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I, Leah M Howell, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

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Academic Identity Status and Alcohol Use Among College Students: A Mixed Methods Study

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Academic Identity Status and Alcohol Use Among College Students: A Mixed Methods Study

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In the Department of Educational Studies of the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services

by

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ABSTRACT

As a student affairs professional in higher education, my primary role is to support the development of a student outside the classroom, in an effort to enhance and compliment the classroom experience. In doing so, I have the opportunity to engage with students on a day-to-day basis that exhibit excellence in academics, leadership and service to their community. Despite their success in many other areas, when I talk to students they express little to no concern about their high risk activity and, in fact, give no indication that they even see these behaviors as risky.

The study was anchored in Social Cognitive and Identity Development Theory, and augmented by the phenomenon of the high functioning alcoholic, or persistent problem drinker. A sequential, explanatory mixed methods design was used in this study to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Specifically, garnering an understanding of the relationship between identity development and decision making related to high risk behaviors can enhance the ability of higher education professionals to better support the developmental needs of students on their campus.

During the first phase, a quantitative instrument was distributed to examine the relationships between academic identity status and alcohol use (n = 97). The instrument was a compilation of sub-sections, including general demographics, Academic Identity Measure (AIM), the Risky College Drinking Practices measure, and select questions adapted from the American College Health Assessment: National College Health Assessment. Results do not indicate a significant relationship between Academic Identity Status and decision-making related to alcohol use. Results do indicate significant gender differences in drinks consumed the last
time they “partied”/socialized. In addition, a positive correlation was found between the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RDCM) and the number of drinks consumed the last time they “partied”/socialized. During the second, qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to determine how students who were identified as individuals experiencing Academic Identity Achievement status, made decisions surrounding alcohol use, the experiences that influenced these decisions, and how they conceptualize high risk use. Decisions were generally made in consideration of academic priorities when the participants had an appreciation for the connection between various facets of their identity. Personal and observed negative experiences with alcohol impacted the decision to use, frequency, and type of alcohol consumption in this same group. All of the participants shared similar conceptions of high-risk alcohol use; however, not all participants identified high risk use as problematic. Three major themes emerged in this phase, including identity development through active exploration, impact of experiences with alcohol, and navigating environmental expectations. The substantive findings give way to future research examining variations in high risk alcohol use by gender and developmental stage.

Keywords: Academic Identity Development, high functioning alcoholic, persistent problem drinker, student affairs, harm reduction.
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“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same.”

Marianne Williamson

_A Return to Love_
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“How many times did I have to wake up in the morning learning about my evil actions the night before from other people? It was humorous at first, but eventually became hurtful to all involved. I didn’t even feel guilty. I blew it off and continued to get good grades. To me having good grades would compensate for anything stupid that I did drunk. Good grades would keep my parents quiet and make me feel as though my life was in control.”

Sarah Allen Benton – a personal journal excerpt (Benton, 2009)

The memory above represents a candid reflection of the experiences that Sarah Allen Benton had during her collegiate experience. After reading the quote and throughout the weeks to follow, it seemed more and more relatable to and reflective of the students on college campuses today. It was an experience with one student in particular, who could have traded places with Ms. Benton, which solidified the direction of the study shared in this dissertation. This experience left me as a researcher wondering how a student could by all accounts be living a successful life, earning excellent grades, serving as a leader in their respective organization, and maintaining positive relationships with those around them, while also choosing to be blackout drunk several days a week. One cannot help but wonder how and why a highly successful young adult would make this choice. It is from this question that the following study was born.

The present study seeks to make a contribution to the field of higher education student affairs by explaining what role, if any, an individual’s academic identity status may have in the decision making process related to alcohol use. Specifically, this dissertation will attempt to explain a phenomenon on campuses, whereas college-age students, who appear to be highly functioning and successful in their collegiate career, are choosing to engage in high-risk alcohol use in their social lives. It will do so through establishing an understanding of academic identity
status, its relationship to the greater identity of collegiate students and how this intersects with alcohol use.

The primary role of student affairs professionals in higher education is to support the outside the classroom development of a student, in an effort to enhance and compliment the classroom experience (Fried, 2012). They work with students on a day-to-day basis that exhibit excellence in academics, leadership, and service to their community, guiding them to find their passion and purpose – ultimately guiding students to an adaptive academic identity. Concurrently, water cooler conversation finds these same professionals questioning how to explain the disparate behavior in students who despite success in many other arenas are making decisions to engage in high-risk behaviors, in particular maladaptive alcohol use. Understanding how the developmental and cognitive processes of decision making and alcohol use interact with one another leads to a greater ability to offer education and support with targeted effectiveness (Goudriaan, Grekin, & Sher, 2007). Specifically, garnering an understanding of the relationship between identity development and decision making related to high risk behaviors (i.e. binge drinking) can enhance the ability of higher education professionals to better support the developmental needs of students on their campus. When a higher education professional considers the phase of identity development that a student is in, they are able to shape their approach to speak to that phase. For example, the conversation about decision making would look very different for a first year student, who has not settled on a major and is away from home for the first time, than it would for a senior who is nearing graduation and considering the next steps in their lives. Fundamental experiences and priorities are different between these two and as such both deserve support that considers this.
Most researchers view development as a general movement toward greater integration and complexity in the ways that individual’s process, think, value, and behave (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Pascarella and Terenzini purport that theories and models of student development seek to not only identify the dimensions and structure of growth in college students, but, more importantly, to explain the dynamics by which student growth occurs. Student development theories have been used in a number of college educational studies to examine myriad issues from decision-making to critical thinking skill development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, how students make meaning of the world and their role in it can have a profound influence on their life decisions and subsequent behavior choices. Critical thinking involves both cognitive skills and the dispositional openness or willingness to apply these skills. (Parada, et al., 2012; White, & Hingson, 2014). Cognitive and intellectual theories offer strong evidence that a supportive environment coupled with tasks that require critical thinking skills can help students negotiate the developmental stages of critical thinking successfully (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Hernandez, Montgomery, Kurtines, 2006).

**Alcohol Use and Abuse**

The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DMS-V) (2013) provides a clear definition of alcohol use disorder (AUD) through the assessment of the presence of 2 or more of 11 criterion. These criterion provide specific and measurable guidelines for determination of alcohol abuse in an individual. Severity of AUD is defined by the presence of additional criterion, using a criteria count (from two to 11) as an overall severity indicator. The severity ranged from mild to severe, with mild indicated by two to three criteria, moderate by four to five, and severe indicated by the presence of six or more
disorders (American Psychiatry Association, 2013; Hasin, et al., (2013). Individuals who are identified as having a more severe disorder, but do not experience the negative social impacts (i.e. still maintain employment, relationships, financial independence, etc.) are sometimes referred to as high functioning alcoholics, or, in an effort to address behaviors as opposed to the person through the label of alcoholic, a persistent problem drinker.

A persistent problem drinker can be described by many, but is yet to be clinically defined, and is estimated to make up about 50% of those individuals diagnosed as alcoholics (Benton, 2009). A wide range of behaviors may be demonstrated by persistent problem drinkers, many of which perpetuate the standard that they do not have a problem or are not engaging in high risk drinking behaviors. Paying bills on time while maintaining their job or career, sustaining friendships or relationships, and the ability to abstain for a significant period of time are just a few of the characteristics that lend themselves to the inability of a high functioning alcoholic to avoid problem recognition (Benton, 2009). Ultimately, a persistent problem drinker looks and acts like a member of the community in which they live and do not create an obvious societal drain, allowing them to essentially fly under the radar of those around them.

Characteristics of a persistent problem drinker attending college can be even more easily concealed and misleading as a result of the environment on the campus (Beseler, Taylor, Kraemer, & Leeman, 2012). In this instance, they may still be getting good grades, maintaining their engagement or leadership roles within organizations, or may be sustaining romantic relationships, ultimately living a heavily compartmentalized life. They justify their high risk drinking as a reward for working hard throughout the week, perpetuate the hook-up culture of a college campus disguised as a romantic relationship, and despite breaking the law or code of
conduct, see no true consequence for their actions when the violation is either dismissed or consequences are limited to submitting an essay or participating in an online education session (Benton, 2009; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Ravert, 2009).

**Alcohol Use among College Students**

College students are at an increased risk for experiencing a number of social, physical, and emotional health issues when compared to their non-college peers. Excessive alcohol use puts students at increased risk of being hospitalized or dying as a result of acute alcohol intoxication and also increases the odds that students will be victims or perpetrators of student sexual assault (Avci & Fendrich, 2010). Cooper (2002) found that risky sexual behavior choices made by college students also significantly increase as the amount of alcohol consumed increases. As a result, the probability of contracting and/or spreading infectious disease is also increased (Fair & Vanyur, 2011).

Despite a marked elevation in the academic profile of students attending college, alcohol-related problems among college students remain a major concern for university administrators, college personnel, and parents because of the many potential negative outcomes of drinking that students experience each year (Avci & Fendrich, 2010; Lowery et al., 2005; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2007). The pattern of higher rates of current alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use among full-time college students compared with rates for others aged 18 to 22 has remained consistent since 2002 (Hingson, Heeren, Aakos, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2001; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005; Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009; SAMSHA, 2007) with the literature offering evidence that strongly suggests that the majority of prevention strategies that have been employed thus far are not working.
Heavy episodic drinking is widespread on most university campuses (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009; Wechsler et al., 2000) and heavy alcohol use and abuse by students has been reported as a major to moderate problem by as many as 67% of college presidents (Lowery, Palmer, & Gehring, 2005).

The many problems associated with excessive alcohol use among college students are not new and date back to medieval times in Europe where students often roamed the streets after curfew, neglecting their studies for brothels and taverns (Lucas, 2006). The early history of American higher education also evidenced serious problems caused by the excessive alcohol consumption of students (Lowery et al., 2005). According to Dowdall and Wechsler (2002), the drinking habits of many university students pose as serious a problem, perhaps even more serious today, than they did more than 50 years ago. According to Hingson, Heeren, Winter, and Wechsler (2005), heavy drinking peaks around late adolescence and early adulthood and is especially common among college students 18 to 24 years-old. Excessive alcohol consumption has also been associated with a number of other serious potential consequences including: fatal and nonfatal injuries; alcohol poisoning; blackouts; academic failure; violence, including rape and assault; unintended pregnancy; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; property damage; and vocational and criminal consequences that could jeopardize future job prospects (Goldman, 2002, p. 5)

The poor choices and the lack of adequate coping skills of students often impact their academic success, not to mention the many potential health and safety hazards that arise as a result of high-risk behavior choices (Hingson & White, 2014; American College Health Association, 2013). Excessive alcohol use among university students is a public health concern affecting not only drinking students, but nondrinking peers who are subjected to arguments,
insults, vandalism, unwanted sexual advancements, disrupted sleep, taking care of severely intoxicated roommates, and interrupted study times (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012; Wechsler, Nelson, & Weitzman, 2000).

Despite these perceived negatives, there is research to indicate that not all consequences are perceived as negative. For example, binge eating and skipped meals related to alcohol use is seen as a positive consequence roughly a quarter of the time, most commonly associated with women and presumed to be in relation to body image. Furthermore, blackout or memory loss is identified as a negative consequence only half of the time, with another 35% of college students indicating that blacking out as a result of alcohol use is neither a positive or negative consequence (Mallett, Bachrach, & Turrisi, 2008).

Researchers have found that young college binge drinkers are 19 times more likely to develop alcoholism than non-binge drinkers (Courtney & Polich, 2009). To further complicate the problem, many students and some parents view such heavy alcohol consumption and the “animal house” party mentality as a rite of passage that all college students deserve and are entitled to experience (Walters, Bennett, & Nolo, 2000). According to Benton (2009), the majority of college students phase out of excessive alcohol consumption following a three to four year period of heavy binge drinking. However, Benton also reported that many young adults do not reach this maturing out phase and may enter a professional environment that normalizes heavy drinking thus encouraging these alcoholic drinking patterns to continue. Moreover, each year an estimated 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries months or years before they reach this phasing out period (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009). Beyond the concern over behavioral patterns of high risk drinking perpetuated by college binge drinking are the physical ones. Adolescence marks a period of
significant brain development. Studies indicate that decision making skills, which are reliant on prefrontal lobe functioning, can be negatively impacted by high risk drinking during this developmental period (Goudriaan, Grekind, & Sher, 2007). This will be explored in greater detail in chapter two.

Regardless of drinking levels prior to late adolescence, research indicates that those who attend college are at a greater risk for binge drinking once they enter the college setting (Quinn & Fromme, 2011; Hingson, et al., 2009). This is largely attributed to environmental factors that have been established to play a critical role in high risk alcohol use or binge drinking (Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2004; Timberlake et al., 2007). Frequently, campuses where there is a high Greek presence or those with a heavy focus on athletics, specifically NCAA Division 1 departments, have been identified as having a greater number of students who engage in high risk or binge drinking (Weitzman, Nelson, & Wechsler, 2003). Believed to be related to the social nature of these campuses, this phenomenon can increase access to alcohol and peer influence; however, current research does not offer a consistent explanation. Regardless of campus environments, of particular note are high risk groups, including men, students affiliated with a Greek organization, athletes and younger students (Weitzman et al., 2003). When combined with environmental factors, the risky behaviors exhibited in these groups are even more enhanced and create greater potential for negative consequences. Student abuse of alcohol in colleges and universities is not unique to particular regions of the country or to particular types of institutions of higher education; such behavior appears to be universal (Ostrander & Marinho, 1998). As a result, alcohol prevention programming has been a major part of campus life for several decades, and a variety of intervention strategies have been employed in an attempt to reduce excessive alcohol on campuses.
With this problem in mind, one might propose that an integrated education model that engages and challenges student beliefs with new options and information can influence the process of students’ decision-making. Traditional alcohol education models, for example, focus on the biological processes of alcohol use and avoidance behaviors (Nelson, et. al, 2010; NIAAA, 2007) as opposed to a model that supports and challenges decision making as it applies to the use of alcohol. The resulting dissonance between traditional education models and a more engaging and supportive model may open the possibility for students to consider new ways of understanding and thinking, requiring the use of their critical thinking skills. Osberg and colleagues (2011) offered support for this type of strategy suggesting that targeting the beliefs of new students regarding alcohol use might be an effective intervention.

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Traditional-age students (i.e., 18-23 years old) come to higher education with a wide range of skills, both in their academic and social preparedness. This variance among skills sets can affect a student’s ability to appropriately recognize their academic efficacy, either by over or under-estimating proficiency (Lynch, 2006), and can directly affect the students’ outcome and efficacy expectations. Similarly, when students arrive, they have significantly varied experiences with alcohol use, thus variation in both resistance self-efficacy (i.e. the ability to make choices independent of others) and harm reduction self-efficacy (i.e. the knowledge and skills to use alcohol responsibly), which can lead them to over or under-estimate their ability to manage alcohol use (Cho, 2007). Just as the classroom curriculum is an expected part of the college experience, so is alcohol, with students often viewing alcohol use as a “rite of passage” and believe they are able to drink in excess and otherwise engage in high risk behaviors (Crawford & Novak, 2006; Ravert, 2009). The research literature clearly demonstrates that
many adolescents make the decision to use alcohol (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2002; American College Health Association, 2009) despite much attention to intervention efforts to prevent such use. Furthermore, research indicates that emerging adults continue to make the decision to use alcohol, many in a high-risk capacity. Common myths about alcohol use (“Drinking isn’t that dangerous”, “I can drink and still be in control”, etc.) are pervasive on a college campus (NIAAA, 2002). Finally, environmental factors such as access to alcohol are associated with many college settings further exacerbate the situation, resulting in potentially lethal consequences for high risk alcohol users (Hingson, et al., 2009).

Research has revealed that psychological, psychiatric, psychosocial, social, environmental, peer, and family factors contribute to adolescent alcohol (and illicit drug) use and initiation (Callas et al., 2004). Various intervention strategies designed to delay adolescent alcohol onset have targeted the population, including media, advertising, educational, and community, but has resulted in limited measurable effect and these gains were not sustainable (Deas & Thomas, 2004). It is not clear what factors contribute to a highly successful student’s decision to engage in high-risk alcohol use, and this gap in the literature needs to be addressed in order to understand this problem to the extent that more effective, or targeted, interventions can be developed. This study assumes that one lacking component of previous attempts to delay adolescent alcohol initiation might be a lack of understanding surrounding identity-related decision making factors, their catalysts and influencing effects.

The importance of this study is found in its attempt to extend knowledge and advance theory. The theory this research seeks to advance is academic identity development, informed by social cognitive theory, by exploring its application to decision making in alcohol use. It is
assumed that the education industry dedicates countless human capital and economic resources to assisting adolescents who engage in alcohol use, particularly as patterns of use mature. This assumption is supported by the dedicated efforts to research adolescent alcohol use and onset (Warner & White, 2003). If these types of resources were better informed, students may be better served, or at the very least, spared exposure to alcohol-related risky behavior or related social and development consequences, even death. This research is also important because at the fundamental core stands the possibility of unlocking a better way to inform college students how to resist alcohol initiation or high-risk use. This study and the understanding that comes from it directly impacts the work and engagement student affairs practitioners may have with students.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status (i.e. earning high grades, exhibiting high levels of campus engagement, and maintaining a positive self-concept) with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Specifically, this study seeks to investigate how and why high-performing and developed college students make decisions to engage in or avoid high-risk alcohol use. Research suggests that students with a more highly developed identity status should make decisions that reflect reduction of risk or harm (Bishop et al., 1997; Bishop et al., 2005; Goudriaan, Grekin, & Sher, 2007). As such, it may be presumed that as a student exhibits more progressively sophisticated identity statuses, their choice to engage in high risk alcohol use would become less frequent; however, there is situational and anecdotal disconnect that appears to result in students with more highly developed identity statuses continuing to make frequent decisions to engage in high-risk alcohol use. Specifically,
students with highly developed academic identity status continue to earn high grades, exhibit high levels of campus engagement, and maintain a positive self-concept.

First, a quantitative survey will be conducted to examine the relationship between academic identity status and alcohol use. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the second qualitative phase will explain the way(s) that students with highly developed academic identities make decisions related to the alcohol use. Qualitative results will be utilized to explain patterns of alcohol use identified through quantitative results and develop an understanding of the experiences and decisions leading to variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity.

It is hypothesized that these students have not experienced a synthesis of identity and do not view their decision to engage in high risk alcohol use as impactful or relevant to their academic identity. In addition, the lack of perception of consequences as negative and the intentional choice engage in high risk activities as a component of the collegiate experience perpetuate this disconnect (Crawford & Novak, 2006; NIAAA, 2002, 2007; Ravert, 2009). The results may inform theory and practice related to alcohol education and intervention efforts on college campuses through a clearer explanation of this phenomenon on high-risk alcohol use among those with highly developed students and offer insight to support identity based harm reduction approaches. As campus professionals are better able to understand and explain disparate behaviors, they can then move to determine where the developmental window of impact is, which ultimately support healthier and safer future generations.

**Quantitative Research Questions**

1. What relationships exist between the levels of academic identity status and alcohol use?
2. What patterns of alcohol use are found for students with highly developed academic identities?

**Qualitative Research Questions**

1. How do students with highly developed academic identity status make decisions surrounding alcohol use?
2. What experiences influence decisions about alcohol use in college students with highly developed academic identity status?
3. How do students with highly developed academic identity status conceptualize high-risk alcohol use?

**Mixed Methods Questions**

1. How do the quantitative results explain and inform the qualitative results?
2. How can the understanding that emerges from the quantitative and qualitative data be used to provide a deeper understanding of the decisions surrounding high-risk alcohol use in support of harm reduction efforts on a college campus?

**Researcher Statement of Subjectivity**

For the purposes of this study, the function of the researcher’s statement of subjectivity is two-fold. First, it provides me with an opportunity to share my philosophical orientation with my readers. This orientation, including the underlying assumptions and theories, have assuredly influenced the subject matter choice as well as my approach to the research. Despite attempts to remain detached, there is an inherent bias that accompanies research in that who we are influences the way we approach and proceed in research. Specifically, my own professional experiences have included engaging with a number of students who would fall into the category of highly successful while also exhibiting persistently problematic drinking behaviors. As such,
remaining detached allowed me to be more objective during the research and analysis process, while avoiding intertwining my daily work with the study process. It is my hope that this statement will convey an openness and transparency that allows my readers to clearly understand my positionality related to the research and form their own determinations as to my influence on the study.

Growing up, I was always what one might call a “good girl”. Having skipped first grade, I developed the sense of being smart early in life. I found comfort and success in the classroom - I didn’t really know anything different and the expectation to earn good grades was unspoken but clear. Beginning in middle school I was involved in band and track, expanding my athletic involvement to include swimming when I entered high school. Up until my ninth grade year, I was in the College Preparatory track and did well, except when it came to Algebra. It was the first time in my life that I had not been successful in a class and I was at such a loss for how to handle it that I froze and did nothing – and my teachers just passed me on to the next level, despite failing that course. Fortunately, my mother intervened and I was moved into a more appropriate course based on my performance. At the same time, I began to develop a much wider social identity, expanding my friends circle to include influences that were perhaps not as positive as those I had up until that point. Regardless, I was successful in the social arena as well and had my first experience with alcohol that year. I remember it well – my friend and I drank a full bottle of Ouzo and it was terrible! To this day I cannot smell black licorice without being transported back to that night.

Half way through the fall of my tenth grade year, my family moved over an hour away from the city I had grown up in and I had to start over to develop new relationships and sense of self. In retrospect, that move was likely the best thing that ever happened to me, because I was
certainly not on the path to continuing my education where I was. I excelled in the classroom, continued to engage in extracurricular activities, and developed a wide social circle. Despite having friends in many different crowds, including those we referred to as “burn-outs” (who were known to skip school, drink, smoke marijuana, and engage in other high risk behavior), I did not drink throughout the remainder of my high school career.

College provided many new academic challenges and social opportunities. While I had been very successful in the high school classroom, I quickly learned that the college classroom was a different place all around. I learned how to study and for the most part, was what one would call a good student. I continued to be involved in a number of activities, including Residence Hall Association, theater, and eventually joining a sorority my junior year. Looking back, I can count on one hand the number of times I drank throughout college, but I still remained very active in a number of social circles. For me, using alcohol did not equate to being social, although I knew many others for whom these two things were inextricably linked. I went on to Graduate School immediately following undergrad, earning a Master’s degree in Social Work, then went to work my first professional role.

As a young twenty-something, I found myself out and surrounded by high risk alcohol use on a regular basis. While my friends are intelligent and very accomplished in their own right, I often found myself as sort of the odd-man out, being the only one with the level of formal education that I have. At age twenty-five, I came to a major crossroads in my life, reaching kidney failure and needing a transplant. I spent time on dialysis, and for the first time in my life I understood how alcohol and other drugs are used so often as a coping mechanism. During this time, despite my health status, I did not make good decisions related to high risk behavior, specifically as it related to alcohol use. It was easy – I still had friends that were heavily
entrenched in the local nightlife, some even owning bars – so I drank a lot, for free. Looking back, it was clearly a way of detaching myself from the reality that I was dealing with a serious illness and facing my own mortality. I was lucky – I got a transplant after only 16 months of dialysis, but it failed seven days later. This was a catastrophic blow and I found myself lost, with no idea of who I was or where I was doing. That year was likely the riskiest of my life, between the prescription medication I was taking and the amount I was drinking. When I got my second transplant, thirteen months after the first, I knew that I needed to find myself again and that I needed to make better decisions if I was ever going to get back on track with my academic and personal goals.

I returned to school not long after the second transplant and began pursuing a degree in student affairs. It was not a field that I had actively sought to pursue, but rather it found me through an incredible assistantship opportunity with the Office of the Ombudsman. Here I found myself advocating for others, helping them to find the best version of themselves, guiding them through crises, and celebrating their successes. It was also during this time that I began to recognize a distinct pattern of disparity in the students I worked with. Often, I was interacting with students facing substance use issues, stress and anxiety over academic expectations, and combinations of the two, but even those who seemed to be facing significant stress in these areas had extreme variations in the role that alcohol played in their lives. Some of the most intriguing and challenging situations were those students who were highly successful in their academic pursuits, but once Friday, or sometimes Thursday, were known to frequently drink to the point of black out for the remainder of the weekend, week after week.

When I left Graduate School, I continued to work in Student Affairs at two different institutions, in the areas of academic advising, student leadership development and Fraternity and
Sorority Life. These professional experiences, coupled with my academic experiences, I had many opportunities to reflect on and make meaning of my experience as a smart, academically successful student as well as my own use of alcohol. I was presented with a wide variety of professional opportunities to engage students in similar reflection and took full advantage of these opportunities. My work in Fraternity and Sorority Life has provided innumerable opportunities to present programs focused on interpersonal development, alcohol education and harm reduction. In addition, I am often presented with informal opportunities to engage in this dialogue. I sincerely enjoy conversations I have with students around their academic demands, social experiences, and future goals, but continue to find a disparate philosophy pertaining to the role that alcohol plays in their lives.

Over the last few years my work with harm reduction and alcohol abuse prevention programming has expanded, as has my depth and breadth of knowledge related to all subjects alcohol-related. It is ultimately my professional goal to work with students to enhance their college experience such that they maximize their capacity for intellectual, social, and personal development. This presents for me a great deal of concern for the current and future health and well-being of successful students who drink heavily and do not connect these two facets of themselves. I thoroughly enjoyed my time as an undergraduate and wish this for my students as well; however, I cannot help but wonder what will become of those individuals who are using alcohol in such a high-risk manner. I have already seen students who have lost their careers as a result of their alcohol use and I cannot help but think about how we can engage them in a more meaningful way and early, to prevent this from happening to others. I was very fortunate to have good mentors in my life, who challenged me when my actions did not align with my espoused values and because of this I seek to be that same mentor to others.
My personal philosophy leans toward significant openness to new experiences and knowledge, gleaned primarily through interactions and conversations with the people around me. From a theoretical perspective, the constructivist paradigm speaks to my understanding of knowledge, in that our applied experiences inform what we know. That is to say, learning takes place not simply in a classroom, but through active engagement and collaboration with others (Montero-Fleta, 2012). This is particularly relevant in the field of student affairs, as much of the work done is programmatic and serves students to make meaning of the world around them (Guido, Chávez & Lincoln, 2010; Magolda, 2009). It was my hope to through this process to engage students in honest and open dialogue that allowed them to share their experiences unfiltered. The result is an opportunity for readers to understand the lived experiences of college students who have achieved academic identity and the factors that influence their decision making process in alcohol use.

