewing your son/daughter, one of the consent forms will need to be signed by you and returned in the self-addressed stamped envelope which is included in the letter. Thank you for returning a copy of the signed consent.

Sincerely,

Tamara Metzen

APPENDIX F. PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

Research study

Your child/legal ward is invited to participate in a research study of what influences a rural teenager's decision to use or not use alcohol being conducted by Tamara Metzen, graduate student in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU, and Brandy Randall, professor in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU.

Basis for participant selection

Your child/legal ward has been selected because he or she is a junior or senior in high school in a rural community in North Dakota. This study includes 20 participants, approximately 10 male and 10 female. Participants will be screened before the study begins to include adolescents who indicate that they use alcohol and adolescents who indicate that they do not use alcohol.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to discover who or what adolescents believe influences their decision to use or not use alcohol within the rural community in which they live. The researchers hope the information can be used to help rural adolescents make better decisions for themselves regarding alcohol use and can help rural families, schools and communities find ways to help influence these adolescents to make positive choices.

Explanation of procedures

This study will require participants to be interviewed by the researcher in a private office in the school after the school day has ended. This interview will take about 1 hour to complete and will involve asking the participant 6 general questions about the people or things that impact

their choices about using or not using alcohol. Follow up questions may be asked to gain more information on the subject and, after the interview is complete, the participants will be asked to complete a short written form that describes their own and their family's background information. The interview session will be audio recorded and will be transcribed into written form by the researchers. At this point all personally identifying information will be removed from the written report and will be only available to the researchers. The information from all the interviews will then be analyzed in order to discover themes of alcohol use/non-use by rural adolescents. The final written report will include information from all participants and will focus on the identified themes.

Potential risks and discomforts

The risk to the participants may include discomfort in discussing their personal history regarding alcohol use. They may be concerned that their personal information will not remain confidential. However, safeguards have been put in place to minimize these risks.

Potential benefits

Your child/legal ward may benefit from participating in this study by gaining insight into the reasons that he or she chooses to use or not use alcohol. This study may also benefit rural communities by providing information on whom or what influences the adolescents who live in these areas to make decisions that may impact their lives.

Compensation for participation

For their time and effort, participants who complete the study will receive a \$10 gift certificate from a local video store.

Assurance of confidentiality

Your child or ward's personal information will remain confidential. The data will be stored at the Graduate Center at NDSU in a locked cabinet and/or a password protected computer. Your child or ward will be given a code which identifies him or her to the researchers. No other individuals will have access to their personal information. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the study is concluded, though the written data may be kept indefinitely by the researchers in locked storage at NDSU. Participant information will be combined with information from other participants at other study sites in the written report, and any information that would identify a participant, their family or community will be removed or altered. Additional protection against release of personal information is in place through a Certificate of Confidentiality supplied by the National Institute of Health. With this Certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify your child/legal ward, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the Certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify your child/legal ward, except as explained below.

The Certificate cannot be used to resist a demand for information from personnel of the U.S. government that is used for auditing or evaluation of federally funded projects or for information that must be disclosed in order to meet the requirements of the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about your child/legal ward or his/her involvement in this research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.

The Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent the researchers from disclosing voluntarily, without your consent, information that would identify your child/legal ward as a participant in the research if your child/legal ward would disclose during the interview process that he/she has been a victim of child abuse.

Data and records created by this project are owned by the university and the investigator. Because of the sensitive nature of the information being collected by the researchers, information being collected from your child/legal ward will not be available to you, as it is important for this research study to ensure that participants will feel free to discuss their activities surrounding their alcohol use without fear of retribution from parents or other individuals. You may make a written request to the principal investigator for a copy of the final research report, if so desired.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study

Your child/legal ward's participation is voluntary and he/she can quit at any time. Your decision whether or not to allow your child/legal ward to participate will not affect you or your child/legal ward in any way, including any other benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. If you decide to allow your child/legal ward to participate, you are free to withdraw your permission and to discontinue their participation at any time.

Offer to answer questions

You and your child/legal ward should feel free to ask questions now or at any time during the study. If you or your child/legal ward has questions about this study, you can contact Tamara Metzen at (phone number) or (email) or Brandy Randall at (phone number) or (email). If you have questions about the rights of human research participants, or wish to report a research related problem or injury, contact the NDSU IRB Office at (701) 231-8908 or ndsuirb@ndsuidu.edu.

