

FINAL REPORT

Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures in America



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Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures in America

Final Report
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Executive Summary

This two-year research project was initiated to provide new perspectives about teen drinking in the United States. The research, which blends the perspectives and methods of public health and cultural anthropology, seeks to complement what is already known about teens and alcohol. It focuses on understanding the cultures surrounding teens and alcohol and, in its research design, it makes heavy use of qualitative strategies, seeking to learn directly from conversations with teens, parents, community leaders and experts. The Final Report and its appendices incorporate the voices of many individuals from around the U.S. The research ultimately aims for improved strategies of intervention grounded in a better understanding of the cultural milieu in which teens drink and of the dynamics of teen drinking.

Background and Research Design

Funded by a grant from The Century Council, this research sought a fresh look at teen drinking, with a focus primarily on high school youth. Probing teens' knowledge and expectations about alcohol, as well as their understanding of what influences teens to drink or not drink, this study sought a fuller sense of the dynamics of teen drinking and of the connections between teen drinking and a plethora of social factors. These factors include gender, religious commitment, academic achievement, peer pressure, and public education campaigns. The research took a direct and open-ended way of learning how teens, their parents, community leaders and others viewed alcohol, teens' decisions, and the broader context of teen decision-making about alcohol. The goal was one of acquiring a holistic understanding of teen drinking so as to better frame interventions that might save lives and produce healthier behavior among teens.

The primary audiences for this research and its recommendations are the various stakeholders, primarily at the local level, but also at the state and national levels. These include those who directly work with teen alcohol issues, such as county or regional coordinators, specialists, or coalition leaders; they also include those who work in various roles with teens or parents, such as professionals in the school setting, in law enforcement or judicial areas, within the faith community, in youth-serving organizations, or elsewhere in state or national leadership positions.

The research project was based at George Mason University. The two PIs were assisted by two part-time staff members with masters degrees. The project also benefited from an Advisory Panel which helped guide the research design, its implementation, interpretation of results and shaping of recommendations.

The project was funded by a grant from The Century Council, a national not-for-profit organization funded by the distillery industry dedicated to fighting drunk driving and underage drinking. Neither The Century Council nor its funders made any attempts to shape the research design, the results, or anticipated conclusions or recommendations.

The research incorporated a blend of methodologies. The core of the research design consisted of focus groups with teens and parents in which the dynamics of teen drinking could be freely explored. These were complemented by an extensive literature review, individual interviews with experts and community leaders, and a national telephone poll with teens and parents. The field research was conducted in seven communities throughout the nation. The research sites encompassed urban, suburban and rural communities located in the Midwest, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic and Southern regions. All research methodologies, protocols, and questions were approved by George Mason University's Human Subjects Review Board.

Telephone Poll: George Mason University's Center for Social Science Research conducted a telephone poll in Spring, 2009 using purchased databases of homes with telephones. A total of 1,623 interviews were completed, including 1014 interviews with adults and 609 with teens. Of these interviews a total of 522 were matched pairs, involving a teen and adult in the same household. Detailed results are provided in Appendix A of the Final Report.

Focus Groups: The research staff conducted a total of 71 focus groups, located throughout the seven research locations. Focus groups with high school and middle school youth were the overwhelming emphasis of the research, with 59 groups conducted with youth; 47 of these were with high school youth; six groups were done with middle school youth, and another six were conducted with college freshmen to garner their insights from recent high school experiences. The high school focus groups included 179 boys and 217 girls, involving 190 who were white and 206 who non-white; the middle school focus groups were smaller, consisting of 15 boys and 20 girls (10 white and 25 non-white). Eight of the focus groups were conducted with parents and four were done with community leaders. Additional detail about the results of these groups is found in Appendices B and C.

Expert Interviews: The research incorporated interviews with 28 experts in the field. Of these, 16 were affiliated with universities, while the others were medical authorities, authors, or government researchers. Experts were asked to describe their views of key issues facing youth, assessment of teen drinking behaviors, review of national efforts to address teen alcohol use, and influences on teens' alcohol decisions. Appendix D gives further information on the expert interviews.

Key Informant Interviews: Information and experiences from those working with teens at the local community setting was sought through key informant interviews. A total of 58 interviews were conducted. Those interviewed included high school principals, teachers, guidance counselors or volunteers; medical personnel and public health workers; law enforcement personnel (including judges, probation officers and police); prevention or adolescent psychological treatment specialists, and leaders in the faith community. Also involved were a few teens in leadership positions. More information about the key informant interviews can be found in Appendix E.

Literature Review: An extensive review of articles, dissertations, and reports on teen drinking published in the United States since 2003 was conducted at the outset of this research; this involved a review of fifteen databases representing over 1,000

professional journals. Through this process, 250 articles were selected for inclusion in the literature review. The Literature Review is prepared in several formats: (a) An annotated summary is provided for each of the 250 articles; (b) A summary of the literature in terms of ten categories of analysis documents overall findings and gaps in research; (c) An overall summary of the entire review of professional literature is offered in Chapter 2 of the Final Report. Appendix F includes the Literature Review summary. The complete Literature Review, and its ten summaries, is available on the project website at <http://teenalcoholcultures.gmu.edu>.

Teen Drinking Phenomenology

Central to this study is a categorization of teen alcohol roles: these include Abstainers, Moderate/Social Drinkers, Partiers, and Losers. The Abstainers are those who rarely or never consume alcohol. Moderate/Social Drinkers are teens who drink occasionally, to be sociable, and do not usually drink to get drunk. Partiers are those who drink more heavily, often to get drunk, and tend to encourage others to drink. Those called Losers are held in low regard by other teens; given this, they often occupy the Loser role transiently. Losers are those who take partying too far, to the point where they endanger themselves, disrupt others' fun, and lose face. Teens can move from one category to another, although many teens seem to remain in one category. Separate from these categories is alcohol dependence, a clinical designation that may (but is not necessarily) be most typical of those in the Partier category. Some dependent teens, unlike Partiers, drink on their own during the school day.

The researchers found that teens occupying these different roles often socialize together and accept each others' roles and behaviors more than one would expect based on the literature on the dynamics of peer pressure in teen culture.

Teens tend to drink whatever alcohol is available. Their preference is liquor, particularly vodka, because it can be mixed with juice and has its effect more quickly. While teens acknowledge awareness of the age 21 law, they report they can obtain alcohol quite easily, whether from stores (with a falsified ID card or without any identification), from home supplies, from older siblings or adults, from parents and from peers, or by theft. Teens report drinking primarily at parties; these are held in the homes of friends or acquaintances, and also at home when parents are present or absent. Often teens drink without adults present, and without the benefit of basic factual knowledge about alcohol's effects. Some teens' initial drinking experiences are dangerous "trials by fire."

Why do teens drink or not drink? In broad terms, teens report that they find drinking pleasurable, that it has become normative for teens to get together for the purpose of drinking, and that drinking can be a way of dealing with stress. Teens attach little importance to peer pressure as a cause of teen drinking. Teens who avoid alcohol often do so for academic reasons or because they have seen the effects of alcohol abuse on a close friend or family member.

The study offers two frameworks to help understand teens' behaviors with alcohol. The Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions illustrates Underlying or Core

Factors (e.g., core values, purpose), Intrinsic or Vital Factors (e.g., family, confidence, balance, coping skills), Extrinsic Factors (e.g., family time, expectations, reflection, positive role models) and Contextual Factors (such as engagement or experimentation). The Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions provides similar elements, and helps with understanding what can be done to reduce teen alcohol use. This framework incorporates Underlying Causes (such as stress, hopelessness, and disenfranchisement) and Intrinsic Factors (such as coping skills, rebellion, and escape) within the view of “The Teen’s World”; its Extrinsic Factors (e.g., lack of knowledge, lack of meaningful conversation, and conflicting messages) and Contextual Factors (e.g., peer acceptability, access, societal acceptability, and parties) are viewed as “The Role of Alcohol.” Central to this framework is the observation that many societal efforts to address teen drinking emphasize only those elements found in The Role of Alcohol, without attention to The Teen’s World. If Underlying Causes and Intrinsic Factors are not addressed with teens, then they remain as unmet needs.

Recommendations to help with youth directly include the importance of engaging youth in meaningful ways so as to better understand their needs, and designing appropriate strategies and services to assist them. Through attention to the underlying causes of teens’ alcohol decisions, opportunities can be provided to aid with transitions and challenges. Finally, it is important to provide opportunities for youth to discuss their needs and concerns.