**Ethical Issues**

In higher education research, consideration must be made for participants to ensure that the principle of “do no harm” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013) is upheld throughout the entire process. This refers to specific ethical issues including confidentiality, anonymity and privacy for the participants. In addition, it applies to issues of informed consent, mental and/or physical harm, transparency in data collection, and respect for participant dignity. Finally, the principle requires that attention is paid to the power and control, or positionality of the researcher. These issues can arise at nearly every stage of the study, from establishing research questions through data collection and on to the presentation of results, and relies on the researchers ability to use common sense, have an ethic of care, communicate openly about methods, and keep the best
interests of the participants at the forefront of their mind throughout the research process (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013).

While conducting this study, it was my ethical obligation to uphold this principle and all of its facets. Confidentially led me to not share any information I acquired from participants without their consent to do so. In alignment with Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols, participants in Phase One were presented with an information sheet when logging in to complete the survey. Participants in Phase Two were then presented with an informed consent form. In both documents, their role as a participant and the expectations of their participation were clarified. The documents further summarized the potential benefits of their participation, explained the voluntary nature of their participation, and clearly communicated their ability to exit the study at any time. Finally, the documents outlined the extent and limitations of confidentiality and the steps that would be taken to protect data and records. Maintaining anonymity informed my understanding that when and if I shared information about the study with others, these were not any overly identifiable data (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). Phase Two participants were automatically assigned a unique ID number through the online system and were not required to provide any identifying information.

Results from the quantitative phase were organized by a separate individual, identified as research staff, in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. Once organized, the research staff presented me with a list of individuals who met the criteria to participate in phase two for recruitment. Preserving the anonymity of the participants in the phase two selection process ensured that my role as an administrative staff member on and familiarity with the campus was not perceived as an impact on the selection of these participants. Phase Two participants were interviewed in private settings on campus and, in accordance with the
Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols, were asked to sign a Statement of Informed Consent. During the interviews, sensitivity to the personal nature of the subject matter remained a priority and subjects were not pressed for information in areas they were uncomfortable talking about. All of the participants were assigned pseudonyms, which were then used throughout the entire research process. Details that came out during the narrative that may have compromised anonymity were altered and, when necessary redacted, to retain meaning but avoid identification. As previously stated, I used a transcription service for the interviews that came highly recommended by several of my colleagues. This company has a reputation for confidentiality and protection of information. The transcriptions, as well as all of the electronic data for this project (audio recordings, memos, journals, analytic documents, and drafts), were stored on a password protected computer, in password protected folders. While direct quotations from the transcripts in this study were used, care not to include information that could identify specific individuals through context was exercised. Similar to other studies, I cannot guarantee anonymity; however, through the steps outlined above, the likelihood of a breach of privacy was significantly reduced.

**Contribution to the Literature**

The results of this study will contribute to the literature through its address of the gap in work related to the decisions students make when choosing to use or avoid alcohol use. More pointedly, this study will begin the exploration of the relationship between an individual’s academic identity status and alcohol related decisions. Specifically, the study will make a small but valuable contribution to the literature through offering a better understanding of why highly successful students choose to drink in a persistently problematic fashion.
Poor choices, a lack of coping skills, and refusal to factor in potential consequences of high-risk behavior choices often impact students’ academic success. A review of the literature found that students’ high-risk behavior choices and the ensuing potential negative consequences have historically been addressed independently as single issue alcohol prevention programs on campuses (Sharmer, 2001; Wechsler, Seibring, Liu, & Ahl, 2004).

While the campus landscapes are seemingly overflowing with programs that have offered alcohol prevention education as single topic programs for first-year students, recent studies suggest that an integrated program, where related topics are combined and presented together, may produce more positive and successful outcomes (Fair & Vanyur, 2011). Offering reliable information coupled with alternative behavior options may engage students’ critical thinking skills, challenging them to consider alternative behaviors that reduce or avoid high-risk situations.

Student development theory offers some evidence that suggests an integrated model that engages the critical thinking of college students may help them make better choices (LaBrie, Migliuri, & Cail, 2009; White, & Hingson, 2014). Despite the support for cognitive-behavioral skills training related to alcohol education, there is still a missing component in considering identity style and decision-making for late adolescents in the college arena. Even more importantly, creating this training through the lens of identity development and status will address both the individual mechanisms that play along with the environmental factors that normalize high-risk drinking on a college campus.

While the extent to which drinking impacts academic performance in any meaningful way is highly differentiated and contextual, these studies help shape the current landscape of research into how drinking impacts the central focus of higher education, namely academic
success. Furthermore, there seems ample evidence to suggest alcohol consumption is connected to the academic lives of almost all college students, regardless of level of achievement or alcohol use. It is also evident that many students come to college with positive expectancies for alcohol use, believing alcohol use is prevalent and accepted on campus. Furthermore, they perceive alcohol as playing a central role in the college experience, and as such may be motivated or decide to use alcohol for a variety of reasons (Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007; Tan, 2012) If this is the case for a high achieving student, this research could suggest that there may be significant competing values at play. Students come to college with a variety of motivations to drink or not to drink. While a student may be academically motivated and therefore wary of heavy drinking, the decision to drink may lie in other motivations, including the social or environmental expectations of alcohol use, such that again they face competing motives for use.

**Chapter Summary**

Throughout this chapter the reader has been introduced to the overarching ideas that this study will explore. Specifically, a brief review of historical context and literature has been presented, which supports its rationale, relevance, and significance. As discussed, the purpose of this study is to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. This explanation is sought through a mixed methods framework, beginning with a quantitative inquiry, followed by a qualitative phase. Research questions for each phase, along with mixed methods questions were presented. Also discussed are the positionality of the researcher and ethical considerations during research, which should ensure readers have an understanding of how this study connects to me both personally and professionally, and should
be able to garner to what extent my biases and assumptions influence the finding and conclusions in later chapters.

The next sections of this dissertation will include a presentation of the literature and theoretical framework, a discussion of the methodological approach and research process, and study results. It will conclude with a discussion of these results, including the implications for practice and direction for future research. This study and the interpretations and conclusions to come, were situated within this historical framework of research. It is my hope that this study will encourage this line of inquiry to be continued and will ultimately have a positive effect on the health, safety, and well-being of students through its ability to impact prevention and intervention work on college campuses.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter will discuss the literature and theory relevant to this study. The section begins with an exploration of theory including Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Identity Development, as well as a discussion of the phenomenon of a high-functioning alcoholic, or persistent problem drinker. The section continues with a discussion of alcohol use and abuse, and education programs. The section will close with a presentation of the theoretical framework and its application to the study.

Self-regulatory and decision making skills are associated with cognitive development taking place during the collegiate years (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012; Parada, et al., 2012). Social Cognitive Theory provides a means of measuring social cognitions that may be important in behavioral regulation relative to identity (Oei & Morawska, 2004). Research to date has investigated the link between identity and exercise (Anderson & Cychosz, 1995; Petosa, et al., 2003) and identity and other health behaviors, such as tobacco use and sexual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 1999; Storer, Cychosz, & Andersen, 1997). However, research has not utilized the predictive frameworks offered by Identity Theory and Social Cognitive Theory to investigate the relationships between identity, behavior, and decision making for alcohol consumption during the collegiate years. The investigation of this relationship will be the focus of the present study to further the literature related to high risk alcohol use and persistent problem drinkers (Demb & Campbell, 2009); and will be grounded in a student development model.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is an approach to understanding human cognition, motivation, and emotion which assumes that people are active agents in shaping their
environments (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 2011; Maddux, 1995; Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). SCT assumes that people are able to symbolize their experiences into internal models of action that allow them to engage in forethought to purposefully direct their behavior. Specifically, SCT is grounded in the premise that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior, assuming that people are capable of self-reflecting about their behavior and experiences.

Through this self-reflection they can self-regulate their behavior (Cho, 2007). Finally, this theory sees inner personal factors, environmental events, and behavior as all mutually interacting in a reciprocal manner (Maddux, 1995). Social Cognitive Theory incorporates an important self-related variable having to do with personal agency: self-efficacy. Self-efficacy asks the question, “What can I do”? This construct is viewed as individuals’ beliefs about their ability to carry out the courses of action necessary to lead to an outcome (Bandura, 1993, 1997) and is thought to have important implications for behavior (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). Specifically, self-efficacy beliefs are thought to influence the choice of goals, attempts, and persistence at reaching those goals, as well as reactions to setbacks along the way (Maddux, 1995, 2003).

The self has been identified as the “psychological apparatus that allows individuals to think consciously about themselves” (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p.8). Further, the self has been identified as a worthwhile construct of investigation in relation to health behavior (Contrada & Ashmore, 1999). Identity asks the question, “who am I”? Viewed as subcomponents of the self, identities are the selves-situated in the context of a particular role (e.g. self as mother, self as friend; Stets & Burke, 2003). Identities hold accompanying expectations from both the individual holding that identity and from others and are thought to guide behavior (Gecas & Burke, 1995;
Stets & Burke, 2003). Further, people are thought to differ in the extent to which they assimilate a particular identity into their sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2003), thus impacting critical thinking and decision making on an individual basis. For example, the decision making process an individual would employ in a professional setting regarding financial management is often vastly different than in one’s personal finances, resulting from a variation in the sense of self related to these roles.

### Identity Development

Identity development is a crucial process which occurs during the period of adolescence and young adulthood. (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Schwartz, et al, 2011). Researchers have suggested that the adolescent period is becoming prolonged due to increasing numbers of individuals pursuing post-secondary education (Kerckhoff, 2002; Larson, 2002; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). During this period known as “post-adolescence”, further identity formation is believed to take place (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Erickson’s stages of Psychosocial Development outlines the individual experience as a person moves through eight life stages toward the formation of personal identity (Erikson, 1950; Erickson, 1968; Waterman, 1982). In his work, Erikson identified several developmental issues that may become the focus of an identity crisis. Of particular interest during the collegiate or post-adolescent years is stage five, during which an individual experiences a crisis between identity achievement and role confusion. During adolescence significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development takes place (Marcia, 1980); and these components align with one another in a manner that guides the developing adolescent towards adulthood.

Traditionally thought to occur from age 13 to 18, contemporary thought now expands the adolescent timeframe to 25 years of age, acknowledging the intersection between each area of
development as having a greater impact than once believed (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999). The hormonal changes that propel physical development in an individual shape an individual’s cognitive development, thus impacting decision-making processes, while emotional development is most heavily influenced during adolescence by the social development or relationships a person experiences (Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996). Although identity formation occurs throughout one’s lifetime, it is during adolescence that an individual moves toward the development of an integrated sense of self (Bishop et al., 2005). Thought to be critical to the identity formation process, Erikson supported the value of exploration, with a basic assumption that the transition from adolescence to adulthood involves a progressive strengthening in the sense of identity (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001).

**Adolescent Identity Formation**

Identity formation is the primary developmental task that occurs during the period of adolescence (Erikson, 1950, 1968). The successful completion of this process culminates with a sense of continuity of self and enables the adolescent to successfully commence the subsequent tasks of adulthood (Erikson, 1950). Of particular interest during the collegiate or late adolescent years is stage five, during which an individual experiences a crisis between identity achievement and role confusion. The identity development process starts during early adolescence (Erikson, 1950). This period is marked by the onset of puberty (Erikson, 1950), which typically occurs at eleven years of age for females and twelve years of age for males (Richards, Abell & Petersen, 1993). The end of adolescence is highly variable (Kleiber & Rickards, 1985). Modell, Furstenberg and Hershberg (1977) suggest that five circumstances indicate the conclusion of adolescence and the commencement of young adulthood. These transition events include leaving school, entering the work force, moving away from family, getting married, and setting up a
Societal changes that promote delay of these traditional transition events may serve to elongate the adolescent development period even more, if not from a developmental standpoint but from a practical one (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2010).

James Marcia (1966) expands on Erikson’s stage of identity versus role confusion, suggesting that it is not simply a crisis between identity achievement and identity confusion, but that this period is more accurately characterized by the individual’s level of exploration and commitment to identity. Since Marcia’s initial work, the study of identity has expanded to include many difference types of identity, including academic identity, racial and ethnic identity, and leadership identity, among others. (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Umaña-Taylor, Quintana, Lee, Cross, Rivas-Drake, Schwartz, & Seaton, 2014; Was & Isaacson, 2008). A student’s identity development plays a critical role in navigating the collegiate experience. It is the lens through which they engage in their world and can have a significant impact on decision-making. This is emphasized during transitional periods, for example the first year of study, when life choices are more pronounced than they may have been in the past and the freedom to make one’s own choices may be a new experience. Occasionally, that freedom to make choices conflicts with external expectations to conform, most prominently in the occupational arena. Research suggests that lower levels of identity development are related to a variety of adjustment problems (Ivarsson, Gillberg, Arvidsson, & Broberg, 2002; Marcia, 1994). Selecting a major, gaining experience through co-op or internship programs, and the ever present expectation to excel at everything does not leave a great deal of room for students to fully explore their complete identity.

Although it has been suggested that late adolescence may typically end at around 23 years of age, the age at which adolescence ends and young adulthood begins seems to be
increasing greatly both in North America and around the world (Larson, 2002; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Academics have suggested that in the recent past, the period of adolescence is being prolonged due to increasing numbers of youth seeking out post-secondary education (Kerckhoff, 2002; Larson, 2002; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). This new demand for increased education is due largely to the higher requirements needed to obtain desirable jobs in the workforce (Larson, 2002; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). In 1971, only 34 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 to 29 had attended college, yet thirty years later, in 2001, over 58 percent of 25 to 29 year olds had some college education (Caldwell, 2005). Students attending university and college are thought to be in a period of extended adolescence, sometimes called “post-adolescence” (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). It is speculated that this post-adolescent phase may provide an opportunity for further identity development to occur (Mortimer & Larson, 2002).

**Identity and Self-Efficacy**

While SCT and Identity Theory emerge from different perspectives, the theories share key assumptions about individuals’ behaviors and influences on adolescent/emerging adults’ development. Both theories posit that behavior is goal directed and see individuals as active in determining their behavior (Bandura, 1997; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Maddux, 1995). Also, both theories recognize the role of others in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2005). Identity Theory assumes that individual behavior is influenced by others’ expectations. Further, individuals gauge others’ reactions to their behavior in a situation so as to determine success at portraying a particular goal identity (Reitzes & Burke, 1980). Social Cognitive Theory also recognizes the role of others in shaping behavior. Vicarious experience and verbal persuasion by others are seen as determinants of self-efficacy and this variable has been reliably shown to predict behavior (Bandura, 1997). The present study seeks to build upon the common ground
shared by these two perspectives and draws ideas from each, a practice that has been advocated by self-researchers (Leary & Tangney, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Through asking the question “who am I?” identity provides a means of assessing a goal or standard for behavioral regulation. According to identity theory, these individuals should regulate their behavior in a manner that is consistent with the expectations associated with being identity-achieved, however does not offer support for those who do not make decisions in alignment. The predictions about how and why identity influences behavior offered by identity theory have to do with social cognitive variables such as affect, intentions and efficacy beliefs (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The current study seeks to gain a clearer understanding of the decision-making processes involved in alcohol use relevant to identity status, specifically their Academic Identity Status.

**Identity Definitions and Models**

Throughout the literature, identity has been referred to by many terms including self, ego, I, and me (Kroger, 2004) and from here forward will be referred to as identity. Identity has been defined by many academics such as Erikson (1950, 1968), Marcia (1980) and Waterman (1984). Many similarities exist between these definitions of identity. Each definition serves to provide continuity between past, present and future, integrate behaviors in multiple areas of life, and explain one’s motivation for behaviors as developing a sense of identity (Waterman, 1984). As Erikson’s conceptualization of identity has been used extensively throughout the academic areas of psychology, sociology, and leisure (Côté & Levine, 1987; Côté & Levine, 2002; Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), his definition of identity is used to guide the current evaluation. He describes identity as:

> a sense of inner wholeness…between that which he has come to be during
the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and expect of him (Erikson, 1968, p. 87).

Many different models of identity formation have been developed including Erikson’s Psychosocial model, Blos’ Individuation model, Kolberg’s Cognitive Development model, Loevinger’s Ego Development model, and Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental model (Kroger, 2004). In each of these models, identity is developed gradually through the adolescent phase and is seen as a process which involves reformulating one’s identity and distinguishing between the self and other (Lavoie, 1994). Despite some similarities that exist between these models, only Erikson’s (1950) model has been given substantial attention within the identity literature (Lavoie, 1994). This may be due to the failure of the other models to take the environment into account in the identity development process (Kroger, 2000). In contrast, Erikson’s (1950, 1968) model was the first to recognize the role of surroundings in shaping identity (Kroger, 2004). Moreover, other models display a lack of precision, have limited methodological rigor, and have not been verified empirically (Kroger, 2004). Therefore, Erikson’s psychosocial model guided the conceptualization of identity in the present study. SCT provides a means of measuring social cognitions that may be important in behavioral regulation relative to identity. Further, self-efficacy beliefs may influence individuals’ persistence at aligning their identity and behavior. As previously indicated, research has not investigated the relationships between identity, behavior, and decision making specific to alcohol use in consideration of frameworks offered by Identity Theory and Social Cognitive Theory.
Erikson’s Psychosocial Model of Identity

Erikson’s (1950) conceptualization of identity formation has been the basis of most identity research, particularly in the fields of psychology and sociology (Côté & Levine, 2002). Erikson’s psychosocial model of development contains eight developmental stages in which all humans’ progress in sequential order throughout the lifespan. These stages include: Trust vs. Mistrust (age 0-18 months), Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (age 18 months to 3 years), Initiative vs. Guilt (age 3 to 5 years), Industry vs. Inferiority (age 5 to 12 years), Identity vs. Identity Confusion (age 12 to 18 years), Intimacy vs. Isolation (age 18 to 40 years), Generativity vs. Stagnation (age 40-65 years), and Integrity vs. Despair (age 65 years and older). Each stage takes place during a different period of life and represents a crisis that must be overcome by the individual in order for healthy development to continue. Erikson’s (1950, 1968) fifth stage, Identity vs. Identity Confusion, takes place throughout the adolescent period. While identity is believed to exist in some form from birth, during this adolescent stage, individuals develop an identity through the assimilation of previous childhood identifications and the modification of these identifications into a coherent whole. Consistency of the new identity must be established within the individual as well as in the individual’s portrayal to others. The adolescent period consists of the exploration of various identities and culminates with the commitment to one final identity. This final identity results in “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 19). While most adolescents successfully develop a consistent identity during adolescence, others fail to develop such an identity thereby leading to identity confusion. This can be exacerbated by pressure to perform beyond their status in the academic, social or occupational arenas. According to Erikson (1950, 1968), identity confusion primarily occurs as a result of the adolescent’s failure to commit to an
occupational or sexual identity. Characteristics of identity confusion include delinquent and psychotic incidents, over-identification with others, isolation, mild depression, and inability to concentrate (Hernandez, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2006). For example, at a university where experiential learning (i.e.: co-op, internship, etc.) are heavily emphasized, a student who has not yet determined their occupational path may feel conflicted in their professional roles. When a student experiences this identity confusion, there are a number of responses they may display. In some cases, they will seek the input and support of others (i.e. family, peers, etc.). In other instances they may choose to engage in a various coping strategies, both positive and negative, including the use of alcohol as an avoidance coping mechanism. In an environment where alcohol use is already so prevalent, this becomes an acceptable coping mechanism, putting the student at greater risk for binge or high risk drinking.

Despite the widespread acceptance of Erikson’s (1950, 1968) identity model, some criticisms of the model do exist. Cote and Levine (2002) argue that Erikson’s eight life stages are based around the masculine, European experience and therefore may not be generalizable to women and people of other cultures. The contemporary relevance of Erikson’s model has also been questioned (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). Validation of Erikson’s theory has relied primarily on clinical observation and logical argument rather than empirical studies (Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981). Despite this, Erikson’s conceptualization still forms the basis for much of identity research (Adams, Berzonsky & Keating, 2006; Anthis & LaVoie, 2006; Berman, Weems, Rodriguez & Zamora, 2006; Hofer, Busch, Chasiotis & Kiessling, 2006) and his work is recognized as a foundation for further models of identity (Côté & Levine, 2002; Côté & Schwartz, 2002).
Marcia’s Identity Status Paradigm

Marcia’s (1966) conceptualization of identity statuses has also been widely used in identity development research (Balistreri, Bush-Rosnagel, Geisinger, 1995). While Erikson’s (1950) dichotomous categories of identity and identity confusion provide limited information regarding the resolution of an individual’s identity conflict, Marcia’s (1966) paradigm provides greater specificity regarding the identity formation process (Marcia, 1980). Marcia’s paradigm builds upon Erikson’s work, categorizing individuals into one of four identity statuses based on the individual’s exploration of identity alternatives and commitment to a final identity.

Marcia (1980) argues that identity is defined within one’s self as “an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history” (p. 159). Furthermore, he suggests that identity structure is dynamic, continually evolving over time as an individual takes part in an exploration process. As such, Marcia acknowledges four statuses, including foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement. Each status is defined in terms of the presence or absence of a decision-making period, or crisis, and the extent of personal investment, or commitment, in the area of occupation and ideology (Marcia, 1980). An individual in foreclosure possesses commitment to an ideology, but this commitment has been chosen parentally, rather than internally. For example, a college student in foreclosure may be seeking degree in a field because their parent has directed them to that field. Those in identity diffusion status show no commitment, regardless of whether they have experienced a decision-making crisis. A common example is an individual who, when asked about political party support, has no opinion on the matter. Those in moratorium are actively experiencing a crisis, struggling with their ideological lens. For example, an individual who is exploring their sexuality may experience a conflict between their own understandings of their identity as
opposed to their family’s perceptions. Finally, identity achievement is marked by a commitment following a crisis or decision-making period. This can be seen, for example, when an individual who identifies as LGBTQ comes out to their family.

These statuses are not limited to any one specific age in life, but exhibit a fluid approach to identity development rather than a sequential one. Both moratorium and achievement are common in late adolescence, as this is a period in life marked by development. Further, an individual may experience many statuses throughout adolescence and identity development, including, for example, sexual orientation, religion, or career pathways, all of which are common experiences for a college student.

A student’s identity development plays a critical role in navigating the collegiate experience. It is the lens through which they engage in their world and can have a significant impact on decision-making. This is emphasized during transitional periods, for example the first year of study, when life choices are more pronounced than they may have been in the past and the freedom to make one’s own choices may be a new experience.

Identity-achieved oriented students have examined alternative identities and have made a commitment to one final identity. In contrast, individuals in the identity diffusion category have not yet examined alternative identities and have not made a commitment to one identity. The identity moratorium category describes individuals who are currently exploring identity alternatives, yet no commitment to an identity has been made.

Finally, individuals are classified into the identity foreclosure status when they have not explored alternative identities, however have already made a commitment to one identity. The identity development pattern among Marcia’s (1966) four identity statuses has been investigated in previous research (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Lavoie, 1994; Waterman, 1982). The most common
pattern of identity development is from foreclosure to moratorium and finally to identity achievement (Lavoie, 1994), however other patterns of development also have been acknowledged (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Waterman, 1982). While Erikson’s (1950, 1968) model suggests that identity development can only progress forward, Marcia’s (1966) identity status model indicates that regression from an advanced identity stage to a less advanced stage is possible. In Adams and Fitch’s (1982) study of college students, over 10 percent of students regressed in their identity status over a one year period. Similar regression patterns also have been identified among high school students (McIntosh, Metz, & Youniss, 2005); however, among college students, stability or positive advancement of identity status is most likely to occur (Adams & Fitch, 1982). Understanding the sequencing of identity statuses is important to the complete understanding of identity development, yet simply knowing the pattern does not explain what happens during the transition between statuses (Lavoie, 1994). According to Lavoie (1994), “a major problem with identity models is their failure to address the mechanisms involved in the transition between statuses even though these models recognize identity as a developmental process” (p. 23). It may also be inferred, as there are multiple types of identity, an individual may experience multiple statuses at any one given time. As such, should an individual not see the connection between these statuses, it is possible that disparate decision-making may occur.

**Dimensions of Identity**

Identity is not a uni-dimensional construct but is rather composed of multiple facets. Erikson (1968) acknowledged the existence of several components of identity including an ego dimension, a personal dimension, and a social dimension. Ego identity refers to a continuity of
personality. Personal identity refers to behavior that differentiates an individual from others. Finally, social identity involves an individual’s relationships with others (Côté & Levine, 2002). While some researchers have maintained the integrity of these three distinct elements of identities (Côté & Levine, 2002), others only acknowledge the existence of personal and social identity (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Brown, 2000). Recent conceptualizations of personal and social identity may have been modified to include aspects of ego identity. In particular, personal identity now seems to include both personal and ego identity dimensions. For example, definitions of personal identity encompass internal consistencies, the similarities and differences with others, and plans and goals for the future (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). In comparison, definitions of social identity involve identification with groups (e.g., family, neighborhood, workplace), roles (e.g., mother, doctor), and conditions (e.g., race, sexuality), and the significance placed on membership of these social groups (Polletta, & Jasper, 2001; Hogg, 2003).

Researchers have investigated the importance placed on both personal and social identity in describing one’s self. Babbitt and Burbach (1990) identified a significant trend towards identifying the self in terms of personal identity rather than social identity. This pattern represents a substantial change from the recent past when social identities were more important. Among college students in the 1950s, only 30 percent described themselves primarily by their personal identity, compared to 80 to 90 percent in the 1980s (Babbit & Burbach, 1990). Female college students as well as students who were married or divorced placed slightly less emphasis on personal identity and tended to focus on their social identity more than males and single college students (Babbit & Burbach, 1990).
Within the psychology and leisure literature, identity has been measured as both a global and domain specific construct. While some researchers believe that only one global measure of identity should be used (Adams, Shea & Fitch, 1979), others argue that the use of multiple measures will provide more precise measures of identity in various domains such as occupation, religion, and politics (Dellas & Jernigan, 1990). These domains vary in their importance between individuals as well as within an individual across time. Some domains are more salient to an individual’s identity than others (Hunter, Platow, Bell, Kypri & Lewis, 1997; Goossens, 2001). As domains increase in salience, the domain becomes more important to defining identity. Studies have shown that incongruence exists between the various identity domains (Dellas & Jernigan, 1990; Goossens, 2001). Within religious, occupational, and political domains, only four percent of participants were classified as having the same identity status in all three areas (Dellas & Jernigan, 1990). Global measures of identity do not provide information regarding the existence of varying identity statuses among domains. In a late adolescent population, this is an important factor for higher education professionals to consider toward enhancing support of the whole student, rather than encouraging the development of a compartmentalized individual.