Consent statement

By signing this form, you are stating that you have read and understand this form and the research project, and are freely agreeing to allow your child/legal ward to be a part of this study. Please return one copy of this form to Tamara Metzen in the stamped, self-addressed envelope included in this letter and keep one copy for yourself. If there are things you do not understand about the study, please contact the researchers before you sign the form.

Parent/Guardian Signature	Printed Name	Date
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Parent/Guardian Signature	Printed Name	Date
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Relation to Participant	Name of Child/Legal Ward
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Researcher obtaining permission: Signature	Printed Name	Date
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APPENDIX G. LETTER TO PARENTS OF STUDENTS 18 & OVER

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

Research study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study of what influences a rural teenager's decision to use or not use alcohol being conducted by Tamara Metzen, graduate student in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU, and Brandy Randall, professor in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU.

Basis for participant selection

Your child been selected because he or she is a junior or senior in high school in a rural community in North Dakota. This study includes 20 participants, approximately 10 male and 10 female. Participants will be screened before the study begins to include adolescents who indicate that they use alcohol and adolescents who indicate that they do not use alcohol.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to discover who or what adolescents believe influences their decision to use or not use alcohol within the rural community in which they live. The researchers hope the information can be used to help rural adolescents make better decisions for themselves regarding alcohol use and can help rural families, schools and communities find ways to help influence these adolescents to make positive choices.

Explanation of procedures

This study will require participants to be interviewed by the researcher in a private office in the school after the school day has ended. This interview will take about 1 hour to complete and will involve asking the participant 6 general questions about the people or things that impact their choices about using or not using alcohol. Follow up questions may be asked to gain more

information on the subject and, after the interview is complete, the participants will be asked to complete a short written form that describes their own and their family's background information. The interview session will be audio recorded and will be transcribed into written form by the researchers. At this point all personally identifying information will be removed from the written report and will be only available to the researchers. The information from all the interviews will then be analyzed in order to discover themes of alcohol use/non-use by rural adolescents. The final written report will include information from all participants and will focus on the identified themes.

Potential risks and discomforts

The risk to the participants may include discomfort in discussing their personal history regarding alcohol use. They may be concerned that their personal information will not remain confidential. However, safeguards have been put in place to minimize these risks.

Potential benefits

Your child may benefit from participating in this study by gaining insight into the reasons that he or she chooses to use or not use alcohol. This study may also benefit rural communities by providing information on whom or what influences the adolescents who live in these areas to make decisions that may impact their lives.

Compensation for participation

For their time and effort, participants who complete the study will receive a \$10 gift certificate from a local video store.

Assurance of confidentiality

Your child personal information will remain confidential. The data will be stored at the Graduate Center at NDSU in a locked cabinet and/or a password protected computer. Your child

will be given a code which identifies him or her to the researchers. No other individuals will have access to their personal information. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the study is concluded, though the written data may be kept indefinitely by the researchers in locked storage at NDSU. Participant information will be combined with information from other participants at other study sites in the written report, and any information that would identify a participant, their family or community will be removed or altered. Additional protection against release of personal information is in place through a Certificate of Confidentiality supplied by the National Institute of Health. With this certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify your child or ward, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify your child, except as explained below.

The certificate cannot be used to resist a demand for information from personnel of the U.S. government that is used for auditing or evaluation of federally funded projects or for information that must be disclosed in order to meet the requirements of the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about your child and his/her involvement in this research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.

The Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent the researchers from disclosing voluntarily, without you or your child's consent, information that would identify him or her as a

participant in the research project under the condition that your child identifies him or herself as a victim of child abuse.

Data and records created by this project are owned by the University and the investigator. Because of the sensitive nature of the information being collected by the researchers, information being collected from your child will not be available to you, as it is important for this research study to ensure that participants will feel free to discuss their activities surrounding their alcohol use without fear of retribution from parents or other individuals. You may make a written request to the principal investigator for a copy of the final research report, if so desired.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study

Your child's participation is voluntary and he/she can quit at any time.

Offer to answer questions

You and your child should feel free to ask questions now or at any time during the study. If you or your child has questions about this study, you can contact Tamara Metzen at (phone number) or (email address) or Brandy Randall at (phone number) or (email address). If you have questions about the rights of human research participants, or wish to report a research-related problem or injury, contact the NDSU IRB Office at (701) 231-8908 or ndsuirb@ndsuidu.edu .