Parents

Parents are often unsure how to address teens’ decisions surrounding alcohol. They report being unaware of many of the issues in the lives of teens, including how often or how much teens drink, how they obtain alcohol, where they drink, and consequences associated with drinking. Further, parents report challenges in finding current, accurate information; they also report that it is difficult to talk with other parents about how to address many of the dilemmas surrounding alcohol, given that parents have strongly held, but often conflicting opinions, and that it is against the law to facilitate teen drinking.

Some parents will do everything they can to make sure their teens observe the legal drinking age of 21; other parents offer contained spaces for teen drinking and teen parties; still other parents allow teen drinking with the family at meals, and some ignore teen drinking altogether. Teens have varied experiences with parent conversations about alcohol and guidance provided to them, with many teens reporting no discussions at all on alcohol, and others reporting constant reminders or “nagging.”

Typically, parents expect that teen alcohol behavior is affected by the school setting, including peer pressure at school and official educational campaigns. The assumption by many parents is that teens receive information and education about alcohol as part of the school-based curriculum.

Recommendations regarding parents emphasize the importance of having opportunities for parents to talk honestly with one another about their dilemmas and challenges faced with dealing with teen alcohol issues. Emphasized with the important

role of parents is the importance of engaging other family members, particularly older siblings.

Community Leaders

Complementing the important role of parents is the engagement of community leaders with teens. Understandably, much of the attention for community work focused on the school setting. All-too-often, it appears that alcohol information is relegated to a portion of one course early in high school. Further, it appears that school-based efforts included curricular material, policies, and schoolwide campaigns or programs; teens reported limited attention to their lives and a lack of engagement to make the information relevant and current. Consequences of infractions (i.e., suspension) were well-understood, yet teens often believed that they would not be sanctioned because they would not be caught.

The Framework for Community Action illustrates the importance of having a comprehensive approach for addressing teen alcohol decisions and their culture. This framework identifies five groups or organizations as central in the community: Schools, Law Enforcement, Health Services, Community, and Youth-Serving Organizations. Four types of efforts are also identified: Policy, Program, Training, and Environment. Sample strategies for each type of effort are included for each of these groups.

Recommendations include having community leaders prepare an engaging community-wide strategy, with benchmarks helpful for monitoring progress. An important factor with teen drinking prevention strategies is to heighten the priority given to addressing these, including dealing with the underlying causes of teen drinking and providing opportunities for dialog and awareness throughout the community. Similar to the teen recommendations, appropriate positive outlets should be identified, working in conjunction with teens. School strategies should be carefully reviewed, to include curricular approaches that are engaging and incorporated in various settings throughout the school. Attention to partnership opportunities for programmatic and policy design and implementation is central to the community efforts.

Recommendations

Recommendations included with the youth, parent, and community chapters have a central thrust of engaging youth in meaningful ways to help understand their lives, and encouraging parents to talk openly and honestly with teens and with other parents. Similarly, community leaders would benefit from sharing strategies and building locally-appropriate strategies to address teens' lives.

Overall recommendations emphasize the importance of understanding the complexity of youth alcohol cultural milieux and the importance of engaging key influencers of youth – mentors, parents and older siblings. Final recommendations emphasize affirming and fact-based (as opposed to fear-based) approaches, as well as maintaining a positive, hopeful perspective about teens and alcohol.

Recommendations for future research build upon this study and on the researchers' conviction that qualitative approaches have a vital role to play in

illuminating teen drinking. Suggested are further research on the classification of teen drinking, reviewing messages heard by teens, teens' mixing alcohol with prescription drugs, and teens' knowledge about drinking issues. For communities, a review of strategies and organizing efforts, as well as curricular approaches and extracurricular activities would be helpful. From a family perspective, the role of older siblings, the role of religious affiliation, and social hosting practices are each worthy of further review.

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Final Report

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides the background of research designed to better understand teens' decisions about alcohol. The blend of cultural anthropology and public health approaches serve as the central underpinning of the research methodologies incorporated, thus providing the opportunity to gain fresh insights regarding this seemingly intractable problem. Through substantive attention to perspectives offered by teens, parents, community leaders, and experts, the research design promotes a holistic view of the cultures of teen drinking in the United States. This research was designed to help fill in some of the gaps found in the current research literature, and was prepared with an eye toward recommended strategies appropriate for community leaders, as well as state and national officials concerned with teen drinking. The role of the Advisory Panel and the research independence afforded by the funder served as vital foundations for this research.

a) Overview of Research Aims

We set out in this two-year study to take a fresh look at the problem of underage drinking in the United States. In our study we focused on middle and high school age youth rather than on underage drinking by college students. We chose to focus on middle and high school teens, for two reasons: first, underage drinking on college campuses has received disproportionate attention, especially in the media; and, second, we wanted to understand the phenomenon of underage drinking in its earliest stages not, as is the case for many college students, when it is already an established pattern. We hoped that an investigation of teens' expectations about alcohol and its effects, their understanding of what influences decisions about drinking and not drinking, and their earliest drinking experiences and early drinking patterns, would give special insight into how to tackle what is becoming an increasingly urgent problem in communities across the country where, according to every major national survey, teen drinking has been on the increase in recent years. Originally we planned to look at middle school students almost as much as high school students but, as it became clear that most teens were not drinking until high school, our study increasingly zeroed in on the high school demographic.

We will say more about our methodology below, but at the outset we should emphasize that we wanted to break with two defining features of so much prior research on teen alcohol use: first, a strong reliance on surveys and telephone polls as the sources of data; and, second, a

tendency to fragment the problem under study into small pieces by analyzing the correlation between teen drinking and single variables: examples include liquor stores' interest in curtailing underage drinking,¹ teen attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder,² early childhood abuse,³ exposure to alcohol advertisements,⁴ the size of alcohol taxes,⁵ rural versus urban residence,⁶ ethnicity,⁷ and participation in extracurricular activities.⁸ While such studies have been important in incrementing our knowledge about teen drinking, giving a fuller sense of its connections to a plethora of social factors, there is, paradoxically, a way in which they distance analysts from the actual phenomenon of teen drinking itself by turning that phenomenon into an aggregate statistical correlate. We wanted to take a more humanistic or conversational approach in our investigation of teen drinking, and we wanted to look at teen drinking more holistically than do studies that use a single variable to section out a slice of the phenomenon. We viewed this as an opportunity to help fill in some of the gaps in the professional literature, much of which will be described in the next chapter.

In our study we wanted to talk in a more direct and open-ended way to teens themselves, as well as other stakeholders, to explore what we call the **phenomenology of teen drinking**. Thus, at the level of *practice*, we wanted to know what teens drink, whether boys and girls prefer different drinks, where they get their alcohol, how hard it is for underage drinkers to get alcohol, where they do their drinking, how much they drink, how they learn about parties, whether and how they hide their drinking from adults, the role of older siblings in a teen's drinking, and so on. At the level of *understanding* we wanted to know what teens say they find attractive in drinking, what they know about the ways in which alcohol interacts with the body, how they talk about alcohol with one another, what kinds of relationships with alcohol they recognize among other teens, what happens at teen parties, whether they think there is pressure from peers to drink, what they expect to happen when they are caught drinking, and where they get their information.

We were particularly interested in teens who do not drink, or who rarely drink. We wanted to know why some teens made a choice not to drink, or to drink very little, and we wanted to know how this affected their relationships with other teens. How did other teens feel about abstainers, and did the abstainers themselves feel they had a place in their peer group? We wondered whether there might be a way to get more teens to emulate the abstainers.

The teens lie at the center of our study, both in the sense that it is their behavior and beliefs we seek to understand and in the sense that we spent more time talking to teens than to

other categories of person. Still, in keeping with our holistic approach, we also wanted to know how teen drinking is perceived by parents, teachers, school principals, guidance counselors, therapists, law enforcement personnel, and experts in the field, and we wanted to triangulate their perceptions with what we heard from the teens. As will become evident in later chapters of this Final Report, a comparison of teen and parent perceptions of teen drinking can be particularly revealing. And, in general, we found that, while parents often get the blame for the drinking of their children, too little attention has been paid to the ways parents think about this issue. Thus we were particularly interested in understanding what parents told their teens about alcohol, how they tried to monitor their teens' drinking behavior (if they did), whether they talked to other parents about teen drinking, how they thought "good" and "bad" parents deal with the teen drinking issue, whether they supported the current drinking age, and whether they tolerated – or even facilitated – teen drinking in their own homes. We found many parents very eager to talk about teen drinking, in part because they felt they lacked other social fora in which it was possible to talk candidly and freely about a topic that worried and perplexed them.