**Academic Identity Status**

As explained in the previous section, identity development is not uni-dimensional construct, but rather made up of various domain specific constructs rooted in the global construct of identity. Because an individual may be in differing status in varying domains, Was and Isaacson (2008) developed a self-reported measure of Academic Identity Status (AIM), designed to distinguish four academic identity statuses: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement. The classifications for these statuses were chosen based on Marcia’s (1966) identity statuses. For the purpose of this measure, academic foreclosure refers to a status in
which an individual exhibits a commitment to their academic identity without having actively engaged in an exploration of this identity. Academic identity diffusion refers to an individual who exhibits a lack of both commitment to and exploration of their academic identity, often accompanied by procrastination related to decisions pertaining to academics. Academic identity moratorium was operationalized as a time of indecision, or lack of commitment, while the individual is attempting to reach conclusions about their academic values and goals through active exploration. Finally, an individual who has reached academic identity achievement has developed a commitment to a set of academic values following a period of active exploration (Was & Isaacson, 2008; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009).

Identity Formation: Discovery versus Creation

Much debate has occurred with respect to the process by which identities are developed (Waterman, 1984). There are two plausible methods by which an individual’s identity is formed – discovery and creation (Waterman, 1984). The discovery method supports the existence of a true self (Waterman, 1984). Through the process of identity development, an individual comes to discover the true self by examining talents, abilities, and personal experiences, as well as relying on intuition to explore a small range of possible identities. In contrast, the creation method suggests there is no true self but rather an infinite number of identities that can be developed (Waterman, 1984). Identity development involves experimentation with a wide variety of identities, receiving feedback from others, and consciously deciding on an identity based on this feedback as well as internal responses. It has been suggested that individuals may choose the method they prefer in the formation of their identity (Waterman, 1984). As the final outcome of both discovery and creation is a commitment to an identity, each method appears to be equally effective in reaching this goal. While Waterman (1984) assumes that the individual’s identity
emerges through self-discovery, there is no concrete evidence to fully validate this, requiring additional exploration in the future.

**Age of Identity Development**

Although Erikson (1950) indicates that identity formation occurs during adolescence, it is unclear at exactly what age this event takes place. Studies have found that among 12 year old males, foreclosure and identity diffusion statuses are the most predominant identity statuses (Marcia, 1980). By age 18, many individuals begin the transition into moratorium and identity achievement statuses (Marcia, 1980). Finally, by age 21, most individuals are classified as identity achievement status (Marcia, 1980). This suggests that the period between ages 18 to 21 is critically important, as it is during this time in which the final identity of an individual is developed. Other studies have indicated that identity development may continue beyond the age of 21. Stark and Traxler (1974) found that youth ages 21 to 24 had significantly more developed identities than youth ages 17 to 20; therefore, the formation of identity may continue well beyond the high school years.

This follows Erikson’s (1968) notion of psychosocial moratorium. Moratorium is a period of delay from adult commitments which is characterized by society’s permissiveness for extended youthfulness. Erikson (1968) suggests that academic life is one of these moratoriums in which adolescents have an extended period of time for identity development to occur. A few studies have investigated identity during the academic moratorium of university (e.g., Adams et al., 2006; Berman et al., 2006; Hofer et al., 2006; Lounsbury, Huffstetler, Leong & Gibson, 2005; Munro & Adams, 1977). Results of a study conducted by Berman and colleagues (2006) indicated that university students are more likely to have an identity achievement oriented status than high school students. Moreover, individuals who enter the work force directly after high
school have a higher likelihood of having an identity achievement status compared to individuals who attend college (Munro & Adams, 1977). This suggests that this moratorium period does exist and that college and university students may still be developing their identity during this post-adolescent period of life.

Among studies concerning identity development among university students, all investigate relationships between identity and correlates such as Berzonsky’s identity styles (Adams et al., 2006; Berzonsky, 1989, 2008), romantic attachment (Berman et al., 2006), motive congruence (Hofer et al., 2006), and academic success (Lounsbury et al., 2005). There is no established literature reporting on the role of identity development and decision making. This includes a wide range of decisions, from major selection, to organizational and social involvement, to high-risk alcohol use. This relationship is important to investigate, as these are all significant developmental aspects of the collegiate years and play a notable role in the university and college community.

**Identity Development Styles and Strategies**

Berzonsky (1990) proposed that individuals may use one of three styles when encountering identity issues: informational orientation, diffuse/avoidant orientation, and normative orientation. Individuals who utilize an information oriented style deliberately seek out, evaluate, and use information regarding their identity when encountered with a crisis (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). These individuals are internally motivated to engage in exploration of their identity and are often classified as being in Marcia’s (1966) identity achievement or identity moratorium categories (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). In contrast, individuals who engage in diffuse or avoidant strategies often display reluctance to examining identity issues (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). These individuals may become defensive and typically only explore their identity
for brief periods of time with the use of external rewards. They are primarily categorized as being in the identity diffusion stage (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996).

Individuals utilizing the final orientation, normative identity style, typically conform to the expectations of others and may rely greatly on their relationships with others for their self-definition. These individuals protect their existing identity by failing to explore any information that may threaten aspects of their self. They usually fall into Marcia’s (1966) category of identity foreclosure (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). All adolescents are capable of utilizing each of the three identity orientations, however influences such as situational factors and personal preference may impact which orientation is used (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996).

**Alcohol Use Among Adolescents**

While traditionally thought to expand from age 13 – 18, contemporary thought expands adolescence to age 25, which is of critical relevance to the collegiate years (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). The legal age to purchase, use, consume, or possess alcohol in all 50 states is 21 years of age (NIAAA, 2007), yet in 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS) reported that 28% of students in sixth grade, 43.8% of students in seventh grade, and 53.8% of students in eighth grade had consumed alcohol (CDC, 2007). As adolescents matured into adults, early alcohol initiation increased five-fold their probability for developing alcohol problems in the areas of health, socialization, and academic pursuits, as well as encountering serious life-altering legal sanctions, incarceration, and even death (SAMHSA, 2007).

In 2005, 25% of seventh and eighth graders reported engaging in binge drinking (Guilamo, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson, 2005). Adolescents who drink before the age of
are five times more likely to develop a drinking problem (SAMHSA, 2007). Problem drinking is associated with health, behavior, and social problems, and is linked to nearly 5000 injury deaths of youth under the age of 21 within the United States annually (Hingson & White, 2014). While one might assume that high risk alcohol use decreases as an individual moves from early adolescence to late adolescence and emerging adulthood, research indicates that this is not the case, particularly for those individuals who go on to attend college or university (Quinn & Fromme, 2011). Adolescence is marked as a period of exploration and alcohol use is a common component of this exploration, as influenced by peer groups and moderated by decision making skills that have not yet fully developed.

The many problems associated with excessive alcohol use among college students are not new and date back to medieval times in Europe where students often roamed the streets after curfew, neglecting their studies for brothels and taverns (Lucas, 2006). The early history of American higher education also evidenced serious problems caused by the excessive alcohol consumption of students (Lowery et al., 2005). According to Dowdall and Wechsler (2002), the drinking habits of many university students pose as serious a problem, perhaps even more serious today, than they did more than 50 years ago. According to Hingson, Heeren, Winter, and Wechsler (2005), heavy drinking peaks around late adolescence and early adulthood and is especially common among college students 18 to 24 years-old. Excessive alcohol consumption has also been associated with a number of other serious potential consequences including: fatal and nonfatal injuries; alcohol poisoning; blackouts; academic failure; violence, including rape and assault; unintended pregnancy; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; property damage; and vocational and criminal consequences that could jeopardize future job prospects (Goldman, 2002, p. 5)
The poor choices and the lack of adequate coping skills of students often impact their academic success, not to mention the many potential health and safety hazards that arise as a result of high-risk behavior choices. Excessive alcohol use among university students is a public health concern affecting not only drinking students, but also nondrinking peers who are subjected to arguments, insults, vandalism, unwanted sexual advancements, disrupted sleep, taking care of severely intoxicated roommates, and interrupted study times (Walter & Kowalczyk, 2012; Wechsler, Nelson, & Weitzman, 2000).

**Alcohol Use and Abuse**

The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (2013) defines alcohol use disorder (AUD) as, “A maladaptive pattern of alcohol use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by two (or more) of the following in the previous 12 months:

1. alcohol is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended,
2. a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol use,
3. a great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain alcohol, use alcohol, or recover from its effects,
4. craving, or a strong desire or urge to use alcohol,
5. recurrent alcohol use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home,
6. continued alcohol use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of alcohol,
7. important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of alcohol use,
8. recurrent alcohol use in situations in which it is physically hazardous,
9. alcohol use continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical
   or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by alcohol,
10. tolerance, as defined by either of the following: a) A need for markedly increased
    amounts of alcohol to achieve intoxication or desired effect b) A markedly
    diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of alcohol.
11. withdrawal, as manifested by either of the following: a) The characteristic withdrawal
    syndrome for alcohol b) Alcohol (or a closely related substance, such as a
    benzodiazepine) is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.

These criterion provide specific and measurable guidelines for determination of alcohol abuse in
an individual. Severity of AUD is defined by the presence of additional criterion, using a criteria
count (from two to 11) as an overall severity indicator. The severity ranged from mild to severe,
with mild indicated by two to three criteria, moderate by four to five, and severe indicated by the
A high functioning alcoholic (HFA) can be described by many but is yet to be clinically defined
and is estimated to make up about 50% of those individuals diagnosed as alcoholics (Benton,
2009). A wide range of behaviors may be demonstrated by high functioning alcoholics, many of
which perpetuate the standard that they do not have a problem or are not engaging in high risk
drinking behaviors. Paying bills on time while maintaining their job or career, sustaining
friendships or relationships, and the ability to abstain for a significant period of time are just a
few of the characteristics that lend themselves to the inability of a high functioning alcoholic to
avoid problem recognition (Benton, 2009). Ultimately, a high functioning alcoholic looks and
acts like a member of the community in which they live and do not create an obvious societal drain, allowing them to essentially fly under the radar of those around them.

Characteristics of a high functioning alcoholic, or persistent problem drinker, attending college can be even more easily concealed and misleading as a result of the environment on the campus. In this instance, they may still be getting good grades, maintaining their engagement or leadership roles within organizations, or may be sustaining romantic relationships, ultimately living a heavily compartmentalized life. They justify their high risk drinking as a reward for working hard throughout the week, perpetuate the hook-up culture of a college campus disguised as a romantic relationship, and despite breaking the law or code of conduct, see no true consequence for their actions when the violation is either dismissed or consequences are limited to submitting an essay or participating in an online education session (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Benton, 2009; Ravert, 2009).

**High Risk Alcohol Use in a College Setting**

Late adolescence is a critical time in an individual’s life. Not only is there a continuation of identity development, but learning to exercise healthy decision making strategies within this development in an environment with little structure and significant access to alcohol can be the perfect storm for a college student to develop characteristics found in high functioning alcoholism (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen & Vollebergh, 1999; Benton, 2009; Luyckx, Schwartz, Soenens, Vansteenkiste & Goossens, 2010). Alcohol consumption has been found to be strongly correlated with levels of identity sophistication (Bishop et al., 2005). Couple this with the social acceptability of high risk alcohol use and increased stress; it is little wonder that the prevalence of alcohol dependence, or maladaptive alcohol use, is the highest in eighteen-to-twenty year olds (Benton, 2009). As such, it can be assumed anecdotally that this also is indicative of high
percentages of high functioning alcoholics on a college campus, despite a gap in formal research to support this. Research does indicate that there is an increase in overall binge drinking (Knight, Wechsler, Kuo, Seibring, Weitzman & Schuckit, 2002; NIAAA 2007) and a decrease in the gender gap between male and female college students who are binge drinking. In short, women are catching up (Benton, 2009). And even when students seek support on campuses, they rarely view alcohol use as the actual problem. More likely they are coming for academic, relationship, or financial support. Author of *From Binge to Blackout: A Mother and Son Struggle with Teen Drinking* (2006), Chris Volkmann suggests that we, as adults, are complicit in creating an environment on college campuses where high functioning alcoholism can run rampant by explaining away high risk behavior as normal adolescent activity. To truly address this epidemic, higher education professionals need to be honest with themselves and their students, directly and consistently addressing students who exhibit the characteristics of a high functioning alcoholic. It is the intent of this study to better explain how identity status impacts decision making related to alcohol use, in an effort to enhance the prevention and intervention efforts on campus level. More pointedly, the study seeks to explain the impact of identity on decisions to engage in high risk alcohol use with the intent of developing better interventions leading to a reduction in the number of students who would be classified as a persistent problem drinker, ultimately improving their health and well-being.

**Alcohol Education Programs**

According to Hingson, Heeren, Aakos, Kopstein, and Wechsler (2001), institutions of higher education may be in an opportune position to address these problems because of the control they can exercise over programs and policies offered to their students. Despite the many intervention strategies that have been implemented to address excessive alcohol use, the
ubiquitous problem remains and continues to worsen. Werch, Pappas, and Castellon-Vogel (1996) found that health education professionals have reported very little reduction in students’ excessive use of alcohol or alcohol related problems as a result of the many prevention programs offered on their respective campuses (Knight et al., 2002), and research suggests that more than 30% of college students meet the criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse as compared to 8.5% of the general population who meet standard diagnostic criteria for an alcohol use disorder (Slutske, 2005). It is also well documented that first-year students have been identified as a high-risk group for heavy drinking (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2002).

Many professional educators and researchers define heavy, episodic drinking, or binge drinking as having five drinks in a row at least once in the previous two weeks for men, and for women as having four or more drinks in a row at least once in the previous two weeks (NIAAA, 2007). Using this definition, nearly 44% of college students can be classified as binge drinkers (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Hang, 2000). White, Kraus, and Swartzwelder (2006) found that most college students “free-pour” their drinks, thus greatly underestimating the amount of alcohol poured and consumed by nearly 20%. The result is that students are consuming even more than the binge definition that is currently being used. When a student “free pours” their drinks, meaning that they use no measuring tools, and have two or three cups throughout a night, they perceive themselves as only having two or three standard drinks. This would equate to approximately 3 – 4.5 ounces of alcohol. In reality, because they are not measuring the amount of alcohol, they may be consuming that amount in just one cup, which would equate to 6 – 9 ounces of alcohol, resulting in more frequent binging.

Weitzman, Nelson, and Wechsler (2003) stated that education alone is not working, and
DeJong and Langford (2002) argued for the environmental approach. In considering the effectiveness of an alcohol education program on a college campus, Rapaport, Minelli, Angera, and Thayer (1999) found that students do not want to be told whether they can drink; they believe that drinking is not only an expected part of campus life but an ingrained part of the student culture that cannot be changed. Building upon this argument, DeJong (2001) argued that practitioners need to move away from the “binge” definition, indicating that it has a negative effect upon students attending prevention programs. Students often become defensive and challenge the definition, derailing any meaningful dialogue or self-reflection regarding personal alcohol use or problems on campus. Schulenberg and Maggs (2002) argued that because heavy drinking seems to be embedded in the cultural transition to college, administrators should adopt a harm-reduction perspective, which centers on decreasing the negative consequences as a result of excessive alcohol consumption rather than attempting to convince underage students to abstain completely. Students often minimize the extent of their own over consumption of alcohol and often do not recognize the many potential and dangerous consequences associated with heavy drinking (Johnston, O’Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2008). Health professionals on college campuses are beginning to encourage responsible consumption of alcohol as opposed to the message of many prevention programs that promote a no drinking “abstinence” message.

Prevention intervention programs that offer responsible consumption information may be more effective in reducing excessive alcohol use on campuses (Barry & Goodson, 2011). Using a mixed method design, Barry and Goodson examined how students conceptualize and practice responsible drinking. They found that students are dangerously misinformed in regard to what “responsible consumption” means and often engage in very dangerous behaviors, thinking they are consuming alcohol responsibly. Ultimately, students who are at the highest risk for high risk
alcohol use are also reporting high exposure to alcohol education programs (Weitzman et al., 2003). This is likely due to their involvement with a high risk group; however the impact of the intervention does not appear to be impacting their choices related to alcohol use.

Research continues to support a multi-tiered approach to alcohol education and intervention. According to the 2007 NIAAA report, *A Call to Action: Changing the drinking culture at US colleges*, there is little evidence to support an educational or awareness approach alone. Rather, results support combining these efforts with efforts that address both the individual and the environment. Individual efforts, specifically cognitive-behavioral skills training programs, offer education that embraces a philosophy of a harm reduction rather than abstinence or avoidance. Combinations of cognitive-behavioral skills training with norms clarification and motivational enhancement interventions are found to be most impactful (Hingson, 2010). For example, in a number of standard “party smart” programs, the focus is on doing things to keep safe – limiting alcohol, partying with friends, eating before partying, etc. These approaches are important in education, but do not provide an individual the opportunity to consider other factors – peers, emotional states, social norms, etc. In particular, focusing on a student’s alcohol expectancies rather than the physiological attributes of alcohol use was found to be impactful on minimizing drinking behaviors for men (Saltz, 2004; Oei & Morawska, 2004). These results support the consideration of identity status and decision making styles when developing a prevention and intervention framework at the collegiate level. That is to say, students with a less highly developed identity status will also have less highly developed decision making skills and need a different approach than those who have more highly developed status. Furthermore, while it is important to talk about moderation and other tactics to remain safe, one must do so within the individual’s social expectations to be truly effective.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided insight into research studies that connect the theoretical framework to a central concept of contexts, thoughts, or situations that have typically influenced or impacted experiences of high risk/persistent problem alcohol use, specifically in the context of academic identity status. Figure 2.1 provides a visual display that summarizes theoretical framework outlined in this chapter.

![Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework Integration](source)

This study is bounded by the integration of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Academic Identity Status (AIM) as they apply to persistent problem/high risk alcohol use in undergraduate students. The reciprocal influences of behavior, person, and environment present in SCT are represented through inquiry into the practices, decision making, and peer influences of participants who exhibit a highly developed academic identity status as it relates to persistent
problem/high risk alcohol use. The following chapters will explore the methodology used to conduct this study, the results, and a discussion of the results.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Understanding how and why college students make decisions is a complex endeavor that requires consideration of both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the relationship between them. The following sections will describe, in detail, the design elements of the methodology by which this study was carried out. It includes a discussion of mixed methods research and the sequential explanatory design, a description of participant selection and sampling, data collection, analysis and validation processes, and mixed methods procedures.

Mixed Methods Research

The purpose of this study is to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses, which would be best supported by using a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). For the purposes of this study, mixed methods research is defined in alignment with Bazeley and Kemp (2012), who state:

Mixed methods research….. is broadly defined to include research in more than one paradigmatic or methodological approach, method of data collection, and/or type of analysis strategy is integrated during the course of the undertaking of the research, regardless of how those approached or methods might individually be classified, and with a common purpose that goes beyond that which could be achieved with either method alone. (p. 55)

This definition encapsulates a complete view of mixed methodology; taking into consideration not only frequency and status information within the context of decision making and identity, but also considers the lived experience of individual participants that would not be reflected in a simple survey instrument. The application of mixed methodology is purposeful and systematic,
used commonly in social and behavioral science studies (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Eastwood & Lucas, 2009; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Stoller, et al., 2009; Wilkins & Woodgate, 2008), and serves to inform practice and enhance greater understanding through holistic inquiry. As the study questions addressed concepts related to both identity development and decision-making, the utilization of mixed methods allowed a broad overview of the patterns related to alcohol use as well as an in-depth look at how and why students with highly developed academic identities make decisions surrounding alcohol.

Furthermore, applying a mixed methods approach most appropriately speaks to the observed disparity of behavior that is the critical concern, with the first phase identifying those students who are highly successful and developed, and the second phase investigating the variations in high-risk alcohol use among them. Finally, once it becomes feasible to be better able to understand and explain disparate behaviors, we can then move to determine where the developmental window of impact is and whether there is any relationship between this phenomenon and overall developmental differences, all of which ultimately supports healthier and safer future generations.

**Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Procedures**

To most thoroughly explain this phenomenon, a sequential quantitative (quan) > QUALITATIVE (QUAL) explanatory approach was employed (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This approach is cited as being able to “provide a general understanding of the research problem”, with the quantitative data being built upon by the qualitative data (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006, p. 5). This design is conducted in a two-phase process, made up of a quantitative data collection phase followed by a qualitative phase that “seeks to assist in explaining the quantitative findings” (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009, p. xvii).
In mixed methods research, priority determines the phase of the study where greater emphasis or focus is placed, and is dependent on the purpose of the study and the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

This design was selected to allow the researcher to determine variation in intent behind decision making among students with highly developed academic identity statuses and eventually inform practice relevant to decision making patterns among this group of students. Priority was given to the qualitative component of this study, with the intent of attention being given to variations between those participants who take part in high-risk activities and those who do not, in an effort to explain disparate behavior despite similarly high levels of academic identity development. The first, quantitative phase was conducted to examine the patterns of alcohol use and relationships between academic identity status and alcohol use. Data were integrated between phases, through the use of purposeful sampling, with results from Phase One informing participant selection and structure of Phase Two. Once the first phase was complete, the second qualitative phase was designed purposefully and with the intent of explaining the result of the first phase in greater depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2013). Qualitative results are utilized to explain patterns of alcohol use identified through quantitative results and develop an understanding of the experiences and decisions leading to alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity. At the conclusion of Phase Two, data was integrated and inferences drawn based on the results to inform the discussion and implications for practice (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark & Smith, 2011). A procedural diagram can be found in Appendix A, which provides an overview of the study, including the timing of the research phases, procedures and products of each.
Phase One: Quantitative Strand

The intent of the quantitative phase is multifaceted. First, data collected was utilized to determine whether a relationship existed between levels of academic identity and alcohol use, as well as examining what patterns of alcohol use, if any, are found for students with highly developed academic identities. The second intention when conducting this phase was to identify participants for the second, qualitative phase of the study. Finally, the results from this section served to inform the mixed methods results, through integration with the qualitative results, to provide a deeper understanding of the decisions surrounding high-risk alcohol use in support of harm reduction efforts on a college campus.

Recruitment, Consent and Sampling

The population includes undergraduate students enrolled in a four-year degree seeking program at a large, public, urban institution located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Convenience sampling (Morgan, 2013) was employed in this study, which yielded a total of 97 viable responses. Participants were recruited through an online research subject pool housed within a School of Education. Additionally, participants were solicited through electronic communication sent to student organization leadership, social media posting, and flyers, and through announcements by faculty/staff during courses that require research engagement or organizational meetings, and word of mouth. This range of participation was intended to provide a well-rounded sample and garner students with a range of academic identity and alcohol use patterns. Phase One participants were presented with consent information at the onset of their survey. At the conclusion of their survey, these participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in Phase Two of the study.
Data Collection

Participants completed an electronic survey, via Qualtrics, which consisted of self-reported demographic information, the Academic Identity Status Measure (AIM) (Was & Isaacson, 2008), the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Schaffer, 2011a), and select questions from the National College Health Assessment survey (American College Health Association, 2013). An electronic survey was used to increase access to the instrument in an effort to increase responses. Demographic information was collected for comparison purposes, including major, current class standing, age, self-reported GPA, organizational involvement, experiential learning engagement (i.e. co-op, internship, etc.), gender identity, and ethnic background. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, once identified as qualified participants’, names were separated from all survey materials to maintain/ensure confidentiality and reduce interviewer bias. A hard copy of the survey, as it appeared in Qualtrics and including the quantitative information sheet and consent information is found in Appendix B of this document.

Academic Identity Status: Academic Identity Measure (AIM)

The purpose of the Academic Identity Measure, or AIM (Was & Isaacson, 2008) is to establish an individual’s current primary academic identity status. This self-reported instrument is made up of 40-items, with four subscales, and is based upon Marcia’s (1966) statuses which operationalizes Erikson’s (1950, 1968) identity development concepts. Using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me), and the instrument assesses academic identity status. Items are then organized into four academic identity status subscales, each consisting of ten items, reflecting each of Marcia’s statuses (achieved, moratorium, foreclosed, diffused). While each participant receives an average score in each of the four
statuses, higher average scores are indicative of greater alignment with a particular status. The selection of Phase Two participants is directed by this, with those participants who exhibit their highest score in AIM Achievement invited to participate in the qualitative phase. A status of non-discrete is assigned to those participants who received an equivalent average score in two or more of the statuses. Internal consistency of this measure is reflected in past use with undergraduate students, with Chronbach’s alpha estimates as follows: diffusion (α = .76), moratorium (α = .85) foreclosure (α = .77), achievement (α = .76) (Was & Isaacson, 2008). Internal consistency of the instrument in the areas of diffusion and moratorium were found to be in alignment with previously published estimates within the study sample (n = 97) (diffusion α = .74; moratorium α = .83); however internal consistency within the status subscales of foreclosure and achieved were significantly lower than previously published research (foreclosure α = .56; achieved α = .54). This difference may be impacted by the lack of homogeneity in the current study sample, which included students from a variety of majors and fields, as opposed to the sample utilized by Was & Isaacson, which only included students in an introductory psychology course. The Academic Identity Measure (Was & Isaacson, 2008) was used with written permission from the measure creator, Dr. Christopher Was (personal communication, November 8, 2014).

**Risky College Drinking Practices Measure:**

The purpose of the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM) is to determine the extent to which college students engage in risky drinking practices (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011a). Furthermore, the assessment is potentially associated with future risky practices. Using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly disagree)

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1 If item 6 is deleted from the AIM Foreclosure subscale and item 4 is deleted from the AIM Achieved subscale, then α = .63 for both subscales.
agree), participants responded to a 6-item measure related to pre-gaming and hooking up, both of which are associated with high risk drinking behaviors (Barry & Goodson, 2011; Paul, & Hayes, 2002; Ravert, 2009). An average score of all six items was calculated to determine whether participants exhibited high or low risk behaviors when compared to other study participants. Internal consistency of this measure in previous studies was unavailable, however the sample Cronbach’s alpha exhibited high reliability, with $\alpha = .84$. The RCDM has previously been predictive of intention and behavior related to pre-gaming (i.e. consuming alcohol prior to attending a social event/function) and hooking up (i.e. casual physical/sexual encounter) (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011b). The Risky College Drinking Practices Measure was obtained via PsycTESTS and is available for use for educational purposes without written permission (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011a).