APPENDIX H. YOUTH ASSENT FORM

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research study that focuses on what has influenced your decision to use or not use alcohol. This study is being done by Tamara Metzen and Brandy Randall.

What will the research involve?

If you agree to take part, you will take be asked several questions about what impacts your decision to use or not use alcohol. This interview will take place after the school day in a private setting at the school and will take about one hour. The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, you will be asked to complete a written form that asks personal information about yourself and your family.

What are any risks or benefits for me?

This research may involve some risks; it's possible you might feel uncomfortable answering questions that involve your personal decisions about using alcohol. It is not possible to know all potential risks in research, but the researchers have taken steps to make sure that there is only a small chance of harm to you. Protections are in place to ensure that personal information about you will not be available to anyone but the researchers.

This may be beneficial for you to take part in this research because you may gain knowledge about what influences the personal decisions that you make. You will be able to help others by helping the researchers provide information to them about what they can do to encourage teenagers to make healthy choices for themselves.

Do I have to take part in the research?

*Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have given their permission for you to be in the research, but it is still your choice whether or not to take part.

* Even if you say yes now, you can change your mind later, and stop participating.

* Your decision will have no bad or good affect on you in any way.

Who will see my answers and information?

We will make every effort to keep your information private, only the people helping us with the research will know your answers or see your information. The only information that would be disclosed to the appropriate authorities is when a study participant indicates that he or she has been a victim of child abuse.

In order to ensure that any information that you give the researchers remains private, they have a special document in place, called the Certificate of Confidentiality, which prevents anyone else from legally getting any information about you. However, if employees of the U.S. government request information to review this study, the researchers must comply with their request. You or your family may also voluntarily release information about yourself and/or your involvement in this research project. If you give your written approval for someone to receive research information about you, the researchers must comply with that request.

Your information will be combined with information from other people in the study. When we write about the study, we will write only about this combined information, and no one will be able to know what your information is. NDSU and the researcher own all information collected for this project.

If you want to look at the information we collect from you, just let us know, and we will provide it to you, but you cannot look at information from others in the research.

What will I get if I agree to be in the research?

For your time and effort in this project, we will give you a \$10 gift card to a local video card once you have completed the interview.

Is there anything else I should know?

If you are injured or hurt because of this research, you should tell your parent(s)/guardian(s) to contact Tamara Metzen at (phone number) or Brandy Randall at (phone number). Later on, if we discover more information about this research, we will tell you about it so you can decide whether or not you want to stay in the study.

What if I have questions?

You should ask any questions you have right now, before deciding whether or not to be a part of the research. If you or your parent(s) or guardian(s) have questions later, contact Tamara Metzen at (phone number) or Brandy Randall at (phone number). Your parents will receive a copy of this form to keep.

What are my rights?

You have rights as a research participant. For questions about your rights, or to tell someone else about a problem with this research, you can contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) at (701) 231-8908 or ndsu.ird@ndsu.edu. The HRPP is responsible to make sure that your rights and safety are protected in this research. More information is available at: www.ndsu.edu/research/ird .

Sign this form only if you:

- have understood what the research is about and why it's being done,
- have had all your questions answered,
- have talked to your parent(s) legal guardian about this project, and

- agree to take part in this research.

Your signature

Printed Name

Date

Name of parent(s) or legal guardian(s)

Signature of researcher explaining study

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX I. STUDENT CONSENT FORM (18 YEARS AND OLDER)

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

This study is being conducted by:

Tamara Metzen, graduate student in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU and Brandy Randall, professor in the Human Development and Family Science program at NDSU.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been selected because you are a junior or senior in high school in a small, rural community in North Dakota.

What is the reason for doing the study?

The purpose of this interview is to help the researchers explore alcohol use by teenagers in rural areas.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked a series of questions about whom or what impacts your decision to use or not use alcohol. The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, you will be asked to complete a short, written form that asks for personal information about you and your family.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take?

The interview will take place in a private office at your school after the school day ends. It will last about one hour.

What are the risks and discomforts?

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to the participant. A possible risk might be discomfort in disclosing information about alcohol use. You may also be concerned that

information about current or past use of alcohol may be released to others. We have listed below the safeguards that are in place to prevent this from happening.

What are the benefits to me?

A potential benefit for you to participate in this study is a better understanding of the reasons that you choose to use or not use alcohol. However, you may not get any benefit from being in this research study.

What are the benefits to other people?

People who are concerned about youth, including people in your family, school and community, may benefit by being more informed about what impacts the decisions that teenagers make regarding alcohol use.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation in this research is your choice. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are already entitled.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to participate.