Teen drinking is certainly not a new problem, but the experts we interviewed agree that the problem seems to be getting worse. Meanwhile the costs of teen drinking are serious, both to individuals and to society: drunk driving deaths, emergency room visits, pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases incurred under the influence, wasted police time, suspensions from school, wrecked athletic and career dreams, families eaten away by worry and deceit, laws eroded by persistent disregard, and young adults falling into self-destructive habits that can be hard to shake. Our goal in acquiring a holistic understanding of teen drinking has been to better frame interventions that might save lives and produce healthier behavior among teens. Although we are wary of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to the problem, we do believe that improved strategies of intervention will emerge from a better understanding of the cultural milieu in which teens drink and of the dynamics of teen drinking. Throughout this Final Report and in Chapter Six, we seek to draw out the implications of our research for strategies of intervention and amelioration. We recommend courses of action that might be adopted at all levels: by parents, by teens themselves, by schools, and by entire communities; some of these warrant consideration by national and state organizations and agencies, including but not limited to governmental groups. Thus, the primary audiences for this research and its recommendations are the various stakeholders, primarily at the local level, but notably at the state and national levels. These include those who directly work with teen alcohol issues, such as county or

regional coordinators, specialists, or coalition leaders; they also include those who work in various roles with teens or parents, such as professionals in the school setting, in law enforcement or judicial areas, within the faith community, in youth-serving organizations, or elsewhere in state or national leadership positions.

b) A Collaboration Between Cultural Anthropology and Public Health

As a cursory look at our literature review reveals, the problem of teen drinking is written about by experts from many disciplines: education, public health, medicine, psychology, sociology, economics, and anthropology to name a few. This research project is a collaboration between an expert in public health (Anderson) and a cultural anthropologist (Gusterson). Public health perspectives have historically been as central to the debate on underage drinking as cultural anthropology has been marginal to it. We believe that importing an anthropological perspective will help catalyze fresh analyses of the problem of teen drinking, and that the differences in perspective between public health and anthropology can, in the context of a collaboration, generate a more holistic understanding of this issue.

The public health paradigm represents well-established approaches for preventing disease and promoting health. Traditional ways of addressing this are to provide information and strategies to individuals as well as organizations, so that the problems associated with disease can be reduced or treated early, and ideally, that health (including emotional, physical, and social health) can be maximized. In public health, the traditional model is one that highlights three major factors: Agent, Host and Environment. Within this model, attention is provided to the relative contribution of each of these three factors in behavior. The Agent, for our review of teen alcohol cultures, is attention to alcohol itself, which can include laws and policies surrounding it. For the Host, the emphasis is upon the individual; for our study, attention would be on factors such as personal motivations, attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions. The Environment includes social controls, messages, cost, and access. Two additional models are popular in public health.⁹ The Health Belief Model was developed in the 1950's by U.S. Public Health Service social psychologists who wanted to explain the low participation rates in programs designed to prevent disease. This model has six elements: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, cue to action, perceived barriers, and self-efficacy. Also popular in public health is the Transtheoretical Model, noting 5 stages surrounding behavior change: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Developed by

Prochaska and DiClemente, this model has been applied to a variety of individual behaviors, as well as to organizational change.

Research done with a public health orientation typically involves human subjects. This research can be done with individuals, groups of individuals, or larger societies. Individual research can focus on self-report or observation, and may include knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, behavioral intent, or other personal factors. This is often done with paper and pencil (and increasingly on-line) surveys, observations, and group or individual discussion. Societal or group research can use archival data, so that records can be reviewed to determine trends or common characteristics among those with health concerns, or with positive health behaviors.

There are different schools of thought and method in cultural anthropology, but the anthropological approach adopted here has three distinguishing features.¹⁰ The first is a commitment to **open-ended conversation** as an investigative technique. While some disciplinary methodologies prize strict comparability across surveys or interviews, and thus insist that all research subjects be questioned as similarly as possible, ethnographers tend to prefer naturalistic interactions with research subjects, opportunistic participant observation, and open-ended conversations that follow different pathways with different interlocutors.¹¹ From the point of view of the anthropologist on this team, the best research technique would have been to attend parties at which teens engaged in illegal underage drinking as a participant observer, join in, and take notes. This was clearly impractical: our university's human subjects review committee would never have allowed it, and teens would hardly have accepted two older adults at such events – or even one. Thus, in order to understand what drinking meant to teens (and others) we sought to engage them, one-on-one and in group settings, in confidential, semi-structured conversation in which they reflected on the dynamics and meaning of life as a teen (in general) and teen drinking (in particular). Such conversational venues allow for a fuller and more agile exploration of the themes in play, and thus appeal to ethnographers, even if they do not produce the sort of comparability across subject responses that tends to be more highly prized by psychologists, statistical sociologists and many public health researchers more enamored of the experimental method as a model for the human sciences.

Second, anthropology brings an emphasis on **holism**. Partly as a legacy from the old days when anthropologists sought to describe a group's entire way of life in a 200-page monograph, anthropologists tend to resist studying a slice of behavior in isolation and to be interested in the ways in which one piece of behavior connects to others as well as the ways in

which the perceptions of different informants cohere or collide. The emphasis in this project on understanding the relationship between the actions and beliefs of teens, parents, teachers and law enforcement officers grows out of this holistic perspective.

Third, the anthropological perspective adopted here brings to the table the importance of **culture**. Much of the literature portrays teen drinking in terms of a simple response to stimuli (alcohol advertisements, alcohol prices, or peer pressure, for example). Without doubting that these stimuli exert influence, it is important to remember that teens drink or decline to drink in cultural milieux and that they have rich culturally patterned¹² narratives about their drinking. It is through these narratives that we can learn about the meanings teens attach to influences and choices. If we take the trouble to listen carefully to teens as they talk about what they have heard about alcohol, how boys and girls drink differently, what they think about teens who don't drink, or what they think about teens who drink, pass out and end up with humiliating pictures on Facebook, then we can see the cultural meanings teens attach to alcohol and the role alcohol plays in teen culture itself. As we will see below, in the context of teen culture (a term that would not have made sense fifty years ago) alcohol plays an important role in the cultural production of gender differences, in the cultural signaling of roles and statuses within the peer group,¹³ in the choice to identify or break with parental religious identities, and in the creation of a liminal teen cultural space separate from the role of child within the family but not yet adult. In that liminal world alcohol signifies a desired privilege of adulthood, but also a hedonistic reprise of the carefree joys of childhood. Paradoxically, teens see the consumption of alcohol both as a way to demonstrate their emerging maturity and as a release from the stress of the encroaching adult career world and other burdens of adult responsibility. In a context where teens often drink to get drunk and to enjoy the unique state of mind-body that alcohol brings about, where drinking is often the main point of getting together, and where teens talk about anticipating with eagerness their next opportunity to drink, the difficult truth we must confront is that the liminal space of teen culture is almost unthinkable without alcohol (or, if not alcohol, marijuana).

A problem that has vexed many anthropological discussions of culture is how to define its boundaries and referents. Some analysts tend to assimilate culture to ethnicity, speaking of "Hispanic culture," "African-American culture" and so on. Others speak of class cultures, national cultures or organizational cultures. Needless to say, all these cultures overlap, so that any individual lies at the intersection of many cultures. In this Final Report we avoid

generalizations about ethnic, class or national cultures. As any marketing consultant knows, there is such a thing as teen culture, and this is the culture we analyze here, seeking all the time to emphasize that teen culture itself is not homogeneous, but is made up of various subcultures.

c) Research Design and Methodology

The core of our research design consists of focus groups with teens and parents in which the dynamics of teen drinking could be freely explored. However, we were interested in gathering information about and perceptions of teen drinking and non-drinking from different categories of people, and we were interested in what light would be shed on the issue by means of different research methods, so we did not confine ourselves only to focus groups. We did a number of one-on-one interviews with experts and key informants, we did a nationwide telephone poll, and we attempted an online survey despite a certain amount of skepticism about surveys deriving from teens' own confessions to us that they often lied or made up answers in their responses to surveys.

Telephone Poll

Our telephone poll was conducted in 2009 by George Mason University's Center for Social Science Research (CSSR). The project staff spent several months developing the phone poll, and then refined it after a pilot phase in consultation CSSR staff and with our Advisory Panel. We then trained the CSSR staff who conducted the phone poll. The staff consisted of graduate students.