**American College Health Association – National College Health Assessment II**

A nationally recognized research survey, the American College Health Association – National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) (American College Health Association, 2013), assists campuses in collecting data about the health and well-being of their student population. The complete assessment is a 66-item survey, conducted either on paper or electronically, at the discretion of the institution. Schools that participate do so with random sampling on a three-year interval. Assessment data is collected on a wide range of health issues, including the areas of: Health, Health Education and Safety; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs; Sex Behavior and Contraception; Weight, Nutrition and Exercise; Mental Health; Physical Health; and Impediments to Academic Performance, each of which is presented in its own sub-section of the assessment. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked to respond only to nine select items related to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs (American College Health Association,
2013). These items were selected to gather quantitative information about patterns of alcohol use, including frequency, amount, related practices/behaviors, and social norms. In addition to exploring patterns of alcohol use, these questions were selected with the intent of comparing across current campus and national data. The responses in this section included both categorical responses of yes, no, n/a or does not apply, as well as interval data, such as number of drinks consumed. Multiple data sets were utilized to establish internal consistency within this measure and as a result it is believed to be a reliable and valid instrument (American College Health Association (n.d.), although specific psychometric information was unavailable. Because the current study utilized only a portion of the overall assessment, reliability and validity were not measured for the purposes of this study. The American College Health Assessment: National College Health Assessment items were selected in consultation with and with permission from the University Wellness Center, who administers this survey for the campus (American College Health Association, 2013).

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, data were cleaned, with attention to missing and incomplete data. Where data that was critical to analysis was missing or incomplete, such as scores on the Academic Identity Measure, participants were removed from analysis. In the instance that the missing data did not critically impact the analysis (i.e. missing class standing) but the remaining data was available, participants were left in the analysis. Data was analyzed using SPSS Statistics, a software program used for statistical analysis, as well as Microsoft Excel, to establish an accurate summary of the sample, including presence or absence of varying identity status, presence or absence of risky choices, and health assessment data, to be benchmarked against national data and toward the development of a profile analysis. In addition, a Pearson’s
correlation analysis was conducted, utilizing results from the Academic Identity Measure and College Drinking Practices responses. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the number of drinks consumed during the last “partied”/socialized time by Academic Identity Status and Gender.

**Mixed Methods Connection**

Phase one recruitment utilized a volunteer sampling strategy with the purpose of informing an understanding of the research questions and building upon the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morgan, 2013). Data was integrated first at the conclusion of Phase One, to direct Phase Two participant selection, which allowed participants to be classified by academic identity status in order to identify those who exhibited AIM Achieved status. Upon completing completion of Phase One, participants were asked to respond to the questions, “Are you willing to take part in an interview to discuss these topics further?” and, “If yes, what is your preferred email?” to indicate their willingness to volunteer for the second phase of the study. A preferred email address was requested in an effort to increase comfort for participants. This email address was separated from raw data during quantitative analysis, using the anonymous unique ID number provided during survey completion as an identifier. For the purposes of this study, the results of the Academic Identity Measure (AIM) were used as a primary selection criterion for Phase Two participants, as the overarching research question focused only on those individuals who were identified as academically achieved. Possible participants were identified as an individual experiencing Academic Identity Achievement status, meaning that their highest average score was on the items reflective of an achieved status. Building upon the work of Marcia (1966, 1980), Academic Identity Achieved individuals are thought to have developed, after a period of active exploration, a set of personal academic beliefs, values, and practices, and
are more firmly committed to this status (Was & Isaascon, 2008; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009). This was operationalized using results of the Academic Identity Measure (AIM, Was & Isaacson, 2008), using the mean sample score plus/minus one standard deviation as a guide to identify participants who exhibited an AIM Achieved status.

The secondary selection of these participants was also purposeful, in an effort to explain the phenomenon of decision making related to alcohol, which aligns with the concept of theoretical sampling commonly utilized in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Morgan, 2013). The intent of the study was to identify participants who exhibited Academic Identity Achievement and varied between high and low risk results, as indicated by Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM), (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011), using the mean sample score plus/minus one standard deviation as a guide. Once compiled, these results were reviewed by research support staff to determine whether those who indicated a willingness to participate met the initial criterion and contacted by research support staff via email for interviews. After the initial request for participation were made, it was necessary to define additional selection criterion for Phase Two participation as there was no response to the request. At that time, participants were reviewed and ranked on the basis of involvement in organizations and/or experiential learning, and self-reported GPA, as well as being identified as high-risk or low-risk, based on their RCDM score. After a secondary call for participants, a total of four agreed to participate and completed the interview, all of whom exhibited high Academic Identity Achievement, with one reporting high-risk alcohol practices and three reporting low scores on the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure, and representing a variation of self-reported gender identity, involvement and GPA. Those that
agreed were presented with an Informed Consent Document at the beginning of the interview (see Appendix C).

**Phase Two: Qualitative Strand**

Qualitative research can take many methodological approaches, ranging from case study, to phenomenology, to grounded theory. The hallmark of grounded theory research is the development of theory that is directly "grounded" in the data from which it was derived (Charmaz, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2008a, 2008b; Fassinger, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Fassinger (2005) described the ultimate aim of a grounded theory study as producing new theory that is "grounded" in data collected directly from participants on the basis of their lived experiences. Morse (2009) explained the purpose of a grounded theory study as leading to an understanding of the foundational processes that explain a phenomenon. While it was not the intent of this study to develop theory, the overarching aim of this study is develop a greater understanding of how and why students with highly developed identity statuses make decisions concerning alcohol use, and as such the findings may lend themselves to future development of theory. Accordingly, the use of a grounded theory approach in the qualitative phase of this study is appropriate, as it supports the study of processes such as decision making.

**Recruitment, Consent and Sampling**

The number of participants in qualitative studies varies; however, the goal is to collect extensive detail from the individuals studied, not to generalize the information (Creswell, 2013). In a qualitative study, the most important consideration is to select the individuals who can provide the researcher with information that will answer the study questions (Maxwell, 2005). For the purposes of this study, it was intended that a minimum of four and maximum of eight participants be interviewed. Ultimately, a total of five participated, with one participant eventually opting to remove themselves from the process, leaving a sample of four. It was
intended that all participants exhibit highly defined academic identity status, while representing variations exhibited Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM), with the aim of providing a deeper understanding and explanation of the decisions surrounding alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status. While all participants met the criteria for highly defined academic status, three of those who took part in the second phase of the study had an RCDM score of less than the mean of the sample, ultimately reflecting less variation or high risk alcohol use than intended. Further discussion of this phenomenon and its implication is explored in chapter five.

Data Collection

The method of qualitative data collection used in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D). Kvale (1996) defines an interview as a conversation that has a structure and a purpose (p. 6). A semi-structured interview provides a foundation of structure and direction to the questioning, while leaving open the possibility for the introduction or emergence of new ideas. Other advantages to the interview format are the opportunity for sensitivity and closeness to the subjects' lived world. Using interviews in the research process gives insight into people’s behavior, ultimately giving the researcher a window of understanding into the meaning of said behavior (Seidman, 2013).

A semi-structured interview has a "sequence of themes to be covered as well as selected questions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). The intent of a semi-structured interview is to elicit authentic responses to open ended questions from participants, while ensuring responses that can be used in case comparison (Dearnley, 2005). This format was well suited to the study because it incorporates the background and knowledge of the researcher while maintaining receptivity and flexibility to the subjects' perceptions and input. It allowed for an ongoing process of
interpretation and construction of meaning. Strauss and Corbin (1998) referred to interviewing in a grounded theory study as a funnel-like approach, moving from broader to more specific questions during the course of the interview. This method allows the researcher to clarify participants' earlier statements and to continuously focus questions based on emergent themes.

Each participant interview was conducted on campus in a place that was convenient for the students but private enough to support confidentiality goals. They were provided with the Informed Consent document and given time to review and ask questions. I used a digital audio device to record each interview, which were then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist at Quills Transcription. The primary interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and used an interview guide to facilitate questioning. While the guide had specific questions and topics with interviews following a similar format, each interview proceeded based on the direction that the individual student and their story took us. The question guide helped keep us on topic and provided some consistency to the subject matter, but also allowed the interview to be conversational and individualized. Each interview focused broadly on academic experiences and social experiences as well as the participants’ experiences with alcohol and drinking. Discussions tended to include attention to actual and perceived motivations for drinking and the process by which the participants navigated decisions related to alcohol use during their college experience.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data were analyzed using open coding, within a thematic framework (Maxwell, 2005) and employed a constant comparison approach (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparison as a qualitative analysis approach is said to be complimentary to theoretical sampling and to support the development of grounded theory (Boeije, 2002). Although the intent of the current study is not to develop grounded theory, principles of
theoretical sampling are applicable and, as such, follow the utilization of constant comparison.

According to Boeije (2002), the following steps are appropriate in comparison:

1. Comparison within single interview.
2. Comparison between interviews within the same group.
3. Comparison of interviews from different groups.
4. Comparison in pairs and couples.

As previously mentioned, all interviews were transcribed immediately following their completion, by Quills Transcription. After receiving the transcription of each interview, I listened to the audio and read through the transcripts of each interview several times, making sure that the transcription was accurate and getting a feel for the verbal nuance of statements (i.e., laughing, nervousness, volume). I then began coding, using the steps outlined for comparison. As a matter of practicality, this meant reading each transcript while listening along with the audio recording, and making notes in the margins, such as tone or volume of the participant. Following this, I took the steps necessary to facilitate open coding, underlining passages of significance by copy and then cutting each of them out to posting to a dry erase board, separating the passages by participant and emergent coding designations, such as the reasons participants did/did not drink and the impact of social expectations on this decision.

Once this was completed for all participants individually, I began to categorize the open coding designations and moving the passages of highest relevance for each participant into common designations. The next step was to consolidate redundant or overlapping units of meaning. For example, participants discussed the way they went about establishing their paths from an academic and social standpoint, which was ultimately collapsed into the larger idea of active exploration. Finally, I created separate Word documents, by consolidated common designations.
and by participant, and moved related passages from the board into these documents. This allowed me to start clustering units of relevant meaning and to identify themes within each cluster. Ultimately, a total of three major themes, supported by nine sub-themes emerged through the process.

Validation

In qualitative research specifically, one method of validation is bracketing. Bracketing is a method used by some researchers to lessen the potential detrimental effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research with the intent of increasing its’ rigor (Gearing, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2012;). Furthermore, when considering the relationship between the researcher and the research topic that sometimes exists, or their positionality to the research, this method is used to protect the researcher from the cumulative effects of potentially emotionally challenging material (Gearing, 2004; Tufford & Newman, 2012). As a method to increase validity I include a researcher statement of subjectivity to ensure an open and transparent communication of my worldview and positionality as it relates to the study. This process can be difficult, if not impossible, to fully achieve; however, by making available what is known prior to the study, the researcher can create a framework of concepts that can serve as a guide to return to throughout the research process to ensure these concepts are being bracketed as much as possible from data collection and analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

In addition to bracketing, memo writing (i.e. reflective journaling conducted throughout the process) was critical in supporting the validity of the research and analysis process, which allowed me to engage at a more purposeful level with the research, reflecting on the process, participating, and implications (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). In addition, I utilized peer
debriefing as a tool to enhance validity of the research, including regular conversations with my colleagues within the field and my cohort).

**Mixed Methods Procedures**

In addition to supporting Phase Two participant selection, data were integrated at the completion of Phase Two and evaluated for consistency between identity status, decision making, and perception of high risk alcohol use on campus. Social norms were also reviewed as a component, to garner a clear explanation of why some students with highly developed sense of self choose to engage in high-risk drinking while others do not. External factors including peer group influence, social norms, and previous exposure emerged through analysis, as both a protective and destructive factor. Specifically, the integrated data sought to support an understanding of the cultural prevalence and acceptability of high risk alcohol use on a college campus. A joint display of results is found in Appendix G. A joint display serves as a visual representation of the results of the individual phases of the study as well as the integration of these results (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the joint display which represents the integration of data is thought to address the issue of validity in mixed methods research (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006), by presenting clearly integrated results. The display was created in conjunction with data analysis, tying quantitative and qualitative results together by the components of social cognitive theory (i.e. behavior, practice, and environment).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter is primarily concerned with how I proceeded through the study and why that approach best accomplished the stated purpose of this research. Throughout this chapter, I have developed and presented a detailed explanation of the methodological approach for my study, as well as a thorough description of how and why I conducted my study with the specific methods
of choice. Readers should see a clear connection between the research questions that guide the study and the conceptual underpinnings of mixed methods research methodology. The remaining chapters will detail the research findings, offer discussion of those findings and outline implications for future research and professional practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS
The following chapter will provide an overview of the results of this study. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Specifically, it sought to explain how and why high performing and developed college students make decisions to engage in or avoid high-risk alcohol use. The initial hypothesis was that these students have not experienced a synthesis of identity and did not view their decision to engage in high-risk alcohol use as impactful or relevant to their academic identity.

Beginning with an analysis of the quantitative phase, conducted to examine the patterns of alcohol use and relationships between academic identity status and alcohol use, the sample demographics, Academic Identity Measure (AIM), Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM) and American College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) data are presented. This is followed by a correlational analysis of the relationship between AIM and RCDM results. Finally, patterns of alcohol use within the sample are presented, as related to identity status and in comparison with available institutional data.

The second section of this chapter presents the qualitative findings, utilized to explain patterns of alcohol use and develop an understanding of the experiences and decisions leading to alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity. The section begins with participant profiles, followed by a summary of major themes that emerged related to how these students make decisions surrounding alcohol use, the experiences that influence these decisions, and concludes with how they conceptualize high-risk alcohol use.

**Phase One: Quantitative Strand**
In the first phase of this study, participants were asked to complete an electronic survey that included four distinctly identified sections: General Demographic Information, Academic Identity Measure (AIM), Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM) and select questions from the American College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA). The purpose of this phase was to determine what relationships exist between the levels of academic identity status and alcohol use, as well as what patterns of alcohol use are found for students with highly developed academic identities.

**Recruitment and Sample**

The quantitative sample initially included a total of 109 survey responses. After reviewing for missing and incomplete data, a total of 97 respondents remained in the sample. These 97 participants completed all four sections of the survey, including General Demographic Information, Academic Identity Status: Academic Identity Measure (AIM), College Drinking Practices Measure, and select questions from the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs subsection of the American College Health Association (ACHA): National College Health Assessment II.

**General Demographic Information**

The General Demographic Information was collected for comparison purposes, and was comprised of seven questions including age, gender identity, current class standing, major, self-reported GPA, organizational involvement, and experiential learning engagement (i.e., co-op, internship, etc.). The sample included 79 participants who indicated that they were ages 18-20, with the remaining 18 reporting that they were age 21 or older. Twenty-four identified as male and 73 as female. Class standing was reported by 96 of the participants as follows: Freshman \(n = 37\), Sophomore \(n = 36\), Junior \(n = 19\), and Senior \(n = 4\). Self-reported Grade Point Average (GPA) was reported by 95 of the participants and ranged from 2.0 to greater than 3.5,
with 20 indicating a current GPA of greater than 3.5. Participants reported significant variations in organizational involvement (Greek Life, Athletics, Student Government, Honorary Organizations, Other Student Organization) and Experiential Learning (Co-Op, Internship, Service Learning), with 60 indicating involvement in one or more organizations and an additional 8 indicating that they had taken part in experiential learning without organizational involvement. A remaining 29 participants responded that they had not had any organizational involvement or experiential learning. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 present the results of the general demographic information.

**Table 4.1**

Organizational Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Sports</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Government</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorary Organization</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Student Organization</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Organizational Involvement</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Forty-two participants reported involvement in one organization; 12 participants reported involvement in two organizations; 6 participants report involvement in three or more organizations.*

**Table 4.2**

Experiential Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Exp Learning</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-op</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>None Reported</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Identity Status: Academic Identity Measure (AIM)**

The purpose of the Academic Identity Status Measure (AIM; Was & Isaacson, 2008) is to establish an individual’s current primary academic identity status. Each participant earned an average score for each of the identity status areas. Participants were then classified into the appropriated status based on their highest average score. Results of the Academic Identity Measure (AIM) yielded participants each of the four categories, with 87 yielding a clearly defined status, including Foreclosure (n = 14), Diffusion (n = 4), Achieved (n = 45) and Moratorium (n = 24). The remaining 10 participants had shared status results, with equivalent scores on two or more of the sub-scales, and therefore discrete status were not assigned. Figure 4.1 provides an overall depiction of the distribution of status by gender.

**Figure 4.1**
Low numbers of responses in the diffusion, foreclosure, and non-discrete status make statistical comparison across these groups impossible. No evidence of difference across gender by status was found.

**Risky College Drinking Practices Measure**

The purpose of the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM) is to determine the extent to which college students engage in risky drinking practices (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011). Results of the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure (RCDM) yielded a mean score of $M=2.077$ ($SD = 1.41$). Internal consistency for the sample was calculated at $\alpha = .84$. Table 2.3 provides a summary of the distribution of high (above the sample mean) and low (below the sample mean) Risky College Drinking Measures scores by identity status.

**Table 4.3**
Risky College Drinking Scores by Identity Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Status</th>
<th>High RCDM</th>
<th>Low RCDM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffused</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moratorium</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Discrete</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American College Health Assessment (ACHA): National College Health Assessment II

A nationally recognized research survey, the American College Health Assessment (ACHA): National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA) assists campuses in collecting data about the health and well-being of their student population. The complete assessment is a 66-item survey, conducted either on paper or electronically, at the discretion of the institution. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked to respond only to nine select items related to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs (American College Health Association, 2013). These items were selected to gather quantitative information about patterns of alcohol use, including frequency, amount, related practices/behaviors, and social norms, as well as comparison to overall national results.

Results of the ACHA-NCHA survey questions indicate that all participants (n = 97, 100%) engaged in at least one episode of binge drinking (i.e., five or more drinks in one setting) in the past two weeks, with 12% of participants indicating that they had done so at least four times during that time period. When participants were asked how many drinks they had the last time they “partied”/socialized, 11 indicated they had had no alcohol, with 46.3% of participants reporting four or less, 9.2% of participants reporting five drinks, and 6.1% of participants reporting six drinks. A total of 38.1% of participants reported seven or more drinks, with 10% of these participants reporting eleven or more drinks, up to a maximum reported amount of twenty.
When asked about experiences related to “partying”/socializing in the last twelve months, 39% of participants indicated they had both done something they later regretted and 38% had forgotten where they were or what they had done. A total of 15% of participants reported having injured themselves while “partying”/socializing in the last twelve months and one participant reported getting into trouble with the police.

Comparatively, when asked, “How many drinks of alcohol do you think the typical student at your school had the last time they “partied”/socialized”, approximately 83% (n = 81) of participants estimated that number to be five or more drinks, up to a maximum reported amount of twenty. Finally, when asked to give an estimate of the number of people they believed had used alcohol in the last 30 days, 97.9% (n = 95) of participants responded that students had used alcohol at all in the last thirty (30) days. Furthermore, 75% (n = 73) of participants believed that at least half of all students had used alcohol in the last thirty (30) days, giving a strong indication that drinking is an acceptable norm on campus. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 presents the descriptive data from the ACHA-NCHA survey questions, as well as a comparison to institutional and national data available through the American College Health Assessment – National College Health Assessment Report (American College Health Association, 2013).

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Drinks</th>
<th>Sample (n= 97)</th>
<th>University (n ~ 800)</th>
<th>National (n ~ 120k)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 or fewer</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5

Reported Negative Consequences in the Past 12 Months When Drinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Consequence</th>
<th>Sample (n= 97)</th>
<th>University (n ~ 800)</th>
<th>National (n ~ 120k)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did something you later regretted</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgot where you were or what you did</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got into trouble with the police</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically injured yourself</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of drinks for the sample was calculated by gender, with males consuming an average of 7.75 ($SD = 5.33$) drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized and women consuming an average of 4.97 ($SD = 3.30$) drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized (Figure 4.2).
In order to adjust for the difference in sample size, a Welch’s $t$-test was conducted to determine difference in the number of drinks by gender drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized. The average number of drinks for the two groups differed significantly according to Welch's $t$-test, $t(29.02) = -2.4036, p = .023$.(Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3**
When considering Academic Identity Status, the average number of drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized across groups was similar at 5. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the effect of academic identity status on the average number of drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized based on reported gender. There was not a significant effect of academic identity status on the average number of drinks the last time they “partied”/socialized at the $p < .05$ level [$F(4, 87) = .936, p = .447, \eta^2 = .041$]; nor in the interaction of identity status x gender [$F(4, 87) = 1.093, p = 0.365, \eta^2 = .048$]; however it affirmed a significant difference in average number of drinks by gender [$F(1, 87) = 10.86, p = .001, \eta^2 = .111$].

**Correlations**

The relationship between Academic Identity Status, Risky College Drinking Practices (RCDM), and the average number of drinks the last time participants “partied”/socialized was analyzed using a Pearson Correlation. Results were insignificant across status; however a positive correlation was found between the RCDM results and the average number of drinks, with $r = 0.570, p < .001$ (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6**
### Correlation Matrix of Variables ($n = 97$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AIM Achieved</th>
<th>AIM Foreclosed</th>
<th>AIM Diffused</th>
<th>AIM Moratorium</th>
<th>RDCM</th>
<th># of Drinks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIM Achieved</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Foreclosed</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Diffused</td>
<td>- .38**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM Moratorium</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCDM</td>
<td>-.212*</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.201*</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Drinks</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01.

### Summary

The previous section outlines results from the quantitative phase of the study, including descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. Overall, the results did not yield statistical significance, with the exception of the number of drinks consumed the last time the participant “partied”/socialized by gender. The remaining components of the quantitative measures present a picture of the campus environment where the study was conducted. Comparative data from the study sample and university sample indicated significantly higher binge drinking rates and occurrence of negative consequences when compared to the national data. The implications of this finding will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. The following section explains the integration of data from phase one to phase two.

#### Mixed Methods Connection Results

Data were integrated first at the conclusion of phase one, to direct phase two participant selection. Initially, volunteer sampling strategy was used, asking participants who completed the quantitative instrument to respond to the questions, “Are you willing to take part in an interview to discuss these topics further?” and, “If yes, what is your preferred email?” to indicate their willingness to volunteer for the second phase of the study. A preferred email address was
requested in an effort to increase comfort for participants. Results of the Academic Identity Measure (AIM) were used as a primary selection criterion for phase two participants with possible participants identified as individuals experiencing Academic Identity Achievement status. These selection criteria initially yielded forty-five participants who were classified as achieved, however of these participants only 15 indicated their willingness to take part in an interview.

The secondary selection of these participants was also purposeful, in an effort to explain the phenomenon of decision making related to alcohol. The initial intent of the study was to identify participants who exhibited Academic Identity Achievement and varied between high and low risk results, as indicated by Risky College Drinking Practices Measure. All potential candidates \((n = 15)\) were contacted by research support staff via email for interviews; however, despite having sufficient potential candidates in the pool, limited response required additional selection criterion for phase two participation. Specifically, there were no responses from those who met the criteria of exhibiting AIM Achieved status and high-risk alcohol use. At that time, an additional call to recruit participants from the initial pool of 15 potential candidates was made and the current pool was reviewed and ranked on the basis of involvement in organizations and/or experiential learning, and self-reported GPA. After this secondary call for participants, a total of 4 agreed to participate, all of whom exhibited high Academic Identity Achievement, with one reporting high-risk alcohol practices and three reporting low scores on the Risky College Drinking Practices Measure, and representing a variation of self-reported gender identity, involvement, and GPA. The following section explores the results of interviews conducted during second, qualitative phase of the study.

**Phase Two: Qualitative Strand**
As previously mentioned, the second section of this chapter will present the qualitative findings, beginning with participant profiles. The profiles are followed by a summary of major concepts that emerged related to how these students make decisions surrounding alcohol use, the experiences that influence these decisions and how they conceptualize high-risk alcohol use.

**Participant Profiles**

While the intent of the research was to find themes that resonated broadly and explained a specific phenomenon, it is important to understand the individual contexts that these experiences are rooted in. Despite some similarities, each of the students has a unique story and background that informs their perceptions of what it is like to be a high achieving and governs their decisions related to and conceptualization of high-risk alcohol use. A total of four students participated in this phase of the study, two identifying as male and two as female, each representing a unique academic field. Participants were all identified as being in Academic Identity Achieved (AIM Achieved) status, thought to have developed, after a period of active exploration, a set of personal academic beliefs, values, and practices, and are more firmly committed to this status (Was & Isaascon, 2008; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009), with one reporting high-risk alcohol practices, and three reporting low-risk alcohol practices, as indicated by the Risky College Drinking Measure (RCDM). A variety of involvement and experiential learning is represented, and self-reported GPA is greater than 3.5 for all participants. Pseudonyms are used in place of the participant names to protect their identity. The following profiles are based on the interview sessions and interpretations of the narratives, and were written to give readers an opportunity to understand and appreciate the context behind each participant’s narratives.
Belle – Belle is a 21-year-old college student in her fourth year, pursuing an undergraduate degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders, with a plan to move on to a graduate program in Speech and Language Pathology. During the interview, she reflected on how she had gotten to this point in her collegiate career, admitting that her first year did not come as easily to her. Initially admitted to the University as an Exploratory, or undeclared student, she says she attended orientation and felt pressure to pick a major – so she selected nursing. Shortly into her second semester, it became apparent to her that she was not interested in her courses. She knew she liked helping people but did not feel the passion for nursing that she felt others in her cohort expressed. As a result, she sought support from her advisor and her mother, who suggested that she do some job shadowing to determine where her interests might lie. It was through this shadowing that she found her passion for Speech Pathology, noting one experience in particular that impacted her, stating “I liked working with people one-on-one and I liked helping people. And there was this one woman in particular who had this like amazing story about like overcoming a stroke and she was just so positive about it. So - and she really liked working with the speech language pathologist. So I definitely wanted to like have that kind of connection with patients.” She describes herself now as a “go-getter”, indicating that she studied really hard and had earned a 4.0 for the past the semesters. Belle is involved in several campus organizations that garner campus-wide recognition and prestige, including serving as an officer in her sorority and professional organization, and presents as socially connected and career-focused.

A common theme in Belle’s story was the extent to which her drinking was highly controlled, safe, and socially oriented. It was obvious that her desire to be in control and “not get too crazy” influenced both early and later drinking experiences. Even the (very) few negative experiences that resulted from her drinking have an almost scripted element to them and
occurred very early in her collegiate career. While it is not uncommon to have one or two incidents of overindulgence, she was so controlled and organized in her approach to school and social life, that rebounding from these experiences seemed effortless and only served to reinforce the protected way that she managed her drinking and academic preparation. Belle described herself as organized, someone who plans ahead and appeared to have developed a set of skills and self-awareness that was invaluable in terms of setting her up for success. She acknowledged that she felt an almost motherly approach to taking care of friends and was less concerned with going out to parties and bars and more focused on spending time with close friend groups. While she defined social as a relational concept, it was clear that these relationships and the time spent with others often included alcohol and was, to some extent, expected. Ultimately, Belle appeared to have achieved the intertwined social and academic experience she was looking for, found a major and career path that was intellectually fulfilling and exciting, and articulated satisfaction and with her college journey.