Who will see the information that I give?

We will keep private all research records that identify you. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study, we will write about the combined information that we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of the study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. The researchers have a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institute of Health that will prevent participant information from being released for legal reasons. The researchers will use the certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify you, except as explained below.

The certificate cannot be used to resist a demand for information from personnel of the U.S. Government that is used for auditing or evaluation of federally funded projects or for information that must be disclosed in order to meet the requirements of the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about yourself or your involvement in the research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold information.

The Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent the researchers from disclosing voluntarily, without your consent, information that would identify you as a participant in the research project under the condition of you, as a participant, having been a victim of child abuse.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study?

After you have completed the interview, you will receive a \$10 gift certificate from a local video store as a thank you for participating in the research study.

What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the research study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have any questions about the study, you can contact the researchers, Tamara Metzen at (phone number) or Brandy Randall at (phone number).

What are my rights as a research participant?

You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about your rights, or complaints about this research, you may talk to the researcher or contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program by:

- Telephone: 701.231.8908
- Email: ndsuirb@ndsuidu
- Mail: NDSU HRPP Office, NDSU Dept. 4000, PO Box 6050, Fargo, ND 58108-6050.

The role of the IRB is to see that your rights are protected in this research; more information about your rights can be found at: www.ndsu.edu/research/irb .

Documentation of Informed Consent:

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that

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

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Your signature

Date

Your printed name

Signature of researcher explaining study

Date

Printed name of researcher explaining study

APPENDIX J. CERTIFICATE OF CONFIDENTIALITY



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism
5635 Fishers Lane, Room 3108, MSC 9304
Bethesda, Maryland 20892-9304

January 26, 2010

Brandy A. Randall, Ph.D, Associate Professor
Department of Child Development and Family Studies.
North Dakota State University
College of Human Development and Education
NDSU Dept 2615
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

Dear Dr. Randall:

Enclosed is the Confidentiality Certificate protecting the identity of research subjects in your project entitled, "Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study." Please note that the Certificate expires on January 26, 2013. We have provided one more year of Certificate coverage than you requested since many studies take longer to complete than initially projected. Providing an extra year ensures coverage for subjects and may spare you the need to formally submit a request for an extension.

Please be sure that the consent form given to research participants accurately states the intended uses of personally identifiable information (including matters subject to reporting) and the confidentiality protections, including the protection provided by the Certificate of Confidentiality with its limits and exceptions.

If you determine that the research project will not be completed by the expiration date, January 26, 2013, you must submit a written request for an extension of the Certificate three months prior to the expiration date. If you make any changes to the protocol for this study, you should contact me regarding modification of this Certificate. Any requests for modifications of this Certificate must include the reason for the request, documentation of the most recent IRB approval, and the expected date for completion of the research project.

Please advise me of any situation in which the certificate is employed to resist disclosure of information in legal proceedings. Should attorneys for the project wish to discuss the use of the

certificate, they may contact the Office of the NIH Legal Advisor, National Institutes of Health, at (301) 496-6043.

Correspondence should be sent to Isabel Ellis, Confidentiality Certificate Coordinator, Office of Science Policy and Communications, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism/NIH, 5635 Fishers Lane, Room 3111, Rockville, MD 20852; 301-443-8771, Fax 301-480-1726; iellis1@mail.nih.gov.

Sincerely,

Isabel Ellis, MSW
Confidentiality Certificate Coordinator

Enclosure
cc:
Amy B. Scott
Assistant Director
Office of Sponsored Programs Administration

CONFIDENTIALITY CERTIFICATE

Number: AA-009-2010

Issued to

North Dakota State University

conducting research known as

Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study

In accordance with the provisions of section 301(d) of the Public Health Service Act 42 U.S.C. 241(d), this Certificate is issued in response to the request of the Principal Investigator, Brandy A. Randall, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Department of Child Development and Family Studies., to protect the privacy of research subjects by withholding their identities from all persons not connected with this research. Dr. Randall is primarily responsible for the conduct of this research, which is supported by No Grant Source.

Under the authority vested in the Secretary of Health and Human Services by section 301(d), all persons who:

1. are enrolled in, employed by, or associated with the North Dakota State University and its contractors or cooperating agencies and
2. have in the course of their employment or association access to information that would identify individuals who are the subjects of the research pertaining to the project known as "Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study,"

are hereby authorized to protect the privacy of the individuals who are the subjects of that research by withholding their names and other identifying characteristics from all persons not connected with the conduct of that research.

