

Alcohol Consumption Prevention Model: Clarifying Students' Misperceptions

C. Kevin Synnott, Ph.D.

Eastern Connecticut State University

860 465-4620

USA

Abstract

College, university, and high school students inaccurately perceive that their peers drink more alcohol than they do themselves. College students also misperceive that their peers are more comfortable in drinking situations than they are themselves. Students may drink more to try and fit in. They already fit in, but they do not realize it. Clarifying these misperceptions might result in fewer alcohol related problems in our schools. The model presented in this paper is unique because it offers a process to clarify both misperceptions.

Keywords: Alcohol Abuse Prevention, Colleges, Universities, Leadership, Higher Education, Public Administration, Prevention Model, Students, Misperceptions

1. Introduction

The Alcohol Consumption Prevention Model: Clarifying Students' Misperceptions presented in this paper was derived from an earlier study conducted by Synnott (2000). This earlier study focused on students' misperceptions associated with their peers' consumption of alcoholic beverages and feelings of comfort in drinking situations. Recently a model was developed to involve parents in clarifying students' misperceptions associated with their sons' and daughters' misperceptions associated with their peer's consumption of alcoholic beverages (Synnott, 2011). This model was developed to involve parents in the clarification process. The original model presented in this paper and the new model designed to involve parents in their sons' and daughters' alcohol abuse prevention efforts can be used together. The original model can be used on campus with students and the newer model can be used with parents via mail. Please refer to the new model for complete detailed descriptions of procedures (Synnott, 2011). The original model is reprinted in this paper with the author's permission. The format was modified and some of the demographic questions were eliminated.

2. Purpose

Students clearly overestimate the consumption of alcohol by their peers and believe that their peers are more comfortable in drinking situations than they are themselves. These inaccurate perceptions regarding the norms associated with drinking may encourage students to drink more alcoholic beverages than they normally would to "fit in." This prevention model is proposed as a way to help incoming freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors realize that they do not have to drink alcohol to develop a feeling of belonging. This strategy is designed to: (a) clarify students' misperceptions regarding their peers' alcohol consumption, (b) clarify students' misperceptions regarding their peers' feelings of comfort in drinking situations, and (c) generate ideas for alcohol prevention that are campus-specific.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Freshmen

The following recommendations are set in soft clay. They can and should be molded to conform to the unique characteristics of each school.

1. It is suggested that the two hour sessions be incorporated into the curriculum as part of the mandatory one credit health course most schools offer for incoming freshmen.
2. It is suggested that the sessions be facilitated by two individuals, that is, an educator and an assistant. The assistant should be a student volunteer from the group of students participating in the session. This helps to develop credibility.
3. It is suggested that the sessions begin in mid October and continue through the school year until all of the incoming freshmen have participated.
4. It is suggested that no more than 25 students participate in a session.

5. It is suggested that the sessions be held in classrooms with desks that can be moved in order to form five groups with five participants in each group.
6. It is suggested that groups be segmented by sex to reduce the potential for "peacocking."
7. It is suggested that the educator and the assistant conduct a mock session with colleagues before the actual sessions begin to get a feel for the process.
8. It is suggested that the ideas regarding prevention activities generated by the participants be implemented whenever possible. Those who create, tend to support.

4. The Instrument

An instrument was developed to assess the following: (a) students' drinking habits, (b) students' perceptions regarding their peers' consumption of alcohol, (c) students' feelings of comfort in drinking situations, and (d) students' perceptions regarding the typical male student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations, and (e) students' perceptions regarding the typical female student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations. Participants are also asked to indicate their year in school, gender, age, and G. P. A.

The first section contains six statements (i.e., 18 items) responded to on a five-point scale used to assess the following: (a) students' drinking habits, and (b) their perceptions regarding their peers' consumption of alcohol. Each of these first six statements include three items used to measure students' drinking habits and their perceptions regarding their peers' consumption. These statements regarding the quantity and frequency of alcohol use were developed by Dr. Ruth Engs at Indiana University during the 1973-1974 academic year (Engs, 1977). I have written permission from Dr. Engs to use these statements. The statements were modified to include (a) the University's name to make them campus specific, and (b) students' perceptions regarding their peers' consumption of alcohol.

The second section contains six statements (i.e., 18 items) responded to on a four-point Likert agreement scale used to assess the following: (a) students' feelings of comfort in drinking situations, (b) students' perceptions regarding the typical male student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations, and (c) students' perceptions regarding the typical female student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations. Item stems are positive to lessen the potential for confusion (Pilotte & Gable, 1990).