**Jasmine** – Jasmine is a 20-year-old college student, pursuing a degree in Secondary Education and plans to teach science. She is currently a junior in college, but indicated that this was only her second year on the campus as she had transferred after her freshman year from another local University. Originally pursuing a degree in Biology, Jasmine changed her major after her first year to education in favor of what she felt was a more secure path after watching her sister struggle to get what she termed a “real job”. She reflected on this decision making process, noting that she felt it was important to enjoy what she was doing as well as to be able to obtain a job, and says “Now that I am doing it, I really, really love it”. She is not involved in any organizations on campus, but expressed an interest in more individualized activities, including swimming, hiking and camping, as well as sharing her appreciate for service.
Jasmine was clearly the most timid of the group, reflected not only in her minimal social activity, but even in her reserved posture and soft voice during the interview. She acknowledges that she tends to be more introverted and private, but states:

I feel like as I've like gotten like further in school, I've also gotten more social but not like in a going out sense. Like I've just gotten more confident in myself. So like I want to meet new people and I want to hang out with more people. So it's kind of like - I feel like they're correlated that way because like as you gain more confidence and in school you're kind of like wow, I'm doing really good. Like I can talk to all these teachers that I was scared of before. And like my study habits, I feel like they're more confident now because I'm like this is how I do it. This is - like I can study with other people now. I don't have to be afraid.

Her greatest influences seemed to be family and teachers, but she did share that her and her roommate were very close. When talking about what it meant to be social, she relayed a fully relational definition, and was the only interview participant to not include alcohol in her personal perspective on what it meant.

As one might expect, Jasmine has had very little personal experience with alcohol, noting one “bad experience”, during which she had alcohol poisoning, leading her to avoid alcohol from that point forward. Similar to Belle, Jasmine talked about her desire to care for friends who had too much to drink. A notable component of her experience, Jasmine shared that sometimes she just holds a drink when at a party due to her perception that “people expect you to kind of like alcohol”, but goes on to share that she does so, despite thinking that alcohol is “nasty”. She also provides a somewhat textbook explanation of what it means to drink responsibly, reciting factual information such as pacing one’s self, drinking lots of water, and not taking drinks from others.
that may have been internalized through an alcohol education presentation. Ultimately, Jasmine approaches her personal alcohol use in the same way she has approached her academic path – carefully planned, organized, and very low risk.

**Robert** – Robert is a 21-year-old student, in his fourth year of college, majoring in Philosophy and minoring in Marketing/PR. When Robert began college, he was a Chemistry major, citing his high school success in Chemistry as the foundation for what he calls being “dead set” in this path. During his first year Chemistry courses, he did not experience the same success he had in the high school and had what he calls a “reality check” during his sophomore seminar that the major was not for him and went to speak with an advisor the next day. Pursuing Philosophy seems to have provided Robert with a more open path to the future, as he is considering career pursuits in law, higher education, or even branding when he completes his undergraduate program. He is a self-identified procrastinator; saying that although he uses an agenda for deadlines, he is often finishing tasks the night before. As he reflected, he noted that the way he works in college is very similar to the way he performed in high school, going so far as to say “I like schedule probably schoolwork around like going out, honestly. We'll have like, like - I'll be like, oh like this is this friend's birthday on Thursday, like so like if this is due on Thursday, then like I procrastinated up to Tuesday.” While he is relatively successful academically, maintaining a 3.6 cumulative average, he recognizes that he does not put 100% of his effort into his academic work.

Despite a major change into courses that were more in line with his interests in strengths, he admits that his grades still suffered at the expense of his desire to interact with people. He was by far the most externally influenced participant I spoke with from a social standpoint. He was cognizant of not being the most popular growing up, even being bullied at times for his
weight, he states he has always been a “social butterfly”, noting that he saw the positive side of being around people. This desire to build relationships with others has lead Robert to be incredibly involved in a number of campus organizations, serving as an officer in several, and eventually being elected to serve as President of his fraternity.

When asked how he defined social, Robert was quick to respond that it meant a person who wanted to be around a lot of people, but clearly alcohol is a part of that interaction. For someone that did not drink much in high school he arrived at college with a very apparent goal of being a more social person. Robert was one of the only participants who acknowledged that his own drinking is excessive at times, that he has had some scary moments involving alcohol, that he could be a better student if he did not drink/socialize as much. He did note that his alcohol use varied significantly depending on the role he was playing (i.e., leadership role vs. personal time). He talked about peers who have let social life supersede academics and go down a bad path, but also those who seem to be going out all the time and “doing ok”. Upon reflection, Robert came to realize that life after college presents many of the same challenges that college did, and he takes pride and offers advice to those that come after him when he says that if you can navigate the college environment he came from and be socially and academically successful, you will be well-prepared.

Alex – Alex is a 22-year-old student in his fifth and final year of college, pursuing a degree in Political Science and Economics. Alex appears to have always been gifted academically and driven to success, presenting as exceptionally curious and the most intellectually inclined of the study participants. It was clear that his parents created an intellectually supportive climate but did not appear to directly impose expectations on him, rather modeling the way through their own intellectual pursuits. In addition, he noted that was from the
area, and had a number of family members and friends directly associated with the University, which created a different experience for him. Many of these people he had known all of his life, and he was aware that this presented a unique perspective for him.

It “meant then that I also understood even from just my freshman year you have to be a little bit more careful than someone that's just coming in and doesn't know anyone - you do know people…. So like there was - there were things on my shoulders that are sitting and saying okay, just as a student even, you had expectations you lived up to. Make sure you don't make stupid decisions don't be a dumbass and like that was a rule that like I had a heard from my freshman year in high school on, who was just use your common sense. He seemed to embrace this perspective as a positive, developing good habits that stuck with him. Alex exhibited a sense of life balance that seemed to be present from early on, had a solid friend group and an interest in giving back to his community through politics and service. His experience appeared highly integrated. Alex articulated a strong locus of control, did not seem to get too caught up in the competitiveness or stress of high achievement, and seemed to have built up several protective habits, in addition to his innate intellectual ability, that allowed him to stay ahead of his work. He is actively engaged in several prominent organizations on campus and has served in very visible leadership roles, both through his own pursuits and through election by his peers, which speaks to the respect shown to him. He saw little distinction between his academic life, his living environment, and his social experience. Each was supportive and interwoven.

When asked how he defined social, Alex talked a great deal about the power and value of relationships, but still implicitly included alcohol in his definition. It is clear that his friend group helped to create a protective element. He spoke about morality and ethics a good bit and seemed to be very aware that drinking should be fun…and hurting people or hurting yourself
would be a line he could not cross and be comfortable. During our interview, Alex disclosed that he had lost a sister at a very young age to an auto accident that involved alcohol and drugs, which clearly impacted his worldview, stating the following:

from a very early age I learned the damages of substance abuse. And alcohol very much is a substance. It's a very dangerous substance. It's probably the most - one of the most dangerous for how it affects you, your decision making and your ability to control your body and things around you. And I saw it from a very early age, which was I lost the person I was closest with.

He did acknowledge that he used alcohol, but seemed to have built up a buffer of sorts, that accounted for the occasional hang over…which for some other students might, over time, cripple their success. When faced with a choice of work or play, he prioritized work. He also created his own definition of success, which satisfied himself, presumably his parents, and lined him up for a successful future. Among all the participants, he seemed the most grounded and least stressed.

**Major Themes**

When reviewing qualitative data, the goal is to ultimately identify the central themes or essence of the responses as it relates to the study questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). In this study, the qualitative component sought to explore three questions: how students with highly developed academic identity status make decisions surrounding alcohol use, what, if any, experiences influence decisions about alcohol use in these students, and how they conceptualize high-risk alcohol use. After thorough data analysis steps were taken to identify units of meaning relevant to the research questions, these units of measure were clustered into three overarching or
“major” themes emerged that represented, in a comprehensive way, the lived experiences of participants who had attained academic identity achievement.

The following section will focus on the three major themes that emerged from the participant interviews. Through primary interviews with four participants, using a semi-structured question protocol designed to elicit personal perspectives and experiences on academics and drinking, several overarching themes emerged. These major themes were identified after coding all interviews for statements that spoke to the research questions, clustering those statements into units of relevant meaning, and determining a unifying theme for each cluster. The major themes, applicable across all participants and emblematic of their lived experiences as high achieving and heavy drinking college students are identity development through active exploration, experiences with alcohol, and navigating environmental expectations.

Within each major theme are several sub-themes that represent an element of the larger theme and collectively define the experience. Some elements within each sub-theme may only have been shared amongst a few participants, or only emerged within one participant’s story, but all represent a significant element of the overall experience. Direct quotations from participants will be shared as examples of the ways that participants expressed their experience of that theme. There is no hierarchy to which the major themes or sub-themes are presented, but rather they are outlined in the order in which most participants discussed their experiences. Table 4.7 below shows each major theme and associated sub-themes that will be explored through example passages to come.
At the beginning of each interview, participants were provided with a brief introduction, explaining that the interview was to help me understand their experience through learning about them, how they became the person they are today, and how they make decisions about the choices they make in consideration of the people they are. Driven primarily by the questions included in the interview protocol as well as the chronological nature of their experiences, most participants first addressed their identification as a student and how they had reached that identity. Next, participants discussed the emergence of social experiences that included the use of alcohol and how these experiences had impacted them. For most, the social experience was altered significantly once they arrived at college, with both an explicit and implicit perceived importance of alcohol and drinking to the social experience. Generally, they each articulated a

Table 4.7: Qualitative Themes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identity Development Through Active Exploration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub-themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: <em>The deliberate activities that an individual participates in during their identity development process.</em></td>
<td>Major and Academic Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact of Experiences with Alcohol</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub-themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: <em>The impact of personal and observational experience with alcohol.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative Experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Navigating Environmental Expectations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sub-themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: <em>The external factors and influences on an individual’s choice to use alcohol.</em></td>
<td>Work Hard/Play Hard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social As a Reward</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Challenging Tolerance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conceptualizing High Risk Use</td>
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</table>
very similar perception of the value of experience, but their responses to those experiences varied.

As they progressed and participants became more reflective, interviews turned to discussions about why the participants chose to drink or not drink, and the role of the campus environment in their experience. This naturally segued into the intersection of their academic and social identities, and how they understood those two to merge with and impact one another, ultimately impacting their navigation and management of their academic work and social experiences.

**Identity Development through Active Exploration**

For every participant, a clear sense of self stood out with nearly all participants having actively engaged in exploration to reach that point. All participants possessed both an internal drive and substantial external influence to succeed in their intellectual development. In the following section, general sub-themes that speak to the development of an identity will be discussed. The general sub-themes are: major and academic exploration, defining social, and sense of self.

Major and academic exploration speaks to the process that each participant actively engaged in that ultimately led them down the path of academic achievement and success. Defining social describes the participant’s identity and how they define social in their own lives, both explicitly and implicitly. Finally, sense of self considers the various internal standards and benchmarks of identity that students perceived for themselves, the feelings of pressure and stress to conform to these standards, and the factors that shaped the students’ experiences and ultimately their identity.

**Major and academic exploration.** The first general sub-theme is one that was explored
early in the interview, major and academic exploration. In each interview, the leading statement asked participants to “Tell me about yourself as a student”, which was followed up by asking them to “Tell me about how you decided to pursue your current academic path.” Major and academic exploration describes the experiences that participants focused on as they recalled formal and informal activities that took place to develop and the sense of their academic selves. As one might expect, three of the four participants talked in detail about their personal academic exploration and the challenges they faced when they arrived at college. When asked about himself as a student, Robert responded in a very typical fashion, explaining his initial plans and the anxiety that came with the realization that it was not for him.

I am a fourth-year majoring in philosophy. I'm getting a double minor…. Did not get to that in an easy way. I started out as a chemistry major. Then I went like exploratory business for a semester…. Well, when I came to school - in high school, I was like super good at chemistry and I was just dead set that I was going to be an anesthesiologist and I came to - when I came to [this city], taking college chemistry classes were a reality check that it was not for me. I held it out that whole year but I didn't even actually switch my - I didn't switch out of chemistry until I came back as a second-year. And I was sitting in a chemistry sophomore seminar. And basically the teacher was like going through all these things that like you could do if you didn't go into medicine and I didn't like the tunnel vision of that and like it freaked me out really bad. And the next day, I went to my advisor and flipped my entire schedule.

Although she has remained in what one would call a “helping field” which will allow her to work with people, Belle recalled her own academic exploration, seeming to feel a pressure to make a decision early about her path. Knowing that she wanted to pursue something in the
medical field, she chose nursing, but found after a short time that she was not truly interested in this path. It was then that she began to actively explore options

So freshman year while I was home on spring break, my mom worked at a nursing home and rehabilitative facility. So I shadowed a speech language pathologist because she suggested that. So I shadowed them and I really liked what I saw and that was definitely something I could see myself doing for the next 50 plus years.

Jasmine engaged in her own exploration, which included not only a change in major but also transferring institutions. For her, the change of major was a decision based in practicality rather than passion. Having seen her sister struggle to maintain regular employment, she shifted to an area related to her interests, but that also presented a tangible opportunity for stable employment.

Well, I actually came in to college with a biology - I kind of wanted to be a biologist one day. … I was like I really need to think about what's actually going to give me a job but like I'll actually enjoy it at the same time. And so I was like well, I can teach biology because I had really good biology teachers in high school. So like that's the reason I wanted to be like in biology. So I decided that that would be good. And now that I'm doing it, I really, really love it.

In addition to considering practicality and the job market, when asked about influences on her decision to pursue education, Jasmine talked about the external influence that one of her high school teachers had on her academic path.

So I actually - my freshman life science teacher. His name's Mr. Sears and he was [just] made the classroom like really fun and like some of the kids would also like eat lunch in his classroom. And it was just fun because it was like we would hang out and like get to know each other. But then like our teacher was like there, too. So it was just
[LAUGHTER] cool. I mean, it wasn't like weird or anything. Like he was always doing his work and we were like hanging out. But - I don't know - because I felt like connected to him. Like we were kind of like friends. And then like when we were in the class, I was like wow, I can learn but it was also like a relationship where if I did something wrong, like he could be like no, stop doing that.

Most confident in his academic path when arriving at college, Alex talked about the early influence that his family, in particular his father and grandfather, had on his academic path and development. The influence of his father and grandfather sent him on a path of exploration earlier than other participants; however, he still continued to explore once arriving on campus, seeking out hands-on experiences that would enhance his academic pursuits. His believe about these experiences is that they present an opportunity for growth – something he actively seeks, stating: “I like being challenged, not mathematically, but - I like being challenged and that's like where I got that sense was my like - I love the challenge.”

Participants shared these academic explorations and experiences with great clarity and reflected at length about the influence each played in grounding their sense of self in academics, sharing their own intrinsic motivations and personal desire to be successful. Whether guided by timing of exploration, such as Alex was, intentionality of exploration, such as Belle and Jasmine, or a more fluid exploration, as Robert appeared to experience, each participant expressed their experiences with exploration during the interview. The following sub-theme continues to explore the identity development of students through their definition of social.

**Defining social.** The next portion of the interviews asked participants to consider their social selves, how they defined them, and how, if at all, their academic self and social self are related to one another. Each talked about social as being explicitly relationship oriented, with a
significant range from implicit to explicit when talking about alcohol as a part of the definition of social. When asked how she defined social, Jasmine’s response exhibited the most relational and least defined sense of social self.

Social - I guess that's just like hanging out with people and like just - like talking to people and like getting to know them and like just like doing activities with them and [just things] like that.

When asked whether there was a relationship between academic and social self, Jasmine said, “I think so”. Her response indicated she did see a connection, both positive and negative, but did not appear to be able to articulate how that connection reflected in her own life.

Because like if you think about like business people, they usually are pretty social in life, too. Like they have - they go out to dinners, they play golf and stuff. So - and that usually is like - helps them get more successful….I definitely think if you do it too much like - and if you do it in the wrong ways, like constantly like alcohol use or like things like that. Instead of just like hanging out. Then yeah, it's really going to affect what you're doing.

The remaining participants expressed both a more clearly defined sense of social selves, as well as being able to reflect on how these connected in their own lives. When asked how she viewed herself socially, Belle was quick to respond with examples of her social self.

Well, I'm in a sorority so I have - I invest a lot of time in that and that has definitely given me the opportunity to branch out socially and meet different people. And even through my major, I've met friends that - we'll do things outside of class and I think usually the weekends are more of a time for me to kind of get away from school and like go out with my friends and I always see myself as an outgoing person.
When asked to define social, she focused heavily on the relational aspect of social, saying:

I think social is your interaction with other people and - I mean, not even just in a night club scene or a bar scene, but just in general, like the way you interact with people you don't know, with people that you are close with. I think it's just having that other aspect of life, of just having like that personal interaction with somebody else.

Belle reflected on the relationship between her academic and social self, talking about the need to balance them in order to ensure success in college and life.

I think within my own major and with academics, you have to have some sort of like social IQ, I guess. You need to be able to relate to people and reach out if you need help. And I think there is a certain way of articulating that to other people, that you need that social skill. And I also think you need to have a good, healthy balance of the both. If you're so involved in your academics that you don't have a social life away from academics, then I don't think that you're balancing your life in a healthy way. And I also think vice versa. If you're so involved socially, then your academics are going to fail. So I think they both have [a relation] within your life.

Despite being very outgoing in the academic realm, Alex indicated he is different when it pertains to his social self, noting the experience of losing his sister at age 10 as a heavy influence on this part of himself. Of note, while he talked about the importance relationships in reference to defining social, Alex’s responses included very explicit reference to alcohol use in reference to being social as well.

Socially, it's - I would say it's different. I - I've never been the person that likes to be the life of the party. And I - I've never been the person that - that likes to go out on the weekends and get hammered and be the one that's always at the bars. I never went out
for the Greek night on Tuesdays and really did any of that…. I'm very much conscious
of the fact of how much others are also and how others are interacting. Being a past
fraternity president, I like - I especially realize that. But I - always in the back of my
head is the like - this - it wasn't me. It wasn't me to be the life of the party and to never
do that. And it really stems from a lot for me from my family and my personal
experiences.

Similar to his academic identity, Alex’s social identity appears to be very highly developed.
When asked to consider how his academic self and social self are or are not related to one
another, his response exhibited the most synthesized identity of all of the participants, citing his
interactions with others as a critical factor in moving him toward this integration despite early
attempts to keep them separate.

I think they're - they absolutely have to be related. It's really hard. I like always had the
leadership philosophy for a while, which was try to keep your personal life and your
professional life separate. And the more like I've tried, the more I've realized is that it's
hard and you almost can't. I think my academic and my social life are very much - go
hand-in-hand because of the people I interact with. It's like - I found my - I found a
family here within my academic and my involvement setting and so that then ties into the
people that I associate with in my social settings and the people that I want to go out with
and the people that I want to hang out with and do just fun things with, whether it's going
to a bar, going to a Reds game or going to a football game or whatever else it is. …I can't
separate them anymore. They go hand-in-hand. They're the people I do everything with.

When asked to expand on how he had reached the understanding that his academic self was
connected to his social self, Alex talked specifically about his experience while serving as his
fraternity chapter president and how that experience impacted his definition and understanding of social as it relates to his life

As the chapter president... you're always in contact. People know where you are. If you don't answer your phone, they knock on your door. If you don't answer your door, they look and see if you're like - if your car's in the driveway. If they don't like - if you're not there, they post on the Facebook.- Or - it's like all these things and all these mediums and that's when I realized that the people I hung out with were people that I was directly working with. And that was when it really clicked was I don't know if you can. You can maybe keep things more private but I don't necessarily think you can keep them separate.

As the most socially oriented of the participants, Robert provided an intriguing look into his definition of social and how it relates to his academic self. Similar to the other participants, he talks about interaction with people in his definition.

I define somebody - that's like somebody that when they go out into public they want to be around a lot of people. Whether that means like they're going to the library or they are going to the bar or going to get food to eat. Like to me, like when you leave your home and you want to be around a lot of people, like that's somebody who likes to be social, in my head.

When asked to consider how his academic self and social self are related to one another, he openly prioritizes his social interactions over his academic responsibilities.

So socially, I like - I definitely schedule - I like schedule probably schoolwork around like going out, honestly. We'll have like, like - I'll be like, oh like this is this friend's birthday on Thursday, like so like if this is due on Thursday, then like I procrastinated up to Tuesday. You know what I'm saying... And that's just like - that is like a whole new
culture and everyone's going out, which is everything they tell you not to do. Like everything. Everyone's doing it so like I'll go out.

While Robert exhibits a well-defined understanding of himself and articulated identities individually, as the interview went on it became clear that he exhibits the least synthesis of identity. The following sub-theme continues to explore the identity development of students and the unique societal factors believed to influence sense of self.

**Sense of Self.** The final sub-theme, sense of self, emerged not through direct questions included in the protocol, but rather through the discussion of implicit expectations that participants revealed. This sub-theme considers the various internal standards and benchmarks of identity that students perceived for themselves, the feelings of pressure and stress to conform to these standards, and the factors that shaped the students’ experiences and ultimately their identity. While this sub-theme did not emerge in all of the participants, it did surface for both of the men who participated. Robert talked about his involvement on campus as a route to success, and the feelings of pressure and stress to “go hard” in both academics and socially.

It definitely takes a life of its own socially …when you see that the people who like are at the top are like who - people who even have like great grades, they're going out really hard and heavy on the weekends, too. You start to think like maybe I'm just doing something wrong like when I'm not going out. So you don't even like - like I guess mentally, I don't even - I don't even like correspond the two because like the people who are doing phenomenal in college, they're going out, too. So like if I'm doing mediocre in college but higher in other realms and like I'm going out, too.

Alex expanded on his perception of pressure and stress from a different angle, citing societal expectations of what it means to be masculine, or be a man, as a common factor in alcohol use
for male identifying students, sharing an experience he had while serving as his fraternity president.

I think alcohol and masculinity are directly correlated into one another. Because I think that the conversation of what it means to be a man is the person that can drink the most and not show that they're drunk or not show that they're that drunk. The person that can go home with the most women and the person that is always at the bar. Like they're the popular bar guy. .... I think it goes back to my original point which is everyone's trying to prove something to each other. And I think college does that and I think alcohol is one of the easiest ways that people try to prove who they are, is that they think that by drinking alcohol, by getting drunk, they're going to meet women..... And so I think then you'll find is that especially college men really struggle with relationships because of how they start and how they're built.

While this sub-theme did not emerge for the participants who identified as women, the impact of role expectation in society appeared as a critical factor for the male participants and therefore is included in these findings. Both Alex and Robert spoke candidly to the pressure that they feel to “be a man” and what they believed that meant, including the need to consume a great deal of alcohol. Additional exploration of the implications of this sub-theme is included in the discussion chapter.

**Summary.** The findings shared above make up the major theme of identity development through active exploration. From an exploration of the start of the participants’ academic journey, to their definition and operationalization of themselves as social, they are not just students as defined by their enrollment in school, but they are students as defined by their sense of self. Just as participants experienced the development of an academic identity that drove their
sense of intellectual attainment, they also developed an identity as being a socially engaged individual. These findings will be explored in greater depth in the discussion chapter of this paper. The following section reveals another major theme, the impact of experiences with alcohol.

**Impact of Experiences with Alcohol**

Each student’s social experience, and more specifically social experience involving alcohol, had a beginning that shaped the development of their social identity. Although many participants discussed an awareness of alcohol and drinking before they themselves chose to drink, among the most salient experiences that ignited the development of a sense of a social identity around alcohol were first instances of drinking. Everyone had a story and everyone could recall with great detail where they were, who they were with, and what they were doing. Some experiences were described as positive, and some resulted in some negative consequence.

The sub-themes explored in this section are: being responsible and negative experiences. Being responsible discusses the participant’s understanding of responsible drinking and their experiences in developing that understanding. The second sub-theme, negative experiences, reflects on the negative experiences that participants had with alcohol and how it influenced their alcohol use now.

**Being responsible.** Regardless of personal experience, the prompt of “When I say ‘drink responsibly’ what comes to mind?” resulted in every participant articulating a very clear understanding of responsible drinking, with responses that seemed as if they were reciting what they had learned about safe alcohol use at some point in their lives. For each participant, primary responses were external factors, with not driving after using alcohol being the most
common. Attributed by both Robert and Belle to alcohol education while in high school, Robert specifically noted this as a practice he felt he could influence others to adopt.

For me - when I tell people to drink responsibly, I tell them to - well, this is stems from high school because I was in High School and my high school had a drunk driving incident. So for me, like drunk driving is like the first thing I hit on. Like when I'm talking to people about drinking safe, I feel like that I can influence them more to not drive drunk than I can actually influence them not to get drunk. You know what I'm saying? Like I can say like hey, if you go out and you drink like please, please, please, please do not get in a car. You know what I'm saying? And I feel like that's like - if I can accomplish something with that, then like I made some leeway.

Belle not only noted finding a sober ride home, but also talked about the importance of the “buddy system” when drinking.

I think if you're going to be drinking that you need to be with somebody. You need to use the buddy system. And definitely not drinking and driving. Having a safe way home. And always having somebody like around you.

Similarly, the importance of having people around them emerged for both Jasmine and Alex as well. In particular, Alex was able to reflect on his experiences and what he articulated as a positive value of having others around him when he was using alcohol.

I've been fortunate that I've certainly been in positions where I've been too intoxicated.... But I knew that - and I can look back and say this. I knew I was fortunate to be around the right people that made sure that when I did get to that point, I was taken care of. If that was making sure that someone was calling [a shuttle], if that was making sure that someone was walking me home, and/or staying with me and making sure and saying
okay, you've had too much to drink. We're going to make sure like you eat something, you get water, and you get hydrated.

In addition to sharing their knowledge of external behaviors that exhibited responsible drinking, Alex and Jasmine both spoke to a more internalized understanding of what it meant to practice responsible drinking in their lives. Jasmine connected her internal awareness with the protective factor of having a friend with her when she socialized.

I feel like you can personally tell like it's time for me to go home. Like, I need to stop and I need to go home. Or like - I usually - I'm pretty good at like knowing when I've had too much alcohol or something. So like I tell - because I always go out with my roommate. Like me and her don't go out without each other. And we usually go home - like if one needs to go home, the other one goes home. So that's like one way I stay safe.

Alex also articulated a more internal locus of control in relation to practicing responsible drinking, seeming to refer to an internal monologue that is on-going when he is drinking that indicates for him it is time to stop.