The purpose of the project is to examine the socio-contextual factors that result in rural adolescents choosing to drink or not drink alcohol.

A Certificate of Confidentiality is needed because potentially illegal or sensitive use of addictive substances or other sensitive information will be collected during the course of the study. The Certificate will help researchers avoid involuntary disclosure that could expose subjects or their families to adverse economic, legal, psychological and social consequences.

Measures to be taken to protect confidentiality include confidentiality training for research staff, restricted access to study records, use of codes instead of recognizable names, publication only of grouped data, and other steps to protect privacy.

Beginning date for this research: January 27, 2010. The research is expected to end on January 26, 2013.

As provided in section 301 (d) of the Public Health Service Act 42 U.S.C. 241(d):

"Persons so authorized to protect the privacy of such individuals may not be compelled in any Federal, State, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings to identify such individuals."

This Certificate does not protect you from being compelled to make disclosures that: (1) have been consented to in writing by the research subject or the subject's legally authorized representative; (2) are required by the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) or regulations issued under that Act; or (3) have been requested from a research project funded by NIH or DHHS by authorized representatives of those agencies for the purpose of audit or program review.

This Certificate does not represent an endorsement of the research project by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Certificate is now in effect and will expire on January 26, 2013. The protection afforded by this Confidentiality Certificate is permanent with respect to subjects who participate in the research during the time the Certificate is in effect.

Kenneth R. Warren, Ph.D.
Acting Director
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

Jan 26, 2010
Date

APPENDIX K. MINI SCRIPT BEFORE INTERVIEW

Thank you for taking your time to do this interview. Before we start the interview, I'd like to explain the study procedures and have you read and sign a form to ensure you understand your rights as a research participant. I will be asking six questions that focus on your perceptions of what influences your decision to drink or not to drink alcohol. I may also be asking more in-depth questions to explore an issue further. You may choose not to answer any question asked of you. Remember that all your responses will be kept confidential, and you may choose to quit this interview at any time. Do you have any questions at this time? If not, then please read this form and sign it to signify your agreement to participate.

APPENDIX L. DEMOGRAPHICS

Thank you for taking time the time to complete this survey.

The following section asks basic information about you. Please be as accurate as possible when responding to each of the following items. Remember that your responses will remain confidential. Please print clearly.

Name: _____

Age in years: _____

Birthdate: _____

Gender: _____

Current year in school (junior or senior): _____

Grade Point Average: _____

Extra-curricular participation during high school (list school and community activities, both during school and in the summer). Use the back if more room is necessary:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Do you have a job? (yes/no)

What type of job do you have? (ex: farm, retail, food, etc.) _____

If you do work during the school year, about how many hours per week? _____

Name of people who live with you, their relationship to you and their ages:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

What are your parent(s)/guardians(s) occupation or job type? (Ex: farming, manufacturing, office) _____

What is the average income range per year that the family you live with earns? (circle answer)

- a. \$0-\$24,999
- b. \$24,000-\$49,000
- c. \$50,000-\$74,999
- d. \$75,000-\$99,999
- e. Over \$100,000
- f. I don't know

Is this the community you have spent the majority of your time at? (Yes/No)

If not, where did you live most of the time growing up? _____

Do you live in town or out of town? _____

If you live out of town, about how many miles? _____

APPENDIX M. ALCOHOL & DRUG TREATMENT CENTERS

Wahpeton/Breckenridge

1. St. Francis Health Care Campus, Hope Unit

2400 Saint Francis Drive
Breckenridge, MN 57530
(218) 643-0499

Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehab services, Mental health services

Services Provided: Rehab for drug/alcohol addiction

Type of Care: In-patient and out-patient treatment

Special Programs/Groups: Individual, family and group treatment, intensive relapse prevention program

Fargo/Moorhead

1. Drake Counseling Services, Inc.

1202 23rd Street South
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 293-5429

Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehab services

Services Provided: Rehab for drug/ alcohol addiction

Type of Care: Outpatient

Special Programs/Groups: Adolescents, dual diagnosis, DUI/DWI offenders

2. Meritcare Chemical Dependency Partial Hospitalization Program

1720 South University Drive
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 461-5500

Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol rehab services

Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction

Type of Care: Partial hospitalization

3. First Step Recovery, PLLP

409 7th Street South
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 293-3384

Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol rehab services

Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction

Type of Care: Outpatient

Special Programs/Groups: Family counseling, cont. care programs, chemical dependency evaluations, drug testing

- 4. Prairie Psychiatric Center**
510 4th Street South
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 476-7216
Primary Focus: Mix of mental health and substance abuse services
Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction, detox
Type of Care: Outpatient, partial hospitalization/day treatment, hospital inpatient
Special Programs/Groups: Adolescents, dual diagnosis
- 5. Share House/Sister's Path Chemical Dependence Treatment Services**
4227 9th Avenue SW
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 282-6561
Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation services
Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction, halfway house
Type of Care: Outpatient, partial hospitalization/day treatment, non-hospital residential (24 hour)
Special Programs/Groups: Women, men, DUI/DWI offenders, criminal justice clients
- 6. New Hope Recovery**
118 Broadway N., Suite 211
Fargo, ND 58102
(701) 280-9090
Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation services
Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction
Type of Care: Outpatient
Special Programs/Groups: Adolescent drug/alcohol treatment
- 7. Simon Chemical Dependency Services**
431 4th Avenue South, Suite H
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 298-8108
Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation services
Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction
Type of Care: Outpatient
Special Programs/Groups: Individual and family counseling
- 8. Southeast Human Service Center**
2624 9th Avenue South
Fargo, ND 58103
Toll Free (888) 342-4900
Primary Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation services
Services Provided: Rehab for drug and/or alcohol addiction
Type of Care: Inpatient at State Hospital
Special Programs/Groups: Adult and child/adolescent inpatient, services for those with mental illness/chemical dependency

9. Wellness Center of Fargo and Moorhead

403 Center Avenue
Moorhead, MN 56560
(218) 233-6398

Primary Focus: Substance abuse treatment services

Services Provided: Substance abuse treatment

Type of Care: Outpatient

10. The Village Family Service Center

1201 25th Street South
Fargo, ND 58103
1-800-627-8220

Primary Focus: Chemical addiction treatment is just one of this agency's focuses

Services Provided: Counseling for chemical addictions

Type of Care: Outpatient

APPENDIX N. REVISED ORAL SCRIPT FOR YOUTH ASSENT

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your class today. My name is Tami Metzen, and I am a graduate student in Human Development and Family Science at NDSU. I am completing a research project for my thesis which is focused on exploring the personal and environmental factors that influence the choices that rural teenagers make to use or not use alcohol. I am looking for juniors or seniors in high school who would be willing to spend about one hour to be interviewed privately about this subject. All information I receive from students during these personal interviews will be combined in order to develop themes. Personal identifying information will be removed from the collected data so that individuals can't be identified.

By agreeing to participate in the research, you can potentially help yourself, your family and community, as well as people who work with youth, gain a better understanding of the issues affecting alcohol use by teenagers in rural areas. Your participation in being interviewed for this research study is completely voluntary, and you may quit at any time. Those who complete the interview will be given a ten dollar gift certificate to a local video store as a thank you for participating.

If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please mark the appropriate box on the ballot being passed to you at this time. Also, if you are under the age of 18, please include your parent(s) or guardian(s) name, address and phone number so they can be contacted for their permission for you to participate. They will be sent a consent form that must be returned to me before you will be allowed to be interviewed for the research.

Once again, no personal information that you report to me will be given out to anyone, including your parents. All identifying information will be removed from the research report. Your participation will be greatly appreciated. Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX O. AMMENDED STUDENT BALLOT

Would you be interested in participating in this study? (circle response) Yes /No

If no, why not? _____

Please answer the following questions, printing clearly.

Name: _____

Gender: (circle response) Male Female

Year in school: (circle response) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Contact Information:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip code: _____

Phone number where your parent(s)/guardian(s) can be reached in the evening: _____

Phone number where you can be reached in the evening to schedule an interview (if different from your parent(s)/guardian(s) phone number): _____

APPENDIX P. LETTER FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TO PARENTS

Dear Parents:

I encourage you to allow your son or daughter to participate in the NDSU research study, Rural Adolescents' Perceptions of Alcohol Use: A Qualitative Study. I have spoken with the researcher/s and feel that this study will provide valuable data which will allow all of us who work with teenagers to better understand and help them with the choices they make about alcohol use. If your son or daughter is allowed to participate, there will be minimal disruption to their school day and the information they will provide will be used only for research purposes by NDSU. Thank you for your cooperation

(Principal's signature)