Appendix A contains a detailed report on the phone poll, showing the questions asked and giving a careful analysis of the responses. Rather than forcing respondents to pick responses from a preset menu that might reflect our own preconceptions, for most questions we allowed respondents to reply in a more open-ended way to questions such as "What do you think are the most important reasons people in your peer group choose to drink?" The CSSR staff recorded key phrases from these responses and sorted them in a preliminary way. The detailed coding, sorting and analysis was done by our project research team.

The poll was conducted in two phases: a pilot phase February 10 to February 27, 2009, followed by the main polling which was conducted March 9 to May 7, 2009. For the pilot phase we used a random sample spread across 50 states of 1200 households with children. For the follow-up main phase we used a second random sample from 50 states and Washington DC of

7,000 households with children aged 13-18. In order to increase the proportion of non-white respondents, toward the end of the poll we obtained a third database; this one contained 3,000 households with children aged 13-18 from the following ethnic groups: African, African-American, Hispanic, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Polynesian, Vietnamese, Middle Eastern, Native American, and other Asian.

Calls were made on weekday evenings and on weekends. Up to five attempts were made for each household. Before questioning teens we required the assent of the teen and then the consent of a parent or responsible adult in the household. George Mason University's Human Subjects Review Committee eventually agreed that this consent could be obtained verbally rather than in writing. The phone polling staff made 10,533 calls, almost half of which resulted in busy signals, answering machine messages or no answer. In 1,743 cases the person who answered declined to take part in the poll. Our callers completed 1,623 interviews. Of these 1014 interviews were with adults and 609 were with teens, and 522 of these were matched pairs – i.e. a teen and adult in the same household.

Focus Groups

Appendices B and C report in more detail on focus groups we conducted. The overwhelming majority of these focus groups were with youth. Out of 71 focus groups conducted in all, eight were with parents, four with community leaders, and 59 with youth. Out of the 59 youth focus groups, the great majority, 47, were with high school age teens. Six focus groups were with middle schoolers and another six were with college freshmen reflecting back on recent high school experiences.

Our plan was to have a range of focus groups in multiple sites reflecting the urban, rural and suburban nature of our country. In virtually every location, multiple focus groups were conducted, with a variety of audiences (youth, parents, community leaders). We worked closely with an identified “community coordinator” who would help convene the requisite groups, with attention to diversity among participants. We worked in detail with about 20 locations throughout the nation to obtain sufficient numbers of individuals and groups to warrant our travel; in the end, we conducted the 71 focus groups in seven locations. These locations included the Northern Virginia region; Bucks County, Pennsylvania; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Orange County, Florida; Northern New Jersey; rural Georgia; and Northern New Mexico. While it was beyond the scope of our resources to do focus groups more evenly distributed across the

country, we sought sufficient regional diversity to ensure that our findings were robust and to give some sense of regional variation. We commissioned a Hispanic graduate student at George Mason to set up focus groups in Northern Virginia's Hispanic community, in order to give a better sense of ethnic variation, but unfortunately her attempts did not bear fruit.

In all, our focus groups included 179 high school boys and 217 high school girls. Of these high school teens, 190 were white and 206 were not. The middle school focus groups were smaller, consisting of 15 boys and 20 girls. Of these students, ten were white and 25 were not.

All four core research staff members (Anderson, Gusterson, Hanfman and Stull) participated in some of the focus groups. Sometimes these groups were run by one person, but more often by two and occasionally by three. Each group meeting was tape-recorded, and subsequently transcribed.

Teen participants in focus groups were given \$5 reward cards, and one participant in each group, selected by random drawing, won a \$25 gift card. Noteworthy with the teens participating in the focus groups was their openness and willingness to participate in the discussions. They reported and were observed by the research staff to be honest and forthcoming with their responses, and cited a desire to engage in discussions similar to the ones provided on a range of other topics.

In accordance with a directive from George Mason's Human Subjects Review Committee, teens who wanted to join in the focus groups but had no signed parental consent form were not allowed to participate.

Expert Interviews

We also conducted 28 interviews with experts in the field. These interviews were mostly conducted by phone. We sought these experts' views on teens' reasons for drinking, the factors that can inhibit teen drinking, the relationship of educational institutions to teen drinking, and the efficacy of various strategies of intervention aimed at inhibiting or preventing teen drinking. We sought experts from a variety of settings, including universities, government, and research organizations. To be identified as an 'expert', an individual needed to have a national perspective on teen alcohol issues, whether through research, writing, or organizational affiliation. These individuals were identified through publications, national organizational or agency affiliation, sponsored national research or writing; these individuals had research or experiential background with teens, with a focus in public health, anthropology, epidemiology,

or national organizations. Of the 28 experts interviewed, 16 were affiliated with universities, while the others were medical authorities, authors, or government researchers. Experts were asked to describe their views of key issues facing youth, assessment of teen drinking behaviors, review of national efforts to address teen alcohol use, and influencers on teens' alcohol decisions. They were also asked about their vision of an 'ideal culture' surrounding teens and alcohol, and what state or federal agencies and organizations could do to create a positive environment for teen alcohol decisions. Appendix D gives further information on the expert interviews.

Key Informant Interviews

The project staff also conducted 58 key informant interviews, some by phone and some in person. Interviewees included 13 high school personnel (such as principals, teachers and guidance counselors); nine medical personnel and public health workers; eight law enforcement personnel (including judges, probation officers and police); six prevention specialists; five specialists in adolescent psychological treatment; three officials of religious organizations; four members of parent-teacher associations; and three teens who had been identified as peer mentors. Key informants were asked to give their sense of the scope and characteristics of teen drinking today, and were asked for their opinions on the relationship between teen drinking on the one hand and parental influences, broader social influences, the school environment, law enforcement, and public health interventions on the other. Depending on the identity of the key informant, different interviews had different emphases: a school principal, for example, would be asked more about drinking and schools, while a judge would be asked more about the efficacy of legal sanctions in deterring teen drinking. More information about the key informant interviews can be found in Appendix E.

Online Survey

The original research protocol also called for an online survey to be filled out by members of relevant professional associations (teachers, public health, law enforcement personnel etc). This part of the research protocol was abandoned for two reasons. First, the insistence by George Mason's Human Subjects Review Board that they had to review and approve the solicitation to and survey of each professional association individually (even though they were identical) created substantial bureaucratic impediments to progress. Second, our pilot

online survey elicited such a low response rate (despite the offer to participate in a prize drawing) that the ratio of effort to reward in conducting the survey made the survey an inefficient use of the staff's time.

d) Staffing and Advisory Panel

The two Co-PIs for the study were David Anderson, Professor of Education and Human Development, and Hugh Gusterson, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, both at George Mason University. The two research staff members, Elizabeth Hanfman and Peggy Stull, helped with question development in the early stages of the project, and did some of the key informant and expert interviews as well as running some of the focus groups.

Important for the project was an Advisory Panel; we wanted an outside group with whom we could share research design, discuss methodological considerations, and review findings, thereby enhancing the nature and potential applicability of the research. This was particularly important, as this project incorporated new ways of thinking about teen drinking, and obviously new ways of seeking to gain this understanding. Thus, the blend of public health and cultural anthropology was essential to the composition of this advisory group. For our Advisory Panel, we recruited diverse experts on teen culture and teen substance use. The panel met with us three times to guide our understanding of the literature, help us refine questions in the phone poll and the focus groups, and to sift through our preliminary reports on the data and help us interpret them. On one of those occasions, we also got a fascinating briefing from Amy Best, an Associate Professor of Sociology and a specialist in teen culture at George Mason University. The members of the advisory panel were:

Allan Cohen: a PhD psychologist and the founder and Vice-President of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), based in Calverton, Maryland. At PIRE, he directs the Center for Advanced Planning and Evaluation. His work has been recognized with lifetime achievement awards from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), the National Association of State Drug and Alcohol Directors (NASADAD), and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD).

Ron Geraci: Senior Vice President for Research at Nickelodeon, where he oversees over 30 people managing all research for the Kids and Family group. His work seeks to understand the behavior and attitude of target audiences, with a range of methodologies.

He has previous managerial research experience at Nick Programming, Nick-at-Night, and the National Basketball Association.

Gerardo Gonzalez: University Dean of the School of Education at Indiana University. An international expert on alcohol and drug education, Dr. Gonzalez' work has been presented in numerous scholarly publications including *The Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, *The Journal of Drug Issues*, *The International Journal of the Addictions*, *The Journal of College Student Development*, *The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal*, and *The International Review of Education*. In addition to his work in substance abuse prevention and higher education administration, Dr. Gonzalez is active in multicultural counseling and education issues.