It's just the feeling I get in my gut that's telling me “Alex”, you physically shouldn't drink this. And “Alex”, mentally, you know that that's not a good idea. You know that if you do that, you're going to put yourself over the edge, which is you won't be in full control of your body. You won't be in full control of what you say and what you do. Whereas if you take a step back now, you're still intoxicated but you still have that level of control where you can process what's going on. You can make hopefully reasonable decisions.

While he acknowledged that the decisions he might make may not be what one would term a good decision, he felt that it was important to recognize the point when his decision making was still reasonable, thus reducing the risk of harm to himself and others.
Belle’s articulation of responsible drinking was directly reflective of herself as a student, also expressing a more internalized sense of control in relation to her social self and alcohol use.

Whenever we decide to go out and drink, there's always like a plan of like where we're going to go. And if I have friends that don't live in the area, where are they going to stay and how we're going to get home, if we're going somewhere that's not within walking distance…. I'm a very organized person and I'm always like planning ahead for the future, especially with academics. And I think planning ahead for the future even just like within the future of the night reflects on myself.

Robert spoke to the concept of knowing one’s limits as well, but presented his response in relation to others, rather than reflecting on his own practice of responsible drinking. In other words, while he was able to articulate that he knew he had limits, he was also very candid about his inability and/or lack of desire to stay within those limits. Conversely, when he saw someone else outside the limits, he felt much more able and willing to intervene.

… when I separate from the group that I'm leading, drink responsibly doesn't exist for me. I'll be honest because like when you like - in college I don't - and I say in college because I would hope that it's not like this after college but like it's like when you go out and like your friends are around and if you've been working to like have this money and stuff, like you just start buying drinks and things start flowing and you just like don't even - you don't even think about it. Especially after you hit 21 and like you can get in anywhere you want…. And you - your friends should know when to cut you off but I kind of focus a lot more on driving than I do on anything else.

Similar to the previous section that considered identity, it was apparent through the interview that Robert possessed the most compartmentalized conception of his own identity; unconsciously
separating facets of himself based on the role he was in at a given time. The following sub-theme continues to examine the effect of impact of experiences with alcohol through an exploration of negative experiences related to themselves and others.

**Negative experiences.** The topic of exploration of negative consequences as a result of drinking was included in each discussion, as a result of the prompt asking participants “What experiences have you had related to high risk drinking?” for themselves or others. Although the passages below will highlight the nature of negative consequences that the participants experienced, they experienced very few severe or permanent negative consequences and the impact on behavior varied greatly across the group.

Jasmine had the least experience with alcohol noting one experience that significantly impacted her, resulting in a choice not to drink after that experience.

I've only had one really bad experience because I kind of like learned from it after. And I actually got alcohol poisoning. And it just - it wasn't very fun. Like I just - like I had a whole bottle of champagne in like one sitting and that was like - but I like told my roommate like please take me home. But then at the - like once I got home, I was getting sick and I was getting scared and I was just like I never wanted to be there again.

Similarly, Alex talked about an exceptionally negative experience he had during his freshman year, which shaped his decisions to use alcohol afterward.

So I remember my freshman year was - I was actually at a - I was at a fraternity party and there were shots of Everclear that I - I didn't know what Everclear was at the time. I learned afterwards that that was a hundred proof vodka. And I remember having to be helped back to my dorm and I like - I remember it was interesting because I remember when I was - like I distinctly remember because I was talking to my dad about it the other
day, which was I remember a few weeks later when I was drinking again because there's
that level when you get that drunk, you don't want to drink for a while.

While he acknowledged it was a very negative experience, he has not avoided alcohol since, but
rather modified the amount he drinks.

You sit back and it's like I don't think my body can handle being around alcohol for a
while. And so I remember I think it was maybe a weekend or two after I was having a
few drinks with my friends. And I remember hitting that - hitting a point which was,
[oh], I just like - I got the shivers of I remember like “Alex”, if you keep going, you're
going to feel like you did a few weeks ago when people had to help you back and that
wasn't a fun feeling…. And so at that point, then I couldn't - if someone handed me a
shot, I wouldn't have been in the position to say no because I couldn't - again, I couldn't
process it mentally to say don't do it. I had already consumed too much. So I learned
that very early on in my freshman year.

When asked whether he felt as though others listened to and learned from the negative
experiences, modifying their own alcohol use the way that he had, Alex was transparent about
the importance of these experiences as a learning moment, but expressed frustration that his
peers may not learn as quickly as he felt he had.

I think it's frustrating, though, to know is that for some people, and I'd say the majority of
people, it takes a negative experience like that to learn that you don't want to be that way.
That it's not that fun to be that drunk. Actually, it's not fun at all…. I think people need -
and it's like the frustrating part and it's something I wish I had an answer to. People need
- I think people need to experience the negative experience of what it feels like to be that
intoxicated to fully understand is that's not something I want to do. And that that's not a
fun physical and mental state to be in when you don't have control over who you are, what you're doing, who's around you and all the actions in between. I think people - I like to think for the most part people listen to their own experiences. It's very hard for an outsider to convey to someone you don't want get that drunk because until they - until someone feels it, they're just having to take someone else at their word.

Robert was one student who admittedly tested the limits of his health, both early in his college career and as a new 21 year old and was willing to share some of his experiences. Despite acknowledging that his choices may be putting him at risk, he still seemed to prioritize the social aspects of his life.

I'm saying like I don't like it but I've like gone to bars and lost friends and like been kind of confused. Like I'm drunk. That's high-risk. That's like really scary for me…. But it's definitely like - at the worst night, I guess you black out. I mean, I've never - I thought like when I came to college like I thought the whole like blacking out thing was a lie. I thought it was something that like people made up in the movies. Like it was not real. And then like when it happens, you're like oh, my god, like where - like what did I do. Like did I embarrass myself? You know, like hopefully not. And then I guess the whole like - the college perspective is just like oh, well, like, and you just like go about your day the next day and like you hope you didn't embarrass yourself.

When asked to consider these experiences and how they reflected on him as a student, Robert expressed that he did not believe there was a reflection on him academically.

To me personally, like how I think about it as a student, it doesn't reflect on me poorly. As a person, I think it reflects on me poorly. I - so like when it comes to just like that, I guess I separate it. I don't let it - I don't really let it - I don't want to say I'm letting it
define how I do in school. That - I think that's what you mean by student because like when I think student I just think like going to class. Like that's like always my target to go to class. And I think I've maybe missed like three classes since I've been in school. Like I am like one of those people, like attendance is the biggest thing for me. I might be a little tardy, walk in fifteen minutes late but like going to class [is the biggest thing]. So I never really let it affect me there. But like as a personal thing, like within as a person, I'm like did I need to drink that much. You know what I'm saying? Did I need to go out? Probably not.

While she had not had any personal negative experiences, Belle talked in detail about experiences with others. In particular, she shared an experience with a friend early in her college career who had consumed too much alcohol, and the need to intervene to prevent a potentially severe consequence.

I haven't personally had like instances of high-risk drinking but I've had to take care of multiple friends that have indulged in way too many drinks and have been trying to make poor decisions and just all-around being out of control and calling me, asking me to come pick them up and getting in fights and things like that…. I remember freshman year there was one girl who I was with and she had been drinking too much and this guy was trying to take her home and I had to like step in and make sure that she came back with me. Because I knew that that situation wasn't going to go over well because they were both intoxicated and I think they both just wanted like intimacy and I stepped in and said like no, she's going back with me.

Robert also shared an interesting perspective in relation to his experiences with others who had been drinking and faced potential negative consequences.
My friends like to drink with me but they also know that I'm the person that if somebody like - if like somebody were to like be passed out drunk or something, I'll probably call an ambulance. Like I'm that person. So, yeah. I do worry about other people. I guess technically I worry about other people's health and safety than I worry about myself when I'm drinking. Like if I personally am like pounding the drinks and stuff, I'm not like in the moment thinking like oh, you should stop. But like if I'm not like in that kind of like mode or realm and I look over and I see somebody else is doing it, like I will kick - like me seeing it like will make me like try to stop them. But like me myself, I won't stop myself.

While he shared openly about the negative experiences he had, it was at this point in the interview that Robert first explicitly acknowledged that he compartmentalized different facets of himself, seemingly not focused on the potential connection between academic and social self.

Similar to Robert, Alex talked about his experiences with others who were facing potentially negative consequences as a result of drinking and his perception of these experiences.

I have been in positions where I've been very concerned for other people. Whether that's in a few of the honorary groups that I'm in here at [the university] that I know when paths have taken it to a level that's been unhealthy. …. it pains me to know every time is that someone has to learn that. Because they're probably not going to listen to me by just me telling them.

He talked further about factors that may impact an individual who has had too much to drink, particularly when they may need help, and his concern for the well-being of others around him.

Especially being 18 to 23, is having someone know that you're not getting in trouble if you call for help and ask for help. Getting that through [other] people's minds is really
difficult. So I have been in those perspectives and I've also been in the perspective which is being nervous to call for help when I was - probably my freshman and sophomore year I don't know if I would have, at least right away unless it was serious. But most people don't have that knowledge or interaction to say yeah, that's the best decision I can make.

It is clear through the excerpts included in this section that college students may face some negative experience in relation to alcohol, either for themselves or for another person, and that these experiences have a wide range of impact on the decisions individuals make for themselves afterward.

**Summary.** The findings shared above make up the major theme of the impact of experiences with alcohol. In developing a balance between academic and social identities, experience plays a variety of roles depending on how an individual responds to that experience. As seen through the stories of the participants there is the potential for a tension between the two to develop, and various skills and strategies were employed to navigate that tension. For some, this meant regularly practicing responsible drinking, through planning in advance. For others, it meant avoiding or limiting the amount of alcohol they consumed. A common reflection on social interaction, with or without alcohol, was the use of that interaction as a reward for performing in the classroom. While they engaged in some social behaviors for pure enjoyment and satisfaction, there were always elements of external motivation. Finally, the participants talked about their personal negative experiences related to alcohol, as well as the negative experiences of those around them, and how these experiences impacted the choices they make related to alcohol. These findings will be explored in greater depth in the discussion chapter of this paper. While this section focused on why participants make the decisions they do in relation
to alcohol use, the following section reveals the final major theme, navigating environmental expectations, which explores how and why they make these choices.

**Navigating Environmental Expectations**

If there is a recurring and dominant theme that permeates the experience of each of the participants in this study, it is the process by which they navigate being a high achieving and social college student. They live within a college environment that expects and demands academic success and one where the perceived culture is that the frequent and heavy consumption of alcohol is equally essential to social success (Crawford & Novak, 2011). As their narratives will demonstrate, they employ philosophies, strategies, and skills in order to achieve their social and academic goals.

This section is divided into several sub-themes, which each relate back to the overarching theme of navigating environmental expectation. The sub-themes are: work hard/play hard, social as a reward, challenging tolerance, and conceptualizing high-risk use. Work hard/play hard refers to the philosophical foundation for navigation. It is a guiding motto and will be expressed in these findings as a feeling that this is just what we do. Social as a reward explores the use of alcohol as a reward for success or completion of other tasks. Challenging tolerance explores the pressure to drink in larger quantities and at faster speeds, with the intent of developing greater social success. Finally, conceptualizing high-risk use delves into the participant’s perception of high-risk alcohol use, including the impact of personal and observed behaviors they define as high risk.

**Work hard/Play hard.** Work Hard/Play Hard is something of an anthem heard on many college campuses in this day and age. Even when these words were not said verbatim during the interviews, the implications of this concept and the environmental expectations that this culture
created were apparent. As shared in previous sections, Robert exhibited the classic embodiment of work hard/play hard, noting his own priority of socialization over academics and comparing himself to others. His focus on social interaction and social as a reward implicitly conveyed his support of the work hard/play hard mentality.

Jasmine addressed this topic of work hard/play hard, rather than through a direct or implicit response, by outlining the social expectations she believed exist on the campus and her own navigation of these expectations.

I guess I just kind of do it because like when you're at parties, people expect you to kind of like want alcohol, but I really think alcohol is nasty. Like I hate all alcohol….So I usually just hold it because I don't really want to drink it and I don't really want to feel bad in the morning or anything. So - I mean just being in like a college social setting, it's usually like a party on the weekend so it's kind of like - it just feels right.

While she did not appear to subscribe to the philosophy of work hard/play hard personally, Jasmine’s reflection seemed to imply an understanding that this was what a college student was supposed to do.

As previously explored with Belle, she has developed a balance between her academic and social self, implicitly referring to the concept of work hard/play hard by actively deferring social interactions to the weekend in favor of completing her academic tasks during the week. When asked whether she believed this to be a common practice across the entire campus, she replied in the negative, and shared her perception of those who focused on social and specifically alcohol in favor of academics.

I don't think it's reflective across the entire campus environment because I - there are people - I think it also depends on your major. Because I know some majors are more
difficult than others. They require more time than others. And I think those people who are willing to put in the effort during the week for those majors will do what I do and have the weekend to just kind of unwind. And I think there are other people on this campus who come here just to party and that is their main focus. And their major is something that they just chose on a whim. They don't go to class. They - I mean, I have - I know people who - they drink every single night of the week. So I don't - I think it's kind of split in half. I think the people who are drinking all the time are not performing classroom-wise.

While he agreed that the concept of work hard/play hard was a prevalent theme on campus, Alex strongly disagreed with this as an acceptable motivation to engage in high risk drinking while in college.

Work hard, play hard. Boys will be boys. And I think that's bullshit. I like - I get so frustrated with that because for me and like what I believe, I think you get one chance in life. Anything past that, if someone wants to give you a second chance or second impression or opportunity, you got a gift. I guess it was like the idea, and I've heard it in - expressed in multiple groups is oh, like college is the time to live it up. College is the time that you - it's like your grace period. And I guess I see it from the alternative perspective which is college can also be the time where you can throw all of your dreams down the drain. You can end your future careers. When I see guys in my fraternity getting underages and getting public intoxication and disorderlies and all these things, is like having to tell them that's going to show up when you're interviewing [at a] company and they ask you have you like - have you had any criminal charges pressed against you. That's going to pop up. So like I adamantly dismiss the work hard, play hard. I think if -
in my opinion, if you need to drink to have fun, then there's bigger issues. Then like clearly we're not doing a good enough job exposing you to how you can have fun and like providing you with enough opportunities. Whether it's [the] university or the community, clearly we're not doing our part in that if that's what you think. And clearly then we need to connect you to the right people is why do you need to do that. Because I think if you have that mentality, then there's probably something deeper going on inside of you that's saying I had a really stressful week. I just need to get drunk. Clearly, there's something more than just having a really stressful week at work. So I think when you say that, I adamantly disagree with it and I think that that shows there are bigger issues than alcohol. Alcohol is the consequence of a deeper issue.

As demonstrated within these passages, work hard/play hard is a common theme on a college campus, but the participants in this study exhibited varied perspectives in how they conceptualized the theme. These perspectives seemed to align with their own sense of self and identity. The following sub-theme continues the exploration of how students navigate environmental expectations and utilize social as a reward.

**Social as a reward.** The second sub-theme that arose in this section revolved around the use of social interaction and alcohol as a reward for completion of academic tasks. Although the participants did not share the sentiment explicitly or as the result of a prompt, several talked in some way or another about stress relief and a desire for relaxation after a hard day or week as a motivator to drink. The most organized of the group, Belle shared her approach to her academic and social life which led me to believe she possessed a fair amount of balance in her life.

I think as a student, like the weekends are definitely - throughout the week we're just - we're going so hard on the academics and I'm studying so hard that I feel like I am like in
high-stress situations throughout the week just trying to balance everything. And I think
during the weekend, it's nice to just like put all of that aside, have a couple [of] drinks
with my friends. And I think that's a healthy balance for me. And - I don't know. It just
- it seems like I can't - like that's something I can look forward to like while I'm doing all
of this stuff during the week. I'm like okay, I know that at the end of the week, I can
relax and have a good time with my friends.

Jasmine approached her social interactions with a similar sense of balance, noting her practice of
planning in advance for social interactions.

I usually don't go out if it's like last minute or something. Like I like to know if I'm going
to go out. That way I can plan ahead and be like okay, you're going eat this for dinner
tonight. You're going to drink this many water bottles. [Then] like you can have a drink
at this time, that time. I like to plan ahead and I like to be organized and I think by
practicing my low-risk drinking that way, it's kind of like how I like to plan for school. I
always like block off times for my homework. Like oh, [like] this time you're doing
physics homework. Like tonight, you'll do physics and then you'll do calculus. And so
it's kind of like how - and I'm like you can have a drink then. [LAUGHTER].

As the most socially oriented participant in the study, Robert talked openly about the
normalization and expectation of alcohol use in his everyday life.

I have become one of those people who like when I have - when I go out to dinner, I have
a drink. Like I like to just have like one beer or - it sounds really funny. It sounds funny
because like I'm in college. So to me, that's like low-risk. I'm eating. I'm having a drink,
maybe two. I don't even think it's pre - it's not even preplanned now. It's like naturally
like when I like - if I go out to eat and I sit down, I'm like oh, yeah, I'll - and I'll - the
funny thing is when I go out socially, like I'm going out in the party mode, I would never order a beer and - like a beer and a water. But like when I go out to eat, I'm like oh, can I have a water and like a beer or something like that? So I guess it just happens naturally. It's not even like preplanned. It's just like oh, I'll have a drink.

As he reflected further, Robert talked explicitly about his social engagement and use of alcohol as a reward for the work he put in during the week.

So I guess now to the point where if I have like a really, really hard test and like I've been studying for like hours and hours on end, I take the test. When I go out, if I like - typically after like I've been like really, really in the library, I don't - I'm too tired to like actually go out. But I'll like go and like have a drink. So like I think it talks to - I think it's kind of scary to think that I'm like rewarding myself with a drink after something like that.

Pausing briefly at this point in the interview, Robert appeared to consider what he had just shared, but quickly continued on, saying:

I think just one thing for me is that like I feel like the student experience and alcohol is always seen negatively as like a whole. And I think student experience and alcohol should be weighed individually, just like when we leave college and like we're in the real world, how someone else handles like being an alcoholic versus someone handles like being someone who drinks. Like those two things are seen separately. But I feel like college students get like looked at under this umbrella of like being like people who like can't handle alcohol at all. But I think it's something that should always be looked at as the individual…. Like - when like an individual is drinking like six days a week in college, then like yeah, that's somebody that we need to like really, really worry about.
Like their drinking capacity and like what they're doing to themselves. But like these students who are like going to class, going to college and like getting involved but then they go out on Friday and Saturday night and like they're out and about - or maybe they go out for a friend's birthday on Thursday or something. I don't think that like those are the students that like should be looked at.

In general, Robert’s responses reflect what appears to be a commonly shared perception and expectation of college as a time of few obligations and responsibilities and an opportunity to let loose to do all of the crazy things that cannot be done “in the real world” without incurring far greater negative consequences. The following sub-theme continues the exploration of how students navigate environmental expectations of challenging tolerance.

**Challenging tolerance.** Challenging tolerance explores the desire and pressure to drink larger quantities at faster speeds, with the intent of developing greater tolerance to the alcohol and therefore a higher social status. The general agreement among interview participants was that individuals who were challenging their alcohol tolerance were doing so purposefully, increasing the amount and decreasing the time over which they consumed alcohol. Often this happened within specific settings or peer groups, which elevated the desire to be seen as able to handle their alcohol even more.

Robert talked about the practice of power hours, during which alcohol is drastically discounted for an hour period and students drink as much as they can, as fast as they can. While one might think that it is safer and less risky to drink in establishments, aside from the concerns about transportation, Robert shared an interesting perspective about drinking in bars as he discussed the environment had experienced.
Like there's been times where I'm like - there's like bars where like people - you just see like they are smashing it pretty quick and that's why I get - like you never see the bartenders cut anyone off in college…. like when you start challenging yourself with alcohol. Like when you - when someone is like saying like they've built their tolerance over the years and that just means like they can drink a lot throughout the night. Like that's a tolerance. But like when people start to actually challenge their tolerance, that's high-risk. Like a power hour is you challenging your tolerance. You know what I'm saying? Like you are - you're seeing how much you can do in an hour.

Alex had a similar perspective when talking about the practice of challenging tolerance, reflecting on the external factors that he felt lead individuals to this practice.

You're aware that your drinking is going to change when you're around one or two people to when you're probably going to be around 20, 30, or 40 people. You know that there's probably going to be an influence if there's music playing. And that all of these different factors, I think drinking responsibly means that you're aware of all the different factors that are going into - potentially that can cause you to either drink more or drink at a moderate pace. Because I think there's a lot of contributing factors, [is] to why people drink more, especially if they're around their friends and people that they're comfortable with. Is - they say okay, I can drink more because I'm around my friends; they'll watch out for me.

Belle shared a different perspective, specifically in relation to a friend. Over time, Belle had developed concern for the reasons her friend was using alcohol, seemingly challenging herself to drink beyond her tolerance and placing herself into what Belle felt were highly risky situations.
I have a friend who - she has - I mean, she's been above the legal age of drinking for a couple [of] years now and I think that she uses alcohol to get attention. And I think she - I'm not sure if she either pretends to be more intoxicated than she actually is or if she just consumes that much alcohol to the point of where she has to be the center of attention. And it does concern me. And just like the things that I've seen her do while she's been that intoxicated. I am concerned for her in that aspect. I remember there was one night I didn't go out with her but I had heard her come home. She was my roommate at the time. And she had like gone downtown, came home, had vomited all over the bathroom, and then woke up the next morning without any clothes on and said that she thought she was drugged. And - I mean, I think she was - I think she just had too much to drink. There was no instance where like she was in a situation where that could have happened, but she just - I think she over-exaggerates things sometimes and she - I think she does it for attention and I'm concerned like how her - how she can find a limit to where she is having fun but not making poor decisions.

Jasmine’s alcohol use was minimal but noted that she had observed people who were actively challenging their tolerance for alcohol consumption and expressed concern for their safety.

I think if you're getting sick and you're still drinking, then that's probably not okay. I've seen like friends and stuff that have had too much and then I kind of like had to take care of them just because you don't want to not be there for them and it's not like a good thing to be - like situation to be in. But you can't just leave them by themselves.

In general, all participants agreed that the practice of developing a tolerance was common among college students and that tolerance is often viewed as a positive attribute and protective factor.

While none of the participants indicated that they had personal experience with challenging their
tolerance, this sub-theme emerged when asked whether they had felt concern for their health and safety or the health and safety of others related to alcohol use. The following sub-theme continues the exploration of how students navigate environmental expectations through their conceptualization of high-risk alcohol use.

*Conceptualizing high-risk use.* This sub-theme explores the participant’s perception of high-risk alcohol use, including the impact of personal and observed behaviors they define as high risk. Participants were asked what experiences they had related to low and high risk drinking for themselves or others. This was followed by asking them to consider how they practiced low or high-risk drinking and how those practices may reflect on their academic and social selves.

The conceptualization of low risk drinking was comparable across all participants. Each of them talked about being aware of what and how much they were drinking, pacing themselves, eating prior to going out, having access to non-alcoholic beverages, and ensuring they are with people they trust when they are drinking. Alex, Belle, and Jasmine all noted that they utilized these practices regularly when drinking.

When asked about low risk drinking, Robert agreed with the definition that others provided, pointing to the need to be aware of the amount of alcohol consumed, as well as the speed and time of consumption. However, when asked how he practiced low risk drinking, his response was unique and reflective of his definition of social explicitly including alcohol use.

I have become one of those people who like when I have - when I go out to dinner, I have a drink. Like I like to just have like one beer or - it sounds really funny. It sounds funny because like I'm in college. Like most college students just drink like a glass of wine at
dinner or something like that. So to me, that's like low-risk. I'm eating. I'm having a
drink, maybe two.

In general, the participants also agreed on the conceptualization of high risk drinking. As
expected, they noted behaviors opposite of their definition of low risk drinking, including
increasing the amount of alcohol they drank, drinking faster or higher proof alcohol, allowing
others to pour drinks for them, and drinking in places or with people they were unfamiliar with.

While she exhibited the least experience with and consumption of alcohol, and despite
her acknowledged aversion to the taste of alcohol, when asked if she had any personal
experience with high-risk alcohol use, Jasmine acknowledged she had.

Sometimes my roommate works and then we go out. And so sometimes we kind of
speed up how many drinks we have - so that we're like on the same level as other people -
that we're hanging out with. And so that's - that's not like good to do and I [don't know
that I've] - so that's one way that I've definitely done high-risk drinking and that's actually
why I had that whole bottle of champagne that one night.

When asked to clarify what she meant by “speeding up” she replied, “Like instead of like pacing
your drinks, you just kind of just go like one, two, three.” When asked and whether she changed
anything else, she said yes, and continued on to say, “I would say instead of like beer it's
probably like shots or something.” It should be noted that while replying to these questions,
although she responded openly, her affect and posture changed, reflecting discomfort with the
discussion and nervously laughing while she responded.

When asked about her conception of high risk drinking, Belle responded, “Drinking in
excess”, in alignment with the other participants. When asked to elaborate on what that meant,
she responded with the following.
And consuming alcohol to the point where you no longer have control of yourself. You - I think you always need to find that healthy limit of we're having a good time but I also like [control the] situations, things get out of hand. And I think giving in to peer pressure, too. So if you're friends are saying like keep taking shots, keep taking shots, I think that's high-risk drinking.

While she denied having any personal experiences with high risk drinking, she did note that she had observed high-risk behavior in others.

I haven't personally had like instances of high-risk drinking but I've had to take care of multiple friends that have indulged in way too many drinks and have been trying to make poor decisions and just all-around being out of control and calling me, asking me to come pick them up and getting in fights and things like that.

Alex did not share any significant personal experiences with high risk drinking, although he implicitly acknowledged that he had experiences. When asked to share how he conceptualized high risk drinking, he provided his examples based on what he had observed on campus.

I think you'll see people that are consuming hard liquor at a fast rate and maybe not being aware of also what they're consuming. So allowing other people to pour their drinks and make their drinks for them. When you're purposefully drinking in order to get drunk - in order to be intoxicated. And not just at a point where you're intoxicated. I think intoxicated is the entry level, the way I think people at high-risk level are sitting back and they're trying to get to that point where they don't remember. And so I think that looks like when people are doing multiple shots in a row, when they're doing line chugs, when you have people come back and you force them to finish their drink or finish their beer or whatever it may be. I think it looks like a high quantity of alcohol in a very short period
of time. And that short period of time is extended, that it's - people are consuming alcoholic drinks at a high rate and they're doing it very quick and they're doing it over a long period of time.