Content Validity

The foundation for content validity for the survey was the review of the literature. Six a priori categories were ascertained and items were developed. The a priori categories were as follows: (a) Category I was named Self Perception Frequency, (b) Category II was called Self Perception Quantity, (c) Category III was named Peer Perception Frequency, (d) Category IV was named Peer Perception Quantity, (e) Category V was called Self Perception Comfortability, and (f) Category VI was called Peer Perception Comfortability.

A panel of experts from the University community reviewed the item stems. Members of the panel included the following: (a) the alcohol coordinator, (b) the director of academic advising, (c) a clinical social worker, (d) a nurse practitioner, (e) an Assistant Professor of Psychology, and (f) a Professor from the Social Work Program.

A Content-Validity Rating Form developed by Gable and Wolf (1993, p. 99) was used by this panel of experts. This review resulted in the following changes: (a) two demographic questions were dropped, (b) abbreviations were replaced with complete words, and (c) average student was replaced with the typical male student and the typical female student.

Construct Validity and Reliability

The instrument was tested for construct validity and reliability at the University of Connecticut. A random sample of students from Residential Life was developed by computer. This sample consisted of 715 students or approximately 12% of the undergraduate students living on campus. Potential participants were mailed a letter, the instrument, and a self-addressed-stamped envelope. Questionnaires were returned by 303 students. One questionnaire was excluded because the student did not follow directions and a second was excluded because the student refused to respond to the items regarding the typical male student and the typical female student. 301 questionnaires were used for analyses representing a response rate of 42.09%.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 7.5) to empirically derive factors reflected by the items and to determine if there was a relationship between the a priori categories and the derived factors. A Principal Axis Factor Analysis and oblique rotation identified five factors. Factor I reflected Categories I and II and was named Self Quantity and Frequency. This factor was constructed by summing the responses for the items related to self frequency and quantity for beer and liquor (i.e., items 1, 2, 5, and 6). Factor II reflected Categories III and IV and was named Perception of Peers' Consumption. This factor was constructed by summing the responses related to students' perceptions regarding the typical male students' frequency and quantity and the typical female students' frequency and quantity (i.e., items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). Factor III mirrored Category V and was named Self Perception Comfortability. This factor was constructed by summing the responses related to self comfort in drinking situations (i.e., items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Factor IV reflected Category VI and was named Perception Typical Male Student's Comfortability. This factor was constructed by summing the responses related to students' perceptions regarding the typical male student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations (i.e., 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Factor V also reflected Category VI and was named Perception Typical Female Student's Comfortability. This factor was constructed by summing the responses related to students' perceptions regarding the typical female student's feelings of comfort in drinking situations (i.e., 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for Factors I, II, III, IV, and V identified above are .82, .75, .90, .84, and .81 respectively.

The instrument is used to measure the following: (a) students' drinking habits, (b) students' perceptions regarding their peers' consumption of alcohol, (c) students' feelings of comfort in drinking situations, and (d) students' perceptions regarding their peers' feelings of comfort in drinking situations. The questionnaire takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Scores are calculated for the following categories: (a) Self, (b) TMS (i.e., perceptions regarding the typical male student), and (c) TFS (i.e., perceptions regarding the typical female student). The frequency scores for beer, wine, and liquor are calculated by averaging the responses for all students for items 1, 3, and 5 respectively for each category. The quantity scores for beer, wine, and liquor are calculated by averaging the responses for all students for items 2, 4, and 6 respectively for each category. The comfort scores are calculated by averaging the responses for all students for items 7 - 12 for each category.

5. Get Acquainted Exercise

The educator forms five groups with five students in each group. Students place their first names in front of them on folded index cards. Students are asked to take turns and share something personal about themselves with the members of their group. For example, students often share information regarding their majors, personal hobbies, pets, favorite sports teams, and so forth.

Approximately every three minutes the educator tells students that it is time for the next student to share.

6. Procedures

The following steps are offered as a blueprint and are intended to facilitate the process in a manner that encourages students to have fun and learn at the same time:

Step 1. The educator administers the instrument. Students do not write their names on the instrument.

Step 2. The educator forms five groups with five students in each group.

Step 3. Students are given instructions for the Get Acquainted Exercise.

Step 4. The educator with the assistant scores the instruments while students get acquainted.

Step 5. The educator writes the results in table format on the blackboard. SELF, TMS, and TFS are written across as column headings. Frequency, Quantity, and Comfort are written vertically as row headings. The responses for the category labeled Self represent the actual norms associated with quantity, frequency, and feelings of comfort in drinking situations. The responses for the categories labeled TMS and TFS represent the students' perceived norms associated with quantity, frequency, and feelings of comfort in drinking situations. The differences should be clear.

Step 6. The educator asks students to work together with their group members to develop four or five ideas that might be used to clarify these misperceptions. Students are asked to select a spokesperson to report their group's results to the class.

Step 7. The educator calls time and asks students to return their chairs to the regular classroom setting.