Geoffrey Hunt: Senior Scientist at the Institute for Social Analysis in Alameda, California. Dr. Hunt is an anthropologist who investigates youth substance use, especially among clubbers and gang members. His work on youth cultures, family, treatment, and substance use has been published in scholarly journals such as the *Journal of Drug Issues*, *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, *Journal of Youth Studies* and the *Journal of Contemporary Drug Problems*.

Mimi Nichter: an anthropologist who studies body image and smoking among teen girls, Dr. Nichter is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arizona, where she also holds an appointment in the Department of Public Health. Her long-term international fieldwork is in South and Southeast Asia where she has studied a range of issues with a particular focus on women and health. She has authored two books: *Fat Talk: What Girls and their Parents Say about Dieting* (which won the Margaret Mead Award) and *Anthropology and International Health*.

e) Funding and Research Independence

This research project was funded by a grant from The Century Council, a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to fighting drunk driving and underage drinking (<http://www.centurycouncil.org/>). Our thanks go to Ralph Blackman, the President and CEO of The Century Council, and Maureen Dalbec, The Century Council's Vice President for Research, for their confidence that we would deliver on an ambitiously conceived project and for their patience as the project unfolded on a timeline much longer than that of The Century Council's other projects. The Century Council conventionally sponsors creative public education

campaigns rather than academic research, and ours was the first academic research project they have funded. We appreciate their willingness to take a risk on something different.

Given that The Century Council's campaign against drunk driving and underage drinking is itself funded by the distillery industry, there will be inevitable questions about our independence from the alcohol industry and about our point of view. In view of recent research that has found that industry-funded studies (in the pharmaceutical area, for example) often reach somewhat different, and apparently less reliable, conclusions than similar studies funded by foundations and government agencies,¹⁴ and since one of us has suggested in print that military funding compromises the integrity of social science research,¹⁵ such questions are quite appropriate. Although some skeptics will doubtless be beyond persuasion, we can only say that we were funded by The Century Council and not the alcohol industry, that neither The Century Council nor the alcohol industry attempted to shape our research design, that no one from The Century Council or the alcohol industry sits on our advisory Panel, and that our sponsors never asked to see any raw data, indicated what conclusions they expected from us, or used the promise of future funding to compromise our independent judgment. Indeed Ralph Blackman, the President of The Century Council, emphasized to us that he expected us to tell it straight. But, ultimately, readers will have to decide for themselves, based on the pages that follow, whether we have kept our promise to ourselves to tell the full story about teen drinking without pulling any punches.

f) Final Report Format

This Final Report represents the synthesis of the range of research methodologies outlined earlier in this chapter. As can be seen with the various appendices, the depth of the research is significant, from over 1,600 telephone interviews to over 70 focus groups, the breadth of opinion and insight is substantive. Further, with the methods employed from the outset, we knew that we would be gathering some information in ways that had been previously untapped. Additionally, unlike many other studies on teen alcohol cultures, we sought to pull things together with the benefit of a range of methodologies. Certainly, we did not cover everything – our aim was to break some new ground, so that we and others could fairly quickly craft some new directions. Through what we hoped would be some new understandings, we sought to create the opportunity for a different kind of dialog about teens and alcohol.

For this Final Report, we have tried to make sense of this overwhelming amount of information. We prepared it in a format that we believed would be most useful to who we expect would be our readers – the variety of dedicated professionals seeking to address teen drinking. We know that some readers are community coalition coordinators, whose full-time responsibility is for orchestrating efforts at the community level. We know other readers are state or national leaders, with similar responsibilities. We also know that some community leaders, who have interest in this issue have responsibilities that are much broader than alcohol abuse prevention. And we know that some researchers are interested in what we have done, and how we did it, so that further contributions to this understanding can be made. Last, but not least, we know that many readers will be parents of teens, or parents of youth who will become teens, and that they are seeking information, insights, strategies, and anything else that might provide some assistance to them as they enter the journey of parenting teenage children. For each of these audiences, and more, this Final Report is written in a manner that tries to give the perspective of those with whom we interacted, and to do so, as often as possible, with their words and their spirit.

The report is organized into six chapters. This first chapter provides the introductory information, and explains what we sought to learn, and how we gathered our information. The second chapter is a very brief summary of the literature review spanning the last five years of published studies; the more complete annotated literature review, plus summaries for each of ten organizing areas, is found on the project's website at <http://teenalcoholcultures.gmu.edu>. Third, a detailed chapter focuses on teens themselves, explaining how they procure alcohol, where they consume it, and what they say about teen drinking. This is followed by a similar review of parent voices, exploring what parents know about teen drinking, the strategies they use to monitor and inhibit it, as well as differences of opinion among parents about “social hosting” – the practice of allowing illegal teen drinking in the home under the assumption that it will be less dangerous at home than elsewhere. Chapter Five addresses what numerous community leaders think, and how they view their responsibilities and activities. This includes school efforts, from curriculum to policies, but goes beyond this in the overall community framework. For each of these last three chapters – Teens, Parents, and Communities – relevant recommendations are offered as they relate to these specific groups. The final chapter incorporates other recommendations, including overall recommendations and suggestions for future research on this issue.

Complementing these six chapters are various appendices. These parallel, for the most part, the research methodologies: A. Telephone Polling Report; B. Teen Focus Groups; C. Parent Focus Groups; D. Expert Interviews; E. Community Leaders; and F. Literature Review. Each of these reports is included on the project website, and can be downloaded and shared with others. In total, the hundreds of pages of appendices offer a tremendous amount of information and data, prepared with sufficient depth, expansion and narrative so they can be helpful for community, state and national leaders, as well as for future research endeavors.

Our aim for this Final Report is to summarize our research in a way that pulls out the key points and provides salient points in a manageable format. After all, what we seek, through all of this research, synthesis and writing, are appropriate strategies that really do make a difference for healthier and safer lives for our teens. We hope this Final Report is helpful in accomplishing this.

Summary

The foundations for this research blend cultural anthropology and public health approaches. With primary attention to qualitative methodologies, the research seeks to better understand the cultures surrounding teens' alcohol-related decisions. The initial design was implemented with modifications made based on Advisory Panel input and logistical considerations. Rich data and numerous insights were obtained through close attention to the primary research questions outlined at the onset of the project. The methodological approaches serve to enhance the understanding of teen drinking, and may aid the incorporation of new research and research strategies by others. The insights gained can be particularly helpful for community leaders, state and national leaders, and others seeking to address teen drinking in a meaningful way.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the professional literature regarding teens and alcohol is summarized. An extensive review of articles, dissertations, and reports on teen drinking published in the United States since 2003 was conducted. This entailed a review of fifteen databases representing over 1,000 professional journals. Through this process, 250 articles were selected for inclusion in the literature review. Project staff identified ten categories to help organize the articles: Community; Individual; Media; Parents; Peers; School; Sports and Leisure; General Culture; Enforcement, Law and Policy; and Prevention and Intervention. Insights gained from this research review, as well as gaps in the professional literature, helped ground the methodology used, questions asked, and recommendations made in this Final Report.

a) Overview

A foundation for this research project was an extensive literature review. With the focus of the research to be undertaken seeking to blend public health and cultural anthropology, the aim of the literature review was to review a range of published sources that informed the project staff, Advisory Panel, and those using our research about teen drinking. This review included articles in refereed and non-refereed journals; local, state and federal government publications; dissertations; and national organization and agency reviews.

With the assistance of a professional librarian at the library of George Mason University, the project research team reviewed numerous databases: PsychINFO, ERIC, MedLine, Sociological Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts Plus, Science Citation Index Expanded, ABI-Inform, Anthropology Plus, America: History and Life, Education Full Text, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Expanded Academic ASAP, Dissertation Abstracts, Social Sciences Citation Index, and AnthroSource. With these databases, over 1,000 professional journals were identified for further examination within the identified search criteria. Attention was provided to articles that had been published within the last five years, since 2003. Articles were sought that addressed the specific demographic characteristics of teen drinking (primarily those teens up to age 18). Specifically, within the domain of “culture”, the search terms included the following: “culture, mores, background, traditions, customs, way of life, sociocultural factors, trends, fads, and popular culture.” Within the domain of “teen”, the search terms included “teens, teenagers, adolescence, adolescents, youth, and young people.” Within the domain of “drinking”, the search terms included “drinking, alcohol, beer, substance use/abuse/misuse, and risk behaviors.”