In addition to sharing his conceptualization, Alex expanded on this by sharing a story of his exposure to high risk alcohol use and the repercussions faced during and afterward.

So when I was chapter president, the first - the week and a half after I took over as chapter president, we had a young woman get alcohol poisoning at our chapter house because of having a case race, where the guys in my fraternity and the women of the sorority race against each other to see who could finish a case - a 24-pack of beer the fastest. And I think that was my - the only thing that you can ever make sense of that is that people want to get drunk…. I've been around and I've been around enough people that take shots quickly and everything else. Like - I like - I've certainly been there, too. You take a few shots too quickly and then you feel it. That - like man, like a step back. Like that wasn't a good decision. But I would say that was my experience of being on the outside and watching and like knowing that it was happening afterwards and learning about it when I was at my fraternity conference and then got a phone call about it. I was trying to analyze the situation, which was you don't do those things for any other motive other than to get drunk. It significantly impacted someone that was at our house, which was that girl had to go to the hospital.

Robert provided a conception of what high risk drinking looked like that was similar to other participants, noting the amount, the speed, and the time as being potentially indicative of high-risk consumption.
So for me, high-risk drinking is when someone is like literally - it's happy hour. It's someone is just like pounding drinks after drink. Like when you see someone drink a cup and put it down and fill it back up, that's high-risk drinking. Like at that point, they are doing way too much.

In addition, Robert was the only participant who openly acknowledged that he had engaged in high risk drinking, but shared an interesting perspective about the impact of environment and peers on high-risk alcohol use.

I've been a part of high-risk drinking myself. And I would say I guess - you know, I guess I always sit here and I say most college students do, but then when I step back and I look at like how people are stereotyped, now that I'm like saying it out loud, I wonder if like most college students actually do. Or if it's just like a stereotype that like when you go to college, like you're going to be drunk all the time. But even regardless, like I don't think no matter - like in my head, no matter what, like in a college standpoint if an institution starts to put high regulations on alcohol, like it's just going to like make the body wonder more, I feel like. And like start diverting from authority and like - so like my personal experience with alcohol is - I think it's been - I think it's been pretty - it's probably been pretty high for someone who like - for most college students. And then from a friend's standpoint, the crazy thing is my closest friend in college, she does not consume alcohol at all. She goes out every time I go out. She's like right there. And I always try to like use her. And now I use her as an example when I go out. Like I mean, I guess I can have fun, too without going as hard. I'm still drinking. I'm not going to lie. But without going as hard. So yeah. I've had some experience with alcohol.
Robert’s implicit point, and justification for investing heavily in social life, was that any reasonable definition of learning in college had to extend beyond the classroom. Although it may have been used as a rationalization to explain away his drinking behaviors, Robert’s responses offered an honest assessment of what he had given up academically in exchange for the opportunity to be social.

**Summary.** Participants all addressed, both explicitly and implicitly, the perception and expectation that the typical college experience in the United States included drinking. Those perceptions and expectations were supported by their experiences once on campus. The participants see drinking as common and normative, but when they need to stay sober or drink in limited ways, there is the freedom to do so. In general, participants seemed to acknowledge that family and teachers played significant roles in the development of their academic identity; however, it is peers who most directly influence their ability to navigate the college environment. These students want to fit in and make friends, to have fun and to have an occasional break from their academic obligations. Ultimately, they all sought to be a part of what society has told them college is all about, but each has developed their own way of navigating the environment and prioritizing academic and social lives depending on their unique experiences.

**Mixed Methods Results**

Understanding how and why college students make decisions is a complex endeavor that requires consideration of both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the relationship between them. In this study, qualitative and quantitative results were integrated to establish how these results may inform one another. The mixed methods inquiry also sought to explore how the understanding that emerges from the quantitative and qualitative data might be used to provide a deeper understanding of the decisions surrounding high-risk alcohol use in support of
harm reduction efforts on a college campus. As noted in the ACHA-NCHA II results, both the current study sample and the university sample as a whole had significantly higher rates of binge drinking, with results indicating 38.1% of study participants and 49.8% of university respondents had consumed seven or more drinks the last time they socialized or “partied”. When compared to the national results, indicating only 20.7% of respondents had consumed that same amount, the impact of the institutional environment and norms becomes a more prominent factor to consider in relation to how students make decisions related to their alcohol use. This is further evidenced through the reported consequences, with 38% of study participants and 47.8% of university participants indicating that they forgot where they were or what they had done during the last twelve months while drinking. These results are of significant concern when compared to the national average, which indicated only 29.9% of respondents had the same experience (American College Health Association, 2013). Furthermore, when asked to give an estimate of the number of people they believed had used alcohol in the last thirty (30) days, 97.9% of study participants responded that students had used alcohol at all in the last thirty (30) days, with 75% of participants believing that at least half of all students had used alcohol in the last thirty (30) days. During the interviews, the topic of the campus culture was discussed, with Alex sharing a detailed reflection of his perception of the culture on the campus as it compares to another local institution.

I think at [our campus], I think an alcohol culture exists but I think it gets blown out of proportion sometimes. I would love to challenge our [city] officers and our [campus] officers to go up to [ABC] University and have an experience up there for a weekend because I think they'll find [is] like - they'll come back and praise our Greek life and say like wow, like thank God, our men and women, our students aren't acting the way that
they do up in [ABC]…. I think it's one of the hardest things that a college culture faces is just how do you promote your students to actually form real relationships and promote healthy relationships that aren't centered around alcohol.

This response presented an intriguing perspective, as the quantitative results indicate the potential for a larger issue surrounding the campus alcohol culture, but Alex, who is an extremely engaged and involved student, has a much different perception. This result presents a potential disparity between actual norms and perceived social norms, and presents an opportunity for prevention work which is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Appendix E presents a joint display of the integrated results. This display frames the results within the context of Social Cognitive Theory, embedded within its key reciprocal components of behavior (practices), person (decision making), and environment (peer influences). Quantitative outcomes for the participants who were identified as exhibiting academic identity achievement are presented within the context of these components. Specifically, patterns of alcohol use for students with highly developed academic identities are presented in relation to behavior and person. In addition, results for the study sample are presented in relation to environment, with reference to campus and national data. Within the qualitative results, the major and sub-themes are presented regarding the experiences within the context of themes which support engagement and avoidance. Major and sub-themes which support engagement are those which guide the participant’s alcohol use and/or conceptualization of alcohol use toward a more low-risk outcome for themselves or others. Major and sub-themes which support avoidance are those which guide the participant’s alcohol use and/or conceptualization of alcohol use toward a more high-risk outcome for themselves or others.
Finally, the joint display outlines example implications for practice which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter contained findings from a quantitative survey completed by ninety-seven students, interviews conducted with four participants during one in-person session, and a discussion of the integration of these results. Distributed through an electronic format, the survey focused on establishing the participant’s academic identity, explored their use of alcohol, and examined their perceptions of alcohol use on campus. The interviews focused on the lived experiences of academically achieved students and explored their personal and observational experiences of alcohol use. Using a semi-structured question format, participants were asked to consider and share experiences related to academics and drinking. These conversations lead to themes related to the people and places that influenced their development, the decision making process and experiences underlying their identity, and the navigation of environmental factors that influenced their academic selves and use of alcohol.

A number of key findings emerged which serve as the basis for the following discussion chapter. Participants generally defined social experience as relationship driven, in some instances those social experiences were synonymous with drinking. They did not just seek out those experiences, but their sense of self was in many ways defined by their social interactions. Participants did not just choose to drink for the sake of drinking or abstain for the sake of abstaining, but rather possessed a range of motivations for their choice that were tied closely to their own personal experiences. Finally, most participants did not compartmentalize and keep separate two parallel college experiences in terms of their academics and social life, but rather
merged and navigated these experiences together with combined philosophy, skill sets, and appreciation for their connectedness.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Specifically, it sought to explain how and why high performing and developed college students make decisions to engage in or avoid high-risk alcohol use. The initial hypothesis was that these students have not experienced a synthesis of identity and did not view their decision to engage in high-risk alcohol use as impactful or relevant to their academic identity.

The study utilized a sequential explanatory approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and was conducted in a two-phase process. Over the course of phase one, quantitative data were gathered using an electronic survey, which yielded a total of 97 completed profiles. Quantitative research questions included: What relationships exist between the levels of academic identity status and alcohol use, and what patterns of alcohol use are found for students with highly developed academic identities? During phase two, qualitative data were collected through in-person interviews using a semi-structured protocol with four academically achieved students. Qualitative research questions included: How do students with highly developed academic identity status make decisions surrounding alcohol use, and what experiences influence decisions about alcohol use in college students with highly developed academic identity status, as well as exploring how students with highly developed academic identity status conceptualize high-risk alcohol use? Data were integrated between phases, with results from phase one informing participant selection and structure of phase two, and at the completion of phase two to inform the discussion and implications for practice (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark & Smith, 2011). Mixed methods questions included:
how do the quantitative results explain and inform the qualitative results?

, and how can the understanding that emerges from the quantitative and qualitative data be used to provide a deeper understanding of the decisions surrounding high-risk alcohol use in support of harm reduction efforts on a college campus?

Through the completion of these two phases of data collection, several key findings emerged. First, it is important to note that survey responses indicate that the specific university environment where the study was conducted potentially creates a facilitative factor, as drinking and high-risk activity is much greater both in the study sample and university sample than the national data (American College Health Association, 2013). The participants’ qualitative responses generally indicated that a significant identity and component of their sense of self was defined by social experiences; however, those with a more integrated identity and sense of self were cognizant of the potential connection between their social and academic selves. The literature supports this finding, going as far as to suggest that individuals possess an “alcohol identity” which exhibits the extent that an individual perceives drinking alcohol to be a distinctive aspect of his or her self-identity (Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011). Additionally, participant reflection indicated that personal and observed experiences with alcohol had a significant impact their decision to use alcohol. Finally, it was clear through both the survey and interview data that the college environment contributes to a perceived expectation of drinking (Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2004; Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007; Sudhinaraset, Wigglesworth, & Takeuchi, n.d.). Those participants with a more synthesized identity seemed better equipped to navigate this environment with lower risk alcohol use.
The remaining sections of this chapter will focus first on a discussion of the findings, within the field of relevant research. The findings will be discussed in connection with decision-making factors, social practices, and peer influences, utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Social Cognitive Theory and persistent problem drinking as explored in chapter two. Following this section is a discussion of implications for professional practice within student affairs, specifically in reference to harm prevention in relation to alcohol use, with regard to identity and social development. The conclusion of this chapter and dissertation addresses this study’s limitations with respect to methods and theory and how those limitations inform opportunities and directions for future research.

Discussion of Key Findings

In the literature review section of this dissertation, found in chapter two, there are three fundamental areas of focus. The first area of focus is social cognitive theory and self-efficacy. Next, the chapter reviews identity development, with attention to academic identity. Lastly, there is a discussion of alcohol abuse, specifically addressing the concept of the high functioning alcoholic, also referred to as a persistent problem drinker. The purpose of the next several sections is to integrate the key findings from this study with these areas of focus in order to facilitate a discussion of the study implications on these matters.

Social cognitive theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is an approach to understanding human cognition, motivation, and emotion which assumes that people are active agents in shaping their environments (Bandura, 1986, 1989; Maddux, 1995; Maddux & Gosselin, 2003; Bandura, 2011). This theory assumes that people are able to symbolize their experiences into internal models of action that allow them to engage in forethought to purposefully direct their behavior.
Specifically, SCT is grounded in the premise that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and triarchic reciprocal interaction of the behavior, person, and environment, assuming that people are capable of self-reflecting about their behavior and experiences. Behavior, also referred to as practices, is made up of an individual’s skills, practice, and self-efficacy. The person is thought of as the decision making component, and takes into consideration an individual’s knowledge, expectancies, and attitudes. Finally, environment recognizes peer influence and is made up of social norms, access in the community, and influence on others, or the ability to change the environment. Each of these factors surfaced through in the themes that emerged in this study, with behavior/practices connected to developing an identity, person/decision making connected with their experiences with alcohol, and finally components of environment presenting in navigating the environmental expectations/peer influence.

**Developing an identity**

Within the field of research of identity development, there has been substantial progress over the past decades. For example, once believed to be a unidimensional or global concept, identity is now understood to be multidimensional, including many facets of self, or domain specific identities, as well as the intersectionality of these identities (Harper, 2011; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Meeus, 2011). A second example is the understanding of adolescent development. Traditionally thought to end at the age of 18, over time and with more research adolescence is now believed to have an extended timeframe ending at roughly 25 years of age (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999). As such, a student’s identity development plays a critical role in navigating the collegiate experience. It is the lens through which they engage in their world and can have a significant impact on decision-making. Building upon Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development (Erikson, 1950), James Marcia (1966) expands
on Erikson’s fifth stage, suggesting that it is not simply a crisis between identity achievement and identity confusion, but that this period is more accurately characterized by the individual’s level of exploration and commitment to identity. As such, Marcia acknowledges four identity statuses: foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium, and achievement. These statuses are not limited to any one specific age in life, but exhibit a fluid approach to identity development rather than a sequential one. Furthermore, his work centers on late adolescence, which coincides with the age range of many college students. One of these domains is academic identity development, a measure of which was developed by Christopher Was and Randall Isaacson in 2008. This instrument was designed an individual’s academic identity status using Marcia’s statuses as a framework.

Just under half of survey respondents (46.3%; $n = 45$ in this study were identified as being in academic achievement status. An individual who has reached academic identity achievement has developed a commitment to a set of academic values following a period of active exploration (Was & Isaacson, 2008; Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden, & Isaacson, 2009). True to form, all of the interview participants had engaged in their own active exploration. Several changed majors after entering college, one even changing universities. This process of active exploration has allowed each of them to consider what they value and where they want to be in the future. They were able to reflect on it, giving considerable attention to the exploration process to seek out a field that they would remain passionate about, connected to, and successful in.

**Academic and social identity development.** For Belle, Jasmine, and Alex, active exploration of academic identity led them to active exploration in other areas, specifically their social identity and alcohol use, and to establish a commitment to values in this arena. When
asked to define social, each of these three focused on a relational definition of being social, citing interaction and engagement with others as social activities. These three participants identified as being academically achieved, but when examining their risky behaviors, scored low on the measure, indicating a propensity to avoid risky behaviors, such as excessive or high-risk alcohol consumption. Each of them were able to recall a specific negative experience related to alcohol use, either personally or observed in someone close to them, which significantly impacted their decisions from that point forward, which suggested the importance of personal experience on alcohol use. They seemed to weigh the pros and cons, consider the impact on their overall goals, and adjust their alcohol consumption accordingly.

That is not to say that all of their motivation, either academically or socially, was intrinsic. It is certain they took part in some behaviors academically or socially for pure enjoyment and satisfaction, but like most of what drives us, there were always elements of external motivation. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) concept of integrated regulation, in which external motivations are aligned with a sense of self and incorporated with values and identity seems to speak to these students’ experience. The most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, integrated regulation, posits that an individual’s external motivations are aligned with their sense of self and incorporated with their established values and identity (Ryan & Deci, 2011). Ultimately, this creates a more authentic identity, in which all facets are congruent, and the individual identifies with behavior regulation. This congruence extends to other aspects of the person’s motivations and practices. Importantly, these external influences were largely integrated and internalized within their social contexts. It is possible that they experience social pressures to achieve academically, but these pressures were congruent with internally held values for learning and the participants responded accordingly. Furthermore, there were clearly social pressures to
drink, but Belle, Jasmine, and Alex responded with behaviors and decisions that aligned with their internally held value of what it means to be social. It would appear that these three participants have developed what Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008a) has defined as autonomous motivation. Encompassing both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivations that an individual has associated with the value of an activity, an individual who has developed autonomous motivation will ideally have integrated it into their sense of self. Ultimately, autonomous motivation lends itself to greater psychological health, which then supports better physical health (Deci & Ryan, 2008b; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). When autonomous, people are purposeful in their actions and authentic in carrying them out, and accordingly they display the highest quality of action. The potential for an academic identity and social identity to come into conflict seems likely, particularly on a campus that seems to equate being social with alcohol use. Despite this potential conflict, these three were able to establish an environment that encouraged, supported, and facilitated both identities, each became integrated and internalized and behaviors became an expression of self. In this way, both learning and drinking became self-directed and autonomous choices, that allowed them to feel in control and able to adapt behavior as personally desired rather than externally forced.

Robert’s situation was very different than the other three participants. Although he, too, exhibited an AIM Achieved status, when examining his risky behaviors, he scored high on the measure, indicating a propensity to engage in risky behaviors, such as excessive or high-risk alcohol consumption. Interestingly, while he had actively engaged in major and academic exploration, he still had a somewhat vague and ambiguous idea of what was to come in his future. When he talked about his path, he mentioned the possibility of pursuing law, higher education, or even marketing after graduation. With this in mind, it was unclear whether Robert
had truly reached academic identity achievement, or if perhaps he responded to the academic identity measure in a way that he believed he “should” respond, resulting in a status that was biased. This was evidenced when asked whether his social identity impacted his academic identity – his response indicating he understood his academic identity as “going to class” rather than a more global definition. It is clear that he values his academic pursuits, but as he also shared he is heavily socially oriented and at times values these more. A further consideration is that for Robert, being social includes alcohol use, which was different than the other participants who focused primarily on the relationship and interactive definition of social. Despite acknowledging that he had both personally experienced and observed high-risk alcohol use, the experience did not seem to impact his behavior. In fact, he openly shared that he saw his academic self as separate from his social self, exhibiting an absence of the integrated regulation seen in the other interview participants.

**Identity, motivation, and drinking.** According to Cox and Klinger’s (1998) Motivational Model of Drinking, there are four types of motives that impact an individual’s decision to drink. These four types include enhancement motivation, social motivation, coping motivation, and conformity motivation. In general, enhancement motives speak to a desire to elevate mood and well-being, are internally driven, and reflect a positive reinforcement for drinking. Social motives are indicative of a desire to gain positive social rewards or status, and are generally thought to be a positive reinforcement of drinking as well. Coping motives are representative of an internal need to control negative affect and emotion. Thought to be a method of escape, coping motives are a negative reinforcement of drinking. Finally, conformity motivation is reflective of the desire to avoid being socially ostracized.
All of the participants in this study shared an identity status that may have influenced their decisions to drink and outcomes from drinking. Although the power and influence of expectations and perceptions towards drinking was apparent, their motivation to drink varied. This may be attributed to the unique personality characteristics of these students, impacting decision making but moderating it at the same time. All of the participants expressed an underlying social motivation for drinking, acknowledging that when they drank they did so with other people. Some research suggests that social and conformity motivation may not only boost drinking, but it may also discourage drinking if an individual is concerned that their behavior might negatively impact their social identity (Dupree, Magill, & Apodaca, 2015).

Although all participants noted social motivation, upon further examination, this did not appear to be the primary motivation for each of them. Both Alex and Belle primarily expressed enhancement motivations, noting a desire to relax and wind down after a busy week. They enjoyed the occasional drink, but did not define their social interactions through the inclusion of alcohol and had a strong identity around enjoying friendships. Again, while Jasmine also expressed social motivation, her primary motivation seemed to be conformity. This was most prominently evidenced through her habit of holding a cup while at parties, noting that drinking was expected. For Alex, Belle, and Jasmine, their underlying social motivations for drinking seemed to be mediated by their desire to avoid negative social consequences as a result of drinking.

Of the participants, Robert expressed the most pure form of social motivation. It would be fair to say that he had an underlying enhancement motivation; however, his acknowledgement that he rewards himself with alcohol and prioritizes social over academic obligations is reflective of a motivation that is primarily social. Social motivations are associated with frequency and
quantity of alcohol consumption, but generally are not associated with long term negative outcomes. Despite indicating that he had several experiences with high-risk drinking after which he was unsure of his behavior, Robert continued to engage in high-risk alcohol use. In his case, the social motivation appears to be explicitly encouraging his drinking; however his desire to conform may be an implicit factor as well. This encouragement is likely impacted by his identity compartmentalization. In short, because he actively separates his identities, he does not recognize the potential impact that negative drinking behaviors may have on him in other arenas, such as his professional trajectory.

**Masculinity and drinking.** One facet of identity that emerged as potentially impactful on the participant’s decision to drink was masculinity. Norms around masculinity reflect the socially constructed beliefs, expectations, and values of what it means to be a man (Mahalik, et al., 2003). Mahalik, et al. (2003) identified eleven masculine norms of Western culture during the creation and development of the Masculine Norms Inventory. These norms included emotional control, risk taking, winning, self-reliance, playboy, pursuit of status, violence, dominance, primacy of work, power over women, and heterosexual presentation (Mahalik, et al., 2003; Iwamoto, Corbin, Lejuez, & MacPherson, 2014). Theoretical models propose that conforming to masculine norms, or their belief of what it means to be a man, may help explain patterns of problematic drinking among men. Research has further suggested that masculine norms of being a “playboy”, risk-taking, and winning were risk factors of drinking to intoxication; while, being a “playboy”, risk-taking, and self-reliance increased the risks of alcohol-related problems. Masculine norms such as self-reliance or emotional control may protect against problematic drinking patterns because they are consistent with self-control and potentially regulate alcohol intake (Iwamoto, et al., 2011). Conversely, the masculine norms of
risk taking and the values placed on pursuit of status may increase the risk of drinking to intoxication because they reflect an individual’s perceived levels of ability to consume and tolerate alcohol (Young et al., 2005). An individual’s fraternity status as well as their perceived social norms increases their risk of drinking and experiencing alcohol-related consequences (Iwamoto, et al., 2011; Iwamoto & Smiler, 2013; Iwamoto, Corbin, Lejuez, & MacPherson, 2014).

With these thoughts in mind, it is not surprising that both Alex and Robert addressed masculinity and the pressure to conform to these standards on a daily basis. Both are fraternity members, and have served as their respective chapter’s president. Robert shared his concerns in a less direct way, talking about his use of social interactions as a route to success, embodying the masculine norm of pursuit of status. As one reflects on the literature, it is not surprising that Robert also shared that he regularly engages in high-risk or excessive drinking, which has lead him to black out at times. On the other hand, Alex’s path seems to be very different, as he exhibits an integrated identity and presents as confident and self-reliant. Again, as current research is considered, Alex’s demonstrated self-reliance is likely a protective factor, guarding against high-risk alcohol use. These assumptions are further supported by the drinking patterns shared by each of the men during their interviews. The potential implications of this discovery and the impact on harm reduction education are discussed later in this chapter.

**Experiences with Alcohol.** Over the past several decades, a great deal of attention has been paid to determine the decision making process that students engage in when they consider whether or not to drink alcohol, how much to drink, and how often to drink. According to Cox and Klinger’s (1998) motivational model of alcohol use, a number of successive elements result in the decision to drink, including: historical circumstances (e.g. genetic disposition), personality
characteristics (e.g. extraversion, sensation-seeking), sociocultural factors (e.g. drinking patterns), environmental factors (e.g. availability of alcohol), situational and current factors (e.g. reinforcement from past drinking), alcohol expectancies and drinking motives. Several researchers in the field have explored the final two elements, developing and refining them through their work (LaBrie, Grant, & Hummer, 2011). Alcohol expectancies point to the learned connections between drinking alcohol and the outcome, desired or undesired. Motives, on the other hand, are an individual’s personal reasons for drinking, or what they want to get out of drinking. While expectancies and motives have often been considered equivalent in determining alcohol use and abuse; however, they are not interchangeable but rather tangential. The expectation of a desired effect occurring does not necessarily imply that a person decides to drink to achieve that desired effect.

The motivational model of alcohol use (Cox & Klinger, 1998) presumes that an individual decides to consume or not consume alcohol. Purposeful decision making always involves emotionally based values, which are rooted in an individual’s identity. As such, the decision to drink is ultimately a combination of emotional and deliberate processes. Regardless, a person is not necessarily aware of having made a decision to drink or not to drink or even the components that guided that decision. In established behaviors, the conscious components of the decision process tend to occur at the onset of the behavior (Kuntsche, Wiers, Janssen, & Gmel, 2010). An athlete, for example, may show up to play in the big game; however, the actions they take during the game happen in a more automatic fashion, without conscious decision as a result of the practice they put into their sport. While the impact of unconscious decision making is limited to the behaviors that are already established, these decisions are ultimately voluntary and a person can control them should they choose to (Cox & Klinger, 2004; Shamloo & Cox, 2010).
Each of the participants was able to define responsibility in relation to alcohol, frequently as a result of previous alcohol education. Individuals make decisions about drinking based on their belief that the benefit outweighs the cost. For example, all of the participants noted driving under the influence as an irresponsible behavior, and denied making the choice to drive after drinking. In this case, for the participants in the study the potential costs of driving under the influence far outweighed the benefits. Not all drinkers identify negative outcomes as such, which complicates the decision making process. It only takes an individual pointing to the number of automobile accidents involving alcohol to acknowledge that not all people had the same perspective. Although their experiences clearly articulated their awareness that drinking presented negative outcomes for some, most of the participants had established low risk drinking behaviors, reducing the likelihood that they would personally experience negative outcomes. While Robert acknowledged the ability to see high-risk behaviors in others and intervene accordingly, his inability to see the same high-risk behaviors and potentially harmful effects of his drinking behaviors indicates a potential misalignment with socially accepted values and behaviors. For Belle, Jasmine, and Alex, their experience and observation of negative outcomes directly impacted their decision making process and resulted in adjusted behaviors to avoid these negative outcomes from that point forward.

**Navigating environmental expectations.** As students are developing beliefs and values tied to their identity, they are also taking note of those around them. A chief goal among all college students is belonging (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006; Reeve, 2012). Belonging is the drive to build their own sense of community while in college, creating connections to the environment, and engaging with others to find experiences to bond over
(Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The community that they develop is likely made up of other students who share similar beliefs and values.

The environmental perspective developed when they enter college is impacted both by what an individual sees or experiences, as well as what they do not see or experience. For example, a student who enters college and spends their initial weekend engaged in on campus activities that do not include alcohol may develop the perspective that alcohol use is not a prevalent practice on the campus. Conversely, a student who begins their college career attending alcohol fueled parties, interacting with other students who are consuming at a high rate, their perception of the social landscape may normalize and overestimate the number of students who are using alcohol. Through the identity development and integration process, many students will eventually realize that the alcohol fueled parties of their introductory weekend are not representative of the overall campus culture and will adapt accordingly. In some cases, students will remain in that insular environment, with excessive alcohol use being the norm. In other cases, despite evidence to the contrary, a student may continue to overestimate the prevalence of alcohol use on campus. Finally, depending on the perception of consequences of drinking, a student may continue to engage in high-risk alcohol use, failing to experience what they perceive as a negative consequence (NIAAA, 2007). In this case, their perceptions would likely continue to reinforce their drinking patterns until either a significant negative consequence was experienced, or until they observed enough contradictory activity that their drinking patterns could longer be rationally seen as normal.