Step 8. The educator calls on each spokesperson in turn and asks each one to share one idea. This process is repeated four or five times until the students' lists are exhausted. Students are encouraged to join in at any time during the discussion.

Step 9. The educator closes the session by asking students to continue the discussion outside of the classroom with friends and acquaintances who were not present.

6.1 Note.

Recommendation three suggests that the process should begin in October. The reason for this is that prevention specialists need students' perceptions associated with their college peers' consumption of alcohol and feelings of comfort in drinking situations and not their perceptions associated with their high school peers' consumption of alcohol and feelings of comfort in drinking situations.

7. Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors

The collection of campus specific information regarding students' misperceptions associated with their peers' consumption of alcoholic beverages and their feelings of comfort in drinking situations from all students is essential for any intervention or prevention effort. Administrators may inform returning sophomores, juniors, and seniors that completing a campus survey is mandatory. This might be accomplished by informing students that they will not receive their student identification cards or dining cards from the registrar until they fill out the survey which takes approximately 10 minutes. Resident assistants can be helpful with this process. Once the information is collected and analyzed it can be merged with the data collected from freshmen. This information can then be disseminated to the entire college or university community. An alternative method for gathering the needed information that is less expensive is for administrators and prevention specialists to administer the instrument developed for this study annually to a random sample of the students attending their institutions.

8. The Questionnaire is presented below.

ISN*

Alcohol Use and Feelings of Comfort in Drinking Situations

A Survey of Perceptions

This study is being conducted to determine students' drinking patterns and perceptions concerning alcohol use. Your participation is greatly appreciated. **DO NOT** write your name on the questionnaire to insure anonymity. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. **Please circle your answers.**

Year: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Gender: Male Female **Age:** _____ (please write in)

Residence during school semester: 1. on campus 2. off campus

Grade Point Average (4.0 ="A", 3.0="B", etc.):

1. 4.0 2. 3.5 3. 3.0 4. 2.5 5. 2.0 6. under 2.0

Section I: This section contains questions regarding your consumption of alcoholic beverages and your perceptions of the typical male student's and typical female student's consumption of alcohol. One drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 ounce of distilled spirits. Please be as honest as you can and if you are unsure, please offer your best judgment. Please circle only one number corresponding to your answer under the appropriate heading.

TMS = Typical Male Student TFS = Typical Female Student

1. Students at ISN, on average, usually drink beer:

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. once a year or less	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. more than once a year but less than once a month			
3. at least once a month but less than once a week			
4. at least once a week but not every day			
5. every day			

2. Students at ISN, on average, at any one time usually drink:

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. less than 1 can of beer or tavern glass	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. 1 or 2 cans of beer or tavern glasses			
3. 3 or 4 cans of beer or tavern glasses			
4. 5 or 6 cans of beer or tavern glasses			
5. more than 1 six pack (6 or more cans or tavern glasses)			

3. Students at ISN, on average, usually drink wine:

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. once a year or less	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. more than once a year but less than once a month			
3. at least once a month but less than once a week			
4. at least once a week but not every day			
5. every day			

4. Students at ISN, on average, at any one time usually drink :

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. less than 1 glass of wine	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. 1 or 2 wine glasses			
3. 3 or 4 wine glasses			
4. 5 or 6 wine glasses			
5. over 6 wine glasses			

5. Students at ISN, on average, usually drink liquor or spirits (whisky, gin, vodka, mixed drinks, etc.):

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. once a year or less	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. more than once a year but less than once a month			
3. at least once a month but less than once a week			
4. at least once a week but not every day			
5. every day			

6. Students at ISN, on average, at any one time usually drink:

	<u>Self</u>	<u>TMS</u>	<u>TFS</u>
1. less than 1 drink with liquor or spirits	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. 1 or 2 drinks with liquor or spirits			
3. 3 or 4 drinks with liquor or spirits			
4. 5 or 6 drinks with liquor or spirits			
5. over 6 drinks with liquor or spirits			

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Section II: This section contains statements regarding how comfortable you feel in drinking situations and your perceptions of how comfortable the typical male student and the typical female student feels in drinking situations. If you are unsure, please offer your best judgment. Please read each statement and circle the number that indicates how much you agree with the statement under the appropriate heading.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree

TMS = Typical Male Student TFS = Typical Female Student

7. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable in situations where alcohol is consumed.	<u>Self</u> 1 2 3 4	<u>TMS</u> 1 2 3 4	<u>TFS</u> 1 2 3 4
8. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable in situations where the main activity is drinking.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
9. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable with a date who has been drinking.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
10. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable at parties with strangers where alcohol is served.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
11. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable at parties with strangers who have had too much to drink.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
12. Students at <u>ISN</u> feel comfortable at parties where drinking games are played.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

*ISN = Insert School Name

9. References

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