Based on the review criteria and an assessment of the potential contribution of the article to the project's objectives, a total of 250 articles were selected for inclusion in this literature review. While hundreds of additional articles were examined briefly, these were not included in this annotated summary because the content did not provide insight into the specific elements included in the overall research, or the content and findings were already included in other articles previously selected for inclusion. These articles were published primarily from 2003-2008, and represent a wide variety of almost entirely peer-reviewed journals. In order to organize the searches and reviews, the project staff designated ten categories of articles, suggesting these organizing factors as helpful in efforts to understand the cultures of teen drinking in the United States:

1. Community
2. Individual
3. Media
4. Parents
5. Peers
6. School
7. Sports and Leisure
8. General Culture
9. Enforcement, Law and Policy
10. Prevention and Intervention

For each of these ten categories, a summary of the literature as well as identified gaps in the current research are provided; this topical overview also incorporates authors' recommendations for future study and/or intervention. Following each category's summary, an annotated bibliography is provided. This chapter provides a very brief overview of this professional literature, organized within these ten areas. The entire literature review is available on the project website at <http://teenalcoholcultures.gmu.edu>.

An important element of the literature review, and of this synthesis of the professional literature, is that this incorporates published research articles included in journals referenced by one or more of the databases used. As with any professional review, the summary is limited based on the various elements of the search process: what is selected for publication in the included journals, what is current, and what addresses fairly directly the content sought within the specified search parameters. The inclusion of an article is not necessarily an endorsement of the researchers' theoretical background, methodology, design, conclusions, or recommendations. The important point with this process is that the results obtained during this

literature review process are limited to any limitations included in the search process, as well as any limitations inherent in the published articles reviewed. It is within this context that articles and conclusions for this annotated bibliography are made.

b) Highlights of Literature Review

The first category found with the professional literature is classified as the **community** factor. The ten articles found addressed the role of neighborhood socio-economic status, community attitudes towards drinking, alcohol retailer density, availability, and neighborhood safety. The research generally finds that these community factors have unique contributions individually as well as in combination with other influences. Community-level recommendations reported in the articles of note include attention to the complexity of neighborhood environments, noting how varying levels of influence interact with one another to predict a range of outcomes, including teen drinking. Partially because of the logistical difficulties in assessing aspects of neighborhood and community environments, community influences on the cultures of teen drinking are not very prevalent. Furthermore, positive community aspects are studied even less than those defined as community risk factors, with few of the identified articles discussing the role of community protective factors.

Second, 13 articles were found on the role of **individual characteristics** in the culture of teen drinking. Researchers address neurocognition, drinking motivations, personality traits, mental health disorder, prior family and personal history, behavioral traits, mood (negative affect) and religiosity. Research on individual characteristics and teen drinking generally identifies risk factors, with comparatively much less attention paid to possible protective factors (such as religiosity).

The third factor identified, with 38 published articles, focused on the relationship between **media** and teen alcohol use. This media section is divided into two parts: advertising and entertainment. The advertising research examines the types of alcohol advertising aimed at or intended for youth, and entertainment articles include research about alcohol's involvement in magazines, movies, TV shows, and their effect on teens. Within advertising, attention is focused on the role of alcohol promotional items, exposure to advertising, and the prior experiences, skills, and beliefs of the teens. The promotional articles showed an association between actual or desired ownership of the items and the youth's intention to drink alcohol. The exposure articles reviewed where ads appeared (primarily magazines) and what promoted

'likeability' (e.g., humor and the use of animal characters). The relationship between drinking and advertising was reported to differ according to the adolescents' prior experiences with alcohol. With entertainment, portrayals of alcohol are found to be common in television, film, and music. Almost no models of teen characters that declined an offer to drink or use drugs were shown. Parental mediation of media viewing seems to moderate effects and is reported to offer a viable method of prevention. About half of the articles recommend developing critical thinking skills among teens for when they are exposed to alcohol advertising and alcohol portrayed in entertainment. The published literature on the influence of media on youth demonstrates the complex nature of understanding causes and effects, and has no clear conclusions about the influence of alcohol marketing on teen behavior.

Fourth, the factor of **parents** found 24 articles published, with the majority of studies citing the important role that parents play in the initiation of teen drinking behaviors especially during the pre-teen years of a child's life. The researchers stated that most parents underestimate the risk that alcohol plays in their child's life, and that most of the parents assumed their own child abstains from alcohol, or drinks less than is the case. Protective family measures cited in the research to prevent alcohol initiation include regular family meals, parental warmth, parental engagement/involvement, alcohol-specific rules, parents' articulation of messages about non-use of alcohol and parental monitoring. Predictors of alcohol initiation were siblings drinking alcohol, adults drinking at home, conflict within the home, friends' parents providing alcohol, and lack of parental monitoring; stress and family environment trauma increased the likelihood of alcohol initiation by age fourteen. Identified predictors of reduced alcohol consumption were youth drinking with parents, rather than drinking with peers, religiosity in African-American families, native language spoken at home in non-English speaking families, and parent knowledge of child's whereabouts, especially after school. Most studies stressed the important role parents play in drinking alcohol by teens and call for prevention measures directed at parents of young teens.

The fifth area of focus emphasized the role of **peers** in teen drinking; 23 articles were found that addressed this. Each of the studies that tested the link between peer use and adolescent use found strong relationships, as adolescent alcohol use initiation and the quantity or frequency of consumption were predicted by or related to their friends' and their larger social network's alcohol outcomes. Researchers studying peer influence theories assert that adolescent use is initiated or continued to match that of their peers, and describes it as an adolescent socialization

process. Researchers studying peer selection theories assert that adolescents seek relationships with peers and peer networks according to desired behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption). Moderators of these relationships, such as age, gender and ethnicity, also come into play and are receiving attention. Most of the studies identified found that adolescent alcohol consumption increases with age from middle to high school. The majority of studies do not address the protective or resilient role of peers in curbing adolescent alcohol consumption. While a group of studies addresses the role of demographic differences in their participants, many use statistical methods to control for the effects of demographic variables instead of looking at the contribution they make in the role of peers in teen drinking. In addition, studies looking at adolescents individually or studying the social networks of adolescents as a group tend to overlook the role of the individual and the group, and few studies look at both the negative and positive roles of peers.

The literature review on **schools** identified nine articles published during the review period. Most of the research used pre-existing data sources; however, a few of the studies used self-report data. The majority of the studies focused on student alcohol consumption and the relationship between academic motivation and school bonding. The overall findings from those studies suggest that those students who are academically motivated and are involved in school (school attachment) had lower alcohol consumption rates, and school graduation rates were reported to be lower for teens using alcohol in high school. Virtually all of these studies deal with alcohol, drugs and tobacco collectively rather than focus on alcohol separately. The studies did not specifically target intervention and prevention programs within the school setting, but rather focused on student alcohol use.

Seventh, the review of **sports and leisure activities** resulted in 21 articles; these show that teen involvement in extracurricular activities appears to have a positive effect on the individual. However, involvement in sports, specifically, does not seem to be a protective factor for substance use among teens. The main protector with extracurricular activities is found with nonathletic activities. Involvement in prosocial activities tended to result in lower rates of alcohol use. Early sports participation (middle school) was found to be associated with later participation in sports and increased alcohol use. Despite the findings of the impact of sport participation on adolescent alcohol use, athletic involvement did seem to be a protective factor for African American youth with regard to alcohol use. While the majority of articles focus on athletic involvement, a few studies are based on other extracurricular activities. Another area

lacking is the differences in extracurricular involvement and substance use when considering multiple demographic variables including race, socioeconomic status, and religion.

The eighth area is called “**general culture**” and incorporates 58 articles that relate to the overall culture surrounding drinking. These articles incorporate several topical clusters, including risk factors, environment and moderators, and international studies. The overall nature of these general culture research studies was upon exploring multiple factors or motivations of teen drinking. Overall, these studies examined who was drinking, what they were drinking, how much they drank, and where they were drinking. Factors within the environment were generally identified as preventive or predictive for alcohol use. The ‘why’ of drinking was not examined in most of these studies, although the international journal articles encompassed ‘why’ in the context of the culture surrounding adolescent drinking. When assessing alcohol and culture, the American journals referenced articles defining differences in alcohol consumption patterns by comparing white Americans with African-Americans or occasionally Hispanics. No mention was made of the other races.