Several concepts and theories of how and why students choose to drink arise among the literature, including the expectation that alcohol is a part of the collegiate experience, exploration of identity, and the desire to build and enhance community. An element of the key findings in
the current study was the sense among most participants that heavy drinking on their campus was normal and pervasive. This was supported by the National College Health Assessment data, which indicated the campus where this study was conducted had binge drinking rate double that of the national norm (American College Health Association, 2013). Despite this information, participants did not see that the alcohol culture on campus was potentially problematic. In fact, despite having a clear knowledge of the alcohol related issues on campus, Alex did not perceive the culture as contributory, but rather weighed the campus against other campuses who had been featured in news stories for incidents related to alcohol. Study participants not only perceived their peers to be permissive of drinking, they perceive the administration to be lax as well. This was reinforced by the presence of alcohol at university sponsored events, such as tailgates, commencement, and alumni events. When Robert considered the possibility of administration establishing a more structured policy, he was hesitant, noting that he thought the student body would respond negatively. Despite this hesitance, Robert, as well as Alex and Belle, noted a shift they had felt in the permissiveness of administrators, who seemed to have developed less tolerance for alcohol related violations and high-risk social events, which may be related to their membership in the Greek community. Each expressed concern that this change may result in high-risk behaviors and alcohol consumption, encouraging pre-gaming, hiding events from administration, and pushing them into non-campus affiliate housing. Although a more permissive attitude may increase the number of students who drink, one consideration is the influence of that permissiveness. One might also ask what and how frequently students are drinking, examining the relative safety of their alcohol consumption. If learning requires not only knowledge but active engagement to truly take place, it is necessary to consider whether students are making decisions differently just through the presence and enforcement of policy. And if
administrators establish a rigid policy expectation, will students seek out support when needed? The need for standards is inarguable, but this study suggests that it is important to be aware of the environment and to make decisions related to policy with the campus culture in mind in order to support students in navigating that environment.

As a final note, while several participants seemed to subscribe to the work hard/play hard mentality that they acknowledge was present on the campus, for those who exhibited AIM Achieved status and low risk alcohol use, the work hard/play hard approach did not have the expected negative connotations, but rather created a sense of balance for these students. As the only participant who presented a compartmentalized identity, Robert subscribed to the work hard/play hard mentality, but acknowledged that his academic success had suffered as a result.

**Summary.** The key findings of this study suggest that the choice to use or not use alcohol is made up of a complex set of additional factors, some of which are individual, some of which are behavioral, and some of which are environmental. The findings do not suggest that there is a relationship between academic identity status and the decision to engage in or avoid alcohol use or risky behaviors. The findings do suggest that the important question may not be how students make these choices, but rather, how does their sense of person, behavior, and environment impact one another and impact these choices. One might also explore perceived consequences, particularly those that the literature has identified as negative, to understand college students perception of these same consequences. The next section will continue this discussion through an exploration of the implications for practice of this study.

**Implications for Practice**

A college campus presents constant opportunities to engage with others, collaborate, and learn. Assuming a full time load of classes, or 15 credit hours, the average student will spend
approximately 20% of their time in the classroom. That leaves another 80% of time outside the classroom, to work, join organizations, apply their classroom lessons, and figure out who they are. As such, the partnership that exists between academic affairs and student affairs is critical, promoting not only academic achievement, but also supporting their health and development.

This section will offer a discussion of opportunities for student affairs and services professionals to enhance the well-being of their students. These opportunities are two-fold, focusing first on the support of identity development and integration, and next on harm reduction education.

**Identity development and integration.** The interview participants in this study have all attained academic identity achievement and articulated their academic goals. While they did not necessarily know where they were headed when they entered college, they actively engaged in a process of exploration with the intent of committing to an academic path that they found value in. Collectively, this engagement is reflective of the identity development process and support the outcome of achievement. They recognized the things that may challenge them, or cause them to be unsuccessful, and have navigated them successfully. From a desire to be passionate about their career, to the more practical desire to ensure employability, they were able to express their motives for pursuing the academic path they chose.

At the same time, they saw others who were not actively engaged in this process. They observed students who, perhaps, had different motives for attending college or priorities that did not align with their own. This exploration extended to alcohol use, as they all shared a negative experience related to alcohol, either for themselves or someone close to them. For several of the participants, this experience happened early in their college career, at the same time they were actively engaged in academic exploration. This parallel exploration enhanced their social
identity development. They made choices accordingly, adjusting their idea of what it means to be social, in an effort to ensure their alcohol use did not get out of hand.

The implications for higher education practice is the benefit of engaging students early and often to actively support their development (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Kuh, 2009). While we know that adolescent development extends into the early 20’s, early purposeful engagement will facilitate the student’s exploration process (Bryson, 2014). Ideally, this engagement begins before they ever decide to attend the university, through admissions visits. Of particular note is the value of peer influence in this process. When an institution utilizes peers to facilitate tours or admissions presentations, prospective students have an opportunity to gauge a more realistic view of the campus culture. This practice should extend throughout the entire transition process, including their new student orientation and academic advising. We know that students are seeking to build community; therefore, activities during their orientation process that meets this desire are not only enjoyable, they are critical in meeting the developmental needs of the student (Trowler, 2010). This connection should continue from the time they attend orientation, to when they arrive on campus, and beyond. Often, universities make the mistake of ending the connection with the peer mentor they met through orientation prior to when classes start. Research would support the extension of this relationship into the first few weeks of the semester. While this may happen informally, best practice suggests a more structured approach to this transition.

Early and frequent engagement with faculty and academic advising professionals will also contribute to the development of an academic identity (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005; Bryson, 2014). For those who come to college with a path in mind, this allows them to identify the potential pitfalls of the path, as well as begin to develop a plan for the future. For those
students who come to campus unsure of their intended path, early engagement with the advisor will ensure that they are challenged to actively explore their academic path, and therefore work toward academic identity achievement. Finally, for students who though they knew what they wanted to do, but found that it was not the fit they were seeking, the relationship with the advisor, as well as peer mentors, will support their transition process. For all students, early and active engagement with advisors ensures that students are able to identify where they might turn for assistance, resources, and engagement. This might include academic support, such as tutoring, a writing center, or supplemental instruction. It may also include social support, such as what one might find in a cultural center or identity based office, such as a women’s center or LGBTQ resource center (Stevens, 2004; Phinney, Dennis, & Chuateco, 2005; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009). The identification of both academic and social supports on a campus will lend itself to positive identity development. Finally, staff and faculty who serve as advisors and engage students in a discussion of their academic interests and how to reach satisfaction, or challenge them on a grade or performance that is not reflective of their actual ability, have an opportunity to also explore the social aspect of their experience and open a discussion about how these facets impact one another.

Cohort based programs also serve to enhance an individual’s identity development (Zhao, & Kuh, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). Learning communities (Tinto, 2006), where a group of students are enrolled in several of the same classes as well as a weekly small group meeting, give students a chance to build connections with others without the expectation that alcohol should be present that they may find at a party or other social event (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010). Similarly, honors programs provide this sense of community, while also challenging a student to perform at a higher level. Often times they include a self-directed
component, which provides the student with an opportunity to create their own learning experience. Cohort programs may exist outside the classroom as well, through activities such as leadership development programs or service learning opportunities (Trowler, 2010). Leadership development programs are often developmentally based; for example, participants are grouped by year in school. Theoretically, first year students are often experiencing the same developmental phenomenon, therefore benefit from being in contact with other first year students, and so forth. Self-reflections and peer reflections present opportunities for students to critically think about their own development and consider their beliefs and values. Service learning opportunities frequently present a chance for students to be exposed to situations or people that are new to them, or different from them (Jones & Abes, 2004). Often times these experiences are uncomfortable at first, but as they discuss the underlying issues that inform the social problem they are working on, their understanding grows. For example, a common service learning opportunity for a student studying sociology or social work may be to spend time as a “homeless” person, in order to walk in another’s shoes and experience a state of being that they may not otherwise experience. Reflection in these projects is necessary in order to resolve potential internal conflict as well as to consider how the experience has impacted their beliefs and values.

The desired learning outcomes and competencies that an institution has for their students through participation in both academic and social experiences are to develop and enhance critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills (Prince, 2004; Zhao & Kuh, 2004; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). As such, it makes sense to connect the social experience to the academic experience and create integrated opportunities to build these skills. Actively involving students in the planning process and creation of these opportunities will not only ensure they are meeting
the needs of students, but will create opportunities for those doing the planning to enhance their development as well. The programs and services outlined above speak to the three facets of social cognitive development through the creation of experiences that utilize a purposeful and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior.

**Harm reduction education.** The second implication for practice that emerged through this study speaks to the creation of harm reduction education (Dimeff, 1999; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005; White, 2006; Mallett, et al., 2013). Although none of the participants in this study reported significant negative outcomes, they did share early negative experiences of drinking. In addition, they acknowledged high-risk alcohol use patterns that they had observed in their peers, including heavy drinking, blacking out, vomiting, and hangovers. For those who are engaging in high-risk alcohol use, there is no way of knowing for sure what the future will hold for them. Continued high-risk use can lead to serious health concerns, including alcohol dependency and liver disease. It can also lead to a deterioration of social status and relationships, as many who engage in high-risk use while an undergrad find that use tapering off before they earn their degrees. There is substantial research surrounding the concerns of high-risk alcohol use and dependency in graduate programs (Bakhshi & While, 2013; Rutledge, Bestrashniy, & Nelson, 2016), such as law or medicine, but there is very limited research of these same concerns in the undergraduate realm.

Regulated integration of identity played an obvious role in the decisions that participants made in relation to alcohol use. The participants who had reached the place of integration practiced safe and smart drinking. They were organized, set limits, and reflected purposefully on their drinking and the potential implications for their academics. They were able to prioritize and maintain a sense of control. While they drank with friends for social reasons, drinking was not a
required component of these interactions. Rather, they focused on relationships and considered other activities, including student organizations, sports, or simply watching a movie with people to meet their need to be social. Conversely, Robert, the sole interview participant who had not yet reached this integration was disorganized, a self-proclaimed procrastinator, and admitted that he prioritized social over academics. He acknowledged high-risk alcohol use, but made light of the consequences he had experienced, including blacking out, concerned only with having done something embarrassing and not the larger implications of high-risk alcohol consumption.

Helping all students think purposefully about their social goals, along with the role of drinking in attaining or missing out on those goals is advantageous and aligns closely with substance use intervention strategies such as Motivational Interviewing (Rubak et al., 2005) and harm reduction approaches (Dimeff, Ed., 1999; Marlatt & Witkiewitz, 2002). This study suggests that using these approaches provides an opportunity for a student to critically reflect on their goals, taking into account not only their social goals, but also their academic goals and identity, as well as how they related to one another. These experiences that the participants in this study shared seemed to indicate that some students find their own way, learning and adapting easily to college life and developing the ability to balance their academic and social obligations. Others experience greater challenge in this process and struggle to find their way. Factoring in both their academic and social identity and motivations may be a powerful tool to guide students toward a healthier behaviors, which are less-risky while still leading to success.

**Methodological Implications**

The use of a mixed methods approach allowed for both the inter and intra personal view, offering environmental information as well as providing the interview participant reflections. Despite having identified as achieved in the quantitative phase, Robert’s responses during the
The qualitative phase of this study sought to determine how students with highly developed identities made decisions surrounding alcohol use, the experiences that influenced these decisions, and how they conceptualize high-risk use. This phase was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. In general, it appeared that decisions were made in consideration of academic priorities when the participants had an appreciation for the connection between these facets of identity. Personal and observed negative experiences with alcohol impacted the decision to use, frequency, and type of alcohol consumption in this same group. All of the participants shared similar conceptions of high-risk alcohol use; however, not all participants identified high-risk use as problematic. Of additional interest is the participant who, despite exhibiting an AIM Achieved status through phase one, did not appear to be functioning at an achieved level, which would not have been noted except for his participation in phase two. This disparity between quantitative outcome and qualitative inquiry is important to note and findings such as this underscore the value of mixed methods research to inform practice and enhance greater understanding through holistic inquiry.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explain variations in alcohol use among students with highly developed academic identity status, with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on college campuses. Specifically, the study sought to explain how and why high performing and developed college students make decisions to engage in or avoid
high-risk alcohol use. The remaining sections of this chapter will address the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

**Limitations.** The goal of this study was to explain the decision making process that students with highly developed academic identities use to determine whether they chose to drink or not. The quantitative phase explored the relationship that existed between academic identity achievement and alcohol use, as well as the patterns of use found for students with highly developed academic identities. Upon analysis, no patterns of alcohol use were identified among these same AIM Achieved students. With this in mind, one clear limitation may be the internal validity of the status scales for this sample, as the Chronbach’s alpha score calculated ($\alpha = .54$) is substantially lower than previously established scores. It is important to note that the low internal validity limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this study. This phase also served to establish a sample reflective of the campus, which was complete as evidenced through the similarities in study sample responses to institutional sample responses; however, a larger sample size would likely impact the reliability and validity of the study results.

While every attempt was made to establish a reasonable sample size, the outcome is a potential limitation, specifically in relation to the second phase of the study. Despite identifying 45 potential participants as indicated by their identity status, only two who identified as high-risk alcohol users volunteered to participate in the interview process, one of which eventually asked that their data not be included. As such, a primary recommendation would be to conduct a follow up study and widen the pool of participants. When doing so, it would be advisable to recruit more purposefully, with attention to gender, ethnicity, and campus involvement. This more purposeful recruitment would ultimately serve to balance and diversify the study sample. This may require adapting the demographic questions created for the purposes of this study to
more accurately identify diverse participants. In addition, a revision of the qualitative instrument to include questions that address gendered norms may speak to the initial implications of these norms identified through this study. Although there is no clear understanding of why this happened, one might assume that those who exhibited highly developed identities were perhaps aware of the incongruence between their academic and social self, choosing not to share this with others. It is also possible that the recruitment methods and language used were not conducive to obtaining a wider result.

The mixed methods section of this study sought to determine how the quantitative and qualitative results informed one another, and how what emerged from the data may be used to provide a deeper understanding of the decisions surrounding high-risk alcohol use in support of harm reduction efforts on a college campus. Primarily, phase one served to identify appropriate interview participants. In addition, the information included regarding the campus culture and practices served to support the perception of campus culture shared by interview participants. Generally, responses suggest that identity status does not directly impact decision making, but rather identity integration is a critical factor.

The study provided only a small picture of a phenomenon that has potential long-term and broad implications. Having said this, the data can only be understood within the context and environment it was collected. It takes place on only one campus, and only four participants took part in the qualitative phase.

From a theoretical perspective, a limitation to the study is the lack of previous research related to persistent problem or high-risk alcohol use in undergraduate students. Most studies have been concerned with students in graduate or professional programs, or with individuals who have pursued high pressure careers. While alcohol abuse can be clearly defined, there is yet to
be a clinical definition of persistent problem drinkers. The college environment, which often perpetuates the expectation that everyone is drinking, had the potential to further conceal the identity of a persistent problem drinker, especially if that person is not experiencing any significant negative consequences as a result of their alcohol use.

**Directions for Future Research**

An invaluable contribution of any study is the ability to provide insight into potential future research. The following section will discuss the potential for future research that emerged from this study.

As was clearly noted, the campus environment is a significant factor in alcohol use. This study was conducted on a large, urban, public campus that is statistically riskier in relation to high-risk alcohol use than many others. An exploration of this same phenomenon on various campuses may yield greater insight into how students navigate their environments. This also opens an opportunity for participant observation, with particular focus and attention to the environmental factors.

From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that the development of harm reduction education that considers identity development may be more impactful than current practices. This could also include cohort based education. The development and assessment of a program such as this would offer a new approach to an on-going concern. In this same arena, continued research of drinking as it relates to cognitive functioning and decision making presents an opportunity for future research. While decision making may become an automatic process once a behavior is established, pointedly examining how those behaviors are established can offer insight into prevention and intervention programs.
Using a larger and more diverse sample will provide an enhanced picture in analysis. Adding components of identity exploration into harm reduction practices may enhance effectiveness of these programs. The data also provides an indication that identity specific efforts may be valuable, such as gender based or developmentally based initiatives.

The findings of this study suggest that this field of research may seek to be less concerned with the impacts or effects of alcohol use on academic trajectory and success, and more focused on the individual factors. The question is not whether drinking affects academic success, but rather the amount of alcohol consumption that impacts success, as well as for whom and how much leads to impact.

**Final Thoughts**

This study sought to explain how and why high performing and developed college students make decisions to engage in or avoid high-risk alcohol use. The proposed hypothesis was that students who chose to engage in high-risk alcohol use had not yet experienced identity integration and synthesis, whereas those who did not engage in high-risk use possessed a more integrated identity and sense of self. That is to say that identity status does not directly impact decision making, but rather identity integration is a critical factor and as such be attended to in harm reduction education. Through quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, this study has contributed a small insight into a previously unexplored phenomenon, as well as contributing to the field the voice of the participants. Through the utilization of a mixed methods study into an on-going issue of concern for college campuses, student affairs practitioners are able to consider an expanded view of this group of students and the factors that define their experience.
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APPENDIX A: Procedural Diagram
**PHASE ONE**

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative Data Analysis

Integration and Phase Two Selection

**QUALITATIVE Data Collection**

**QUALITATIVE Data Analysis**

Integration of quan and QUAL results

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**PROCEDURE**

Survey (n = 97)
Convenience Sample

Instruments:
- Academic Identity Measure (AIM)
- Risky Choices
- NHCA Subset
- Demographic

Descriptives, Profile Analysis, Correlation

Purposeful, Volunteer Sample
Develop Interview Protocol

Individual, semi-structured interviews

Open Coding and Thematic Analysis

Interpretation of quan and QUAL results

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**PRODUCT**

Quantitative/Numeric Data

Demographic summary; National Data Benchmarks; AIM-RCDM correlates

Cases (n = 4)

Text data

Codes and Themes

Data Matrices/Joint Display Discussion, Findings, Implications
Appendix B: Phase One (Quantitative) Information Sheet and Survey
Information Sheet for Research
University of Cincinnati Principal Investigator: Leah Howell
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marcus Johnson

Title of Study: Academic Identity Status and Alcohol Use Among College Students

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a study. Please read this information carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

The person in charge of this study is Leah Howell of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Student Activities & Leadership Development.

She is being guided in this research by Dr. Marcus Johnson. There may be other people on the research team helping at different times during the study.

The purpose of this study is to explain the relationship between an individual’s academic self and alcohol use. Results will be utilized to develop an understanding of the experiences related to alcohol use for those students who also exhibit highly developed academic identity with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on a college campus.

Who will be in this study?
University of Cincinnati undergraduate students. Participants in this study must be at least 18 years or older. If you are not at least 18 years old, please do not participate in this study.

What will you be asked to do in this study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to complete an online survey which should take approximately 30-60 minutes. General demographic information will be collected including Major, Current Class Standing, Age, Self-Reported GPA, Organizational Involvement, Experiential Learning Engagement, Gender Identity, and Ethnic Background. Surveys may be completed in a setting of your choice.

Upon completion of the survey session you will be awarded one research credit. At the completion of this survey, you may be invited to volunteer to take part in an interview. Should you choose to participate the interview will run approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews will take place on the University of Cincinnati uptown campus, in a private setting of your choice. An additional consent form will be completed at that time.

Are there any risks to being in this research study?
Some of the questions asked in the survey may make you uncomfortable. You can refuse to answer any questions that you don't want to answer.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
Upon completion of the survey session you will be awarded one research credit.
What will you get because of being in this research study?
You will not be paid to take part in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this study?
If you do not want to take part in this study you are welcome to decline at any time.

Information about you will be kept private by limiting access to research data to the research team not including your name on the typed transcript, erasing audiotapes as soon as they are transcribed, keeping research data on a password-protected computer.
Your information will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Steger Student Life Center for no less than two years and no more than five with any paper documents to be shredded and any electronic information purged at that time. The data from this study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

What are your legal rights in this study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you should contact Leah Howell at leah.howell@uc.edu or (###-###-####).

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have.

You may start the study and then change your mind and stop at any time. You may also skip any questions you don’t want to answer.

BY TAKING PART IN THESE ACTIVITIES YOU INDICATE YOUR CONSENT FOR YOUR ANSWERS TO BE USED IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.
Q30 Please Provide Your Birthdate

Q4 General Demographic Information

Q5 What is your current age?
- 18 (1)
- 19 (2)
- 20 (3)
- 21+ (4)

Q8 Gender Identity
- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Transgender (3)

Q3 Which describes your current class standing
- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)

Q2 What is your major?

Q9 What is your current university GPA?
- (1)
- 2.0-2.5 (2)
- 2.6-3.0 (3)
- 3.1-3.5 (4)
- >3.6 (5)

Q6 Are you involved in any of the following (please indicate ALL that apply):
- Greek Life (1)
- Club Sports (2)
- Athletics (3)
- Student Government (including tribunal and college government) (4)
- Honorary Organization (5)
- Other Student Organization (6)
Q7 Have you participated in any of the following experiential learning opportunities (please indicated ALL that apply)

- Co-op (1)
- Internship (2)
- Service Learning (3)


American College Health Association (ACHA): National College Health Assessment II American College Health Association. (2013). American College Health Association-national college health assessment II: Results from the ACHA-NCHA II, Fall 2008 - present. *Linthicum, MD: American College Health Association*. Select questions used from the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Subsection with permission. Distribution prohibited.

Q27 Are you willing to take part in an interview to discuss these topics further?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q28 If yes, what is your preferred email?

Q29 PLEASE NOTE: Not all participants will be contacted for an interview. Thank you in advance for your assistance!
Appendix C: Phase Two (Qualitative) Informed Consent Form
Title of Study: Academic Identity Status and Alcohol Use Among College Students

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this study is Leah Howell of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Student Activities & Leadership Development.

She is being guided in this study by Dr. Marcus Johnson. There may be other people on the study team helping at different times during the study.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to explain the relationship between an individual’s academic self and alcohol use. Results will be utilized to develop an understanding of the experiences related to alcohol use for those students who also exhibit highly developed academic identity with the aim of informing prevention and intervention strategies on a college campus.

Who will be in this research study?
About 4-6 people will take part in this study. University of Cincinnati undergraduate students who exhibit Academic Identity Achievement and volunteer to participate.

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to complete a personal interview. It is anticipated that the interview will run
approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews will take place on the University of Cincinnati uptown campus, in a private setting of your choice. You may be contacted as a follow up to clarify any of the information provided.

**Are there any risks to being in this research study?**

It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research study.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?**

You will probably not get any benefit because of being in this study.

**What will you get because of being in this research study?**

Upon completion of the interview session you will be awarded two research credits, in addition to the credit earned through phase one survey completion. You be provided with a gift card, valued at $5 for an on campus vendor.

**Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?**

If you do not want to take part in this research study you are welcome to decline at any time. All interviews will be audiotaped. If you do not want to be audiotaped you should choose not to take part in this research study.

**How will your research information be kept confidential?**

Information about you will be kept private by

- limiting access to data to the study team
- not including your name on the typed transcript
- erasing audiotapes as soon as they are transcribed
- keeping study data on a password-protected computer

Your information will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Steger Student Life Center for no less than two years and no more than five with any paper documents to be shredded and any electronic information purged at that time. The data from this study may be published; but you will not be identified by name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

**What are your legal rights in this research study?**

Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

**What if you have questions about this research study?**
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you should contact Leah Howell at leah.howell@uc.edu or ###-###-####.

The UC Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, complaints and/or suggestions about the study, you may contact the UC IRB at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

**Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?**

No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have.

You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Leah Howell (leah.howell@uc.edu or ###-###-####).

**Agreement:**

I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

Participant Signature _____________________________ Date _______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____________________________ Date _______
Appendix D: Interview Protocol
Academic Identity Status and Alcohol Use Among College Students
Phase Two: Qualitative Interview Protocol

This interview is to help me understand your experience. I would like to learn about you, how you became the person you are today, and how you make decisions about the choices you make in consideration of the person you are.

1. Tell me about yourself as a student.
2. Tell me about how you decided to pursue your current academic path.
3. Tell me about how you view yourself socially.
4. Tell me about how you believe your academic self and social self are related to one another.
5. When I say “drink responsibly” what comes to mind?
   a. What would be examples of responsible drinking? Irresponsible drinking?
   b. How do you define High Risk drinking?
6. What experiences have you had related to high risk drinking (self, others)
7. How do you practice low risk drinking?
   a. Would you say these practices are pre-planned?
   b. How do these practices reflect on who you are as a student?
   c. How do these practices reflect on your social self?
8. How do you practice high risk drinking?
   a. Would you say these practices are pre-planned?
   b. How do these practices reflect on who you are as a student?
   c. How do these practices reflect on your social self?
9. Have you ever felt concern for your health and safety or the health and safety of others related to alcohol use? What can you tell me about that concern?
10. What else should I know about your experiences as a student and your use of alcohol?
Appendix E: Joint Data Display
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices (Behavior)</th>
<th>Qualitative Outcomes</th>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| AIM Achieved $\bar{c}$ RCDM ($n = 45; r = -0.212$) | Themes/Sub-themes which support Engagement
- Identity Development Through Active Exploration
  - Major/Academic exploration
  - Sense of self | Identity Development Through Active Exploration
- Defining social
- Sense of self | Early and frequent engagement with faculty/staff/peers; Identity status specific harm reduction education |
| AIM Achieved $\bar{c}$ # of drinks ($n = 45; r = -0.068$) | | |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Making (Person)</th>
<th>Qualitative Outcomes</th>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| AIM Achieved $\bar{x}$ RCDM
- Mean = 1.98
- Range = 1–4.6
- High RCDP: 25
- Low RCDP: 20 | Impact of Experiences with Alcohol
- Being responsible | Impact of Experiences with Alcohol
- Negative experiences | Developmentally appropriate levels of intervention; Access to support/amnesty practices |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Influences (Environment)</th>
<th>Qualitative Outcomes</th>
<th>Implications for Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reported 7+ Drinks Consumed the Last Time Students “Partied”/Socialized
- 38.1% (Sample)
- 49.8% (Campus)
- 20.7% (Nat’l) | Navigating Environmental Expectations
- Work hard/Play hard
- Social as a reward | Navigating Environmental Expectations
- Challenging tolerance
- Conceptualizing high risk use | Community/cohort/peer based education and interventions; Policy interventions; Social norms education |