Ninth, the topic of **enforcement, law and policy** comprised a factor with 23 articles. These articles examined the effects of the change in the law for minimum drinking age from eighteen to twenty-one, the impact of zero tolerance laws and drinking and driving campaigns, and the enforcement of these policies. The majority of the research reviewed concludes that although underage drinking has declined since the changes in minimum drinking age law, alcohol consumption by teens is still a major public health concern. Nearly half of the research studies cite that enforcement of the current laws is not effective or is inconsistent throughout the United States. Recommendations from the literature call for changes in policy involving alcohol advertisement bans, increases in alcohol taxes to combat underage consumption, and increased and effective enforcement utilizing media campaigns to educate the public concerning public health problems associated with underage drinking.

The final cluster of articles incorporated 32 articles dealing with youth alcohol **prevention and interventions**. Issues included here involve setting, high-risk youth, personality, skills and motivation, education, cultural competence, parent and family, sport and physical fitness, and web/technology. These studies provide a dramatic range of different interventions that have been implemented and evaluated. A majority of the studies show the greatest success with high-risk youth. Increasing motivation and targeting self-regulation skills were found to benefit students who had the highest exposure to drinking. Promoting parental involvement in

prevention activities was shown to reduce the misuse of alcohol among youth. Interventions tend to focus on small segments or aspects of the lives of adolescents, which may bring short-term or specific effects but are not fully effective in the absence of other, more comprehensive efforts. Interventions are recommended to be culturally competent, depending on what population is targeted. Including the school, community, and family members are cited as necessary for a comprehensive, culturally competent intervention to be successful. Most of the interventions have not been evaluated using follow-up data. Data most often comes from surveys given directly after the intervention has taken place, making it hard to determine the ultimate long-term effectiveness.

c) Conclusions from Literature Review

Emerging from this literature review is the conclusion that the issue of the cultures of teen drinking in America is complex and has not been comprehensively examined in the literature. This review suggests that the three most important influences identified are parents, peers, and the media. Parents appear to be the most important influence on decision-making in an adolescent's earlier years; from the literature, they represent the most influential determinant for the age of onset of drinking behavior. However, as the adolescent ages, other environmental factors outside the family become more influential on decision-making and preferences. Throughout the literature, many studies have found that increasing age is the greatest predictor of alcohol consumption and intention to use. Gaps in the literature in the cultures of teen drinking include missing or underdeveloped topics or populations of concern, methodological issues, and prevention, intervention, law, policy and enforcement efforts needing further expansion.

Methodological concerns include the lack of comparison and control groups, overemphasis of quantitative methodology, the narrow definition of research questions, the overuse of existing and dated data sources and the logistics of conducting and publishing research on teens. Especially in terms of media influence, the absence of a control or comparison group that has not had exposure to the influence makes it difficult to determine the full effect of any of the identified factors on adolescent decision-making. The majority of studies reviewed contained quantitative analysis; less than ten percent used qualitative methods. More qualitative methods need to be used to find out why teens drink because most of the current literature only seeks to find out which group of teens drink more than other groups.

The research questions used in American research tend to be extremely focused and less descriptive; American studies look more at the minutiae of the “who, what, when and where” of teen drinking. The international literature seems to better address the question of *why* teens drink. While the American literature is comprehensive in defining the problem, they often use pre-existing data from national studies that does not allow investigations of the current and ever-changing culture of American teens.

In studying teens under age 18, there is also the problem of gaining parent or guardian consent. Since the topic of study is a sensitive issue and may unearth illegal behavior, there is added difficulty. Furthermore, there is also the question of whether youth are being honest on the commonly used self-report surveys. It is difficult to capture current teen drinking behaviors when self-report surveys reflect on previous behaviors that may not be fully accurate. The methodology utilized in a majority of the studies in the reviewed literature on teen drinking is not youth-friendly, which makes getting accurate information difficult. Getting access to and honest answers from teens in a research environment is challenging and requires methodological and logistical creativity.

An additional challenge with studying current teen culture is the time lag involved in the traditional publication of articles: by the time articles are published in peer-reviewed journals their results are already talking about dated results and do not reflect the current teen culture. Since culture changes at a rapid pace and in different ways, it is difficult to publish on current trends and also difficult to define the culture itself at any single moment in time. Thus, peer-reviewed journal articles on current teen American culture do not exist. For example, social networking websites are a definitive component of current teen lifestyles but the role of these in the culture of substance use is not reflected in current peer-reviewed literature on teens.

The literature review also uncovered prevention, intervention, law, policy and enforcement efforts that need further expansion. Studies pertaining to prevention and intervention strategies show how difficult it is to summarize or make general conclusions because of the wide variety of programs available to adolescents. The strategies are not uniform and most of the interventions appear to be provided through the schools. However, many interventions in non-school settings are shown to be effective; thus, greater buy-in from the community for non-school programs would most likely benefit American teens. Although the establishment of evidence-based practices for interventions is necessary to document effective and successful ways to reach youth, available research often focuses on what works and does not report programs that were

less than effective. Knowing details about unsuccessful efforts would provide learning opportunities for those working on prevention and intervention programming and would help the field advance. The literature on law, enforcement, and policy shows that there is no uniform policy or enforcement across region, state, or even community. Some authors provide recommendations regarding changes that may work; however, there is little about the feasibility of these recommendations within the current political climate.

In conclusion, the analysis of the literature reflects the absence of discussion about culture as it is related to teen drinking. There is an understanding that drinking is a social phenomenon but how infiltrated it is in American youth society is not well portrayed. This review has reflected how researchers have approached teen drinking. However, current literature is lacking in an understanding of teens' cultures and in information about how to approach the cultures of teen drinking. There are many studies pertaining to the root causes of teen alcohol consumption but most of the studies do not provide new, innovative information to the field. The original question of identifying the cultures of teen drinking is not sufficiently addressed in the literature.

Summary

This review of current research on teens and alcohol identified 250 professional journal articles published in the United States since 2003. Current research demonstrates the complexity of teen drinking, and the lack of comprehensive attention to understanding this behavior. Overwhelmingly, the methodological approaches incorporate quantitative strategies, with overuse of existing data sources, limited research questions, and logistical concerns with gaining access to youths' experiences. Primary influencers of teens' decisions about alcohol are identified as parents, peers and the media; research on other influencers is limited. Absent in the professional literature are substantive attention to broad-based issues surrounding why teens drink, and limited consideration of culture as it relates to teen drinking. The opportunity is documented for future research on the cultures of teen drinking.

Chapter 3: Teen Drinking Phenomenology

This chapter on the phenomenology of teen drinking is designed to provide substantive insight into factors that contribute to teens' decisions about alcohol. Central to this chapter, and helpful for thinking about teens and alcohol, is a categorization of types of teen drinking behaviors. Other questions addressed include what alcohol is being consumed, where teens obtain alcohol, where and how they drink, and what they know about alcohol. Significant attention is provided to why teens drink as well as why teens do not drink. This section also provides a Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions as well as a Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions.

a) Teen Dilemmas and Identity Transitions

While the literature suggests that many teens first drink in middle school¹⁶, this conclusion is not confirmed by our research. A few of our teens had drunk in middle school, but most middle schoolers in our focus groups were naïve and so ill-informed about alcohol as to have obviously had little significant experience with it. Instead, it seems that the decision to consume alcohol by teens is predominantly associated with the high school experience and that for many adolescents an important part of the high school experience is deciding whether and how to drink alcohol and, in the case of users, experimenting with it.

The high school years are challenging for American teens. High schools are large, anonymous places riven with adolescent insecurity, cliques and identity politics. As one teen expressed it, “most people are out there trying to fit in; you better have some friends that are going to the same school or you are going to be by yourself.” In this socially challenging environment, in just a few years, teens must master a body of academic knowledge, garnering skills which will determine whether or not they go to college, how good a college they go to or, in the case of less fortunate teens, whether they will most likely be fated to a life of low-paying insecure jobs. At the same time they are learning to separate from their families, to cope with their emerging sexuality, to date, and to socialize in the “packs” or “cliques” that are a hallmark of American teen sociality, especially for girls. In other words, they are trying to individuate, discovering what sort of individual they are, learning how to form romantic bonds with individuals while developing social skills in peer groups, and laying down academic and career pathways that will have lifelong consequences. Add to this mix the hormonal turbulence of adolescence, and you have a challenging mixture.

Adding alcohol to this combustible mix ensures that alcohol will be implicated in one way or another in the execution of many of the identity tasks and crises that characterize adolescence. Ambitious teens seeking to excel at sport or academics will have to decide whether alcohol consumption will compromise their goals, and the dividing lines between those who party with alcohol and those who do not often become surrogates for divisions between high and lower achievers. Teens seeking to separate from parental authority and develop their own identity will have to decide whether to pay more attention to parental warnings not to drink, perhaps to the values of parents who do not drink on principle, or to the “coolest” of their peers who counsel the joys of drinking. Teens learning how to make friends and manage conversations in diverse peer groups will often do so in contexts where alcohol is available, and its use as a social lubricant or a way of signaling peer group membership is tempting. And teens exploring their emergent sexuality will do so in contexts where alcohol is often available and its use is seductive as a disinhibitor or as an alibi for choices that are hard to acknowledge directly. It is in the nature of adolescence that many of the choices made will not be thought through ahead of time. Many teens report that they got into drinking by showing up at a party where alcohol was served, and then having one, two or more drinks there. In these situations, they did not intend to drink, nor did they go to the party so that they could drink; they just arrived, saw that others were drinking, and joined in.

The junior year is cited by teens as a particularly significant transition time, when the center of gravity of their lives shifts from family to peer group in a fundamental way. They may be using weekend or evening jobs to accumulate some financial resources and many teens start driving in their junior year. “They don’t depend on their parents anymore, and it’s easier to go places.”

b) Types of Teens

It is easy to fall into the mistake of thinking of teens as an undifferentiated mass – as, simply, teens. The mass media often speak of “teen culture” as if it was a single thing, and in popular parlance it is common to talk about “adolescence” and “adolescents” as if they were unitary. When understanding the relation of teens to alcohol, however, it is important to make distinctions between different kinds of teens with different beliefs about and relationships with alcohol. It is conventional in contemporary sociological or anthropological research to sub-

divide communities and populations by ethnicity, class, or gender in the process of doing cultural analysis. While these categories are important, and we will describe below how teen drinking is inflected by gender identity in particular, the categories into which we want to divide teens here cut across striations of ethnicity, class and gender and pertain to the phenomenology of teen relationships with alcohol rather than to the conventional categories of sociological analysis. The categories are: **abstainers**, **social drinkers**, **partiers**, and **losers**. We will also talk about teens who are or are becoming dependent upon alcohol; however, this is a different type of designation, and one which could cut across our four categories.

Abstainers are teens who rarely or never consume alcohol. If they attend parties, they drink something else. The factors that drive teens to become abstainers are various. Some abstainers come from families that do not drink at all, and they are honoring and continuing their parents' values and practices. Other abstainers come from families where they have seen alcohol abuse or alcoholism up close and have turned against alcohol as a result. For example, one teen said he had watched an uncle die of alcoholism and now refused to touch alcohol. Often teens who abstain from alcohol do so because they fear it would interfere with an ambition – to get into the best college, to do well in a chosen competitive sport, or to achieve a particular career goal. For example, one parent said, “I’ve got one son who is a senior this year who wants to become a Fairfax County Police Officer, that’s all he has ever wanted to do. So for that reason, he’s always prepared for his polygraph because he wants to say that he’s never drunk. He’s invited to every party because he’s the designated driver. That’s his motivation. He’s very different. So I wonder, if he didn’t have that as a goal, I wonder if he would drink.”

Moderate drinkers are teens who do not abstain but do not usually drink to get drunk or drink so much that their behavior gets out of control. In the parlance of teens themselves, such youth drink to get a little “buzzed.” They are perceived by their peers as sociable, but they are not the teens driving the pace of the drinking and trying to persuade others to drink more at parties. Some of these teens drank more excessively earlier in their drinking, and learned to moderate their use.

Partiers are the teens whose behavior colors general perceptions of all teenage drinking. Such teens prefer drinking in large groups to small groups, take the lead in encouraging others to drink, are most likely to play and encourage others to play drinking games, and drink more heavily than the moderate drinkers. They often drink to get drunk and acquire social capital, with some audiences at least, by relating “war stories” of times they got “wasted.” But as long as

their extreme drinking is social, it is usually a way of being seen as “cool.” It goes without saying that the partiers are the most likely to drink and drive and, in general, to move situations in a direction where they become more dangerous and more likely to attract the attention of law enforcement officers, parents and so on. In recent years there has been increasing concern about “binge drinking” among teens in high school and at college.¹⁷ Binge drinking is the drinking style of the partiers.

The final category of teen is the **Loser** (our term, not teens’). Here is an example of a group of girls talking about a loser in a focus group:

A: Well, we had this thing for New Years, and this one girl got really drunk and she was like stupid, and everyone had to take care of her for like two hours, and she wasn’t even conscious. She was throwing up all over herself and everyone was taking care of her and it was just a real downer.

Q: How old was she?

A:16

Q: Did her parents find out what happened?

A: Probably not. And the next day she thought it was funny, but we were like, you ruined everything. It’s supposed to be like a fun time, but if you’re not responsible, then everyone has to take care of you and it’s just gross. And we thought maybe we were going to have to take her to the hospital.

Losers are failed partiers, teens who take partying too far to the point where they endanger themselves, disrupt others’ fun, and lose face. “People don’t want to take care of you; that is the main thing,” said one teen. Stories about losers often feature vomiting and passing out. Where teens constantly drink alcohol to achieve bodily and social disinhibition, losers cross the line and lose control of their bodies in “gross” ways. This, in turn, disrupts the festive sociality alcohol is supposed to help achieve, contaminating it with the urgent need to caretake a spoiled partier. Losers are salutary object lessons to other teens, and thus actually perform a useful function: gossip about their lapses serves as a warning to other teens about what can happen if you cross a line whose location teens struggle to identify. “Everybody talks about you at school the next day,” said a youth. “Dude, you were, like, out of control,’ and you don’t want that.” Losers may try to recover from their embarrassing behavior by narrating it as cool, but these narrative attempts fizzle and are rejected by peers (as in the above case). Losers are sanctioned very effectively by gossip – the power of which is now enhanced by social

networking sites such as Facebook – so that someone who engages in the kind of behavior described above can find their identity seriously spoiled for a while in networks of their peers, and must live in dread that the gossip will eventually find its way back to their parents (or to future employers if the lapse has been documented on Facebook). They may also be sanctioned by no longer being invited to parties by their peers. Said one teen: “People actually feel bad for you when it happens once, but twice or three times, then people start forgetting about you and not caring about you.” Or, in the words of another teen: “if people continually do it and continually get wasted, that’s not cool. It’s stupid. That’s when people start getting mad, when it happens over and over again.” Still, the loser identity is rarely a permanent identity in the way that abstainer is more likely to be. Teens usually learn from the unpleasant experience of losing control of their bodies and having this gossiped about afterwards, and gradually improve their identities, narratively converting terrifying experiences of abjection into war stories to laugh at. However, some losers assume this role permanently, especially those known to drink alone and to be so dependent on alcohol that they sneak it into school to drink in the daytime.

These four classifications can be illustrated with the following graphic. This illustration suggests the relative proximity of each of these four categories, and is not meant to represent the number of teens in each of them. The illustration also suggests that teens can move from one category to another; for example, the abstainer may be in this role on a permanent basis, or this self-designation may be based more on situational decisions. As noted above, the “loser” designation is one that is not viewed as desirable by teens, and is generally a temporary attribution. With this type of visualization of teen alcohol behaviors, it can be helpful to think about ways of helping teens to ‘move’ toward less risky behavior; thus, strategies and approaches can be designed to help teens move from wherever they are toward more moderation and abstinence.



It's important for us to introduce another designation, though it is not one of our four categories that describe teen alcohol behavior. We are fully aware that some youth are dependent on alcohol, or are in the process of becoming dependent. For the clinical term "alcohol dependence", we defer to the American Psychiatric Association's definition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.¹⁸ We mention dependence because we view the four categories of teens as descriptive of teens' behaviors, and not as a statement that suggests anything negative or condescending about a teen who might be dependent. To suggest that a teen who is alcoholic (dependent) and cannot control his/her drinking as a "loser" is not a statement about this teen's character or a projection of the teen's future; it's more descriptive of the teen's current behavior. While we would expect that those who are designated as partiers and losers are more likely to become dependent, or be at heightened risk for alcohol dependence, we should not be read as using "loser" as a synonym for "alcoholic." We noted earlier that we view the loser identity as an often transitory role. Alcoholism / alcohol dependence are lifelong diseases, and those individuals who develop clean and sober lifestyles show extraordinary self-control and are far from being "losers" at all. Meanwhile, the teen identified as an abstainer may be an alcoholic (in recovery) or may know that she/he is at risk of becoming dependent. Finally, the moderate drinker may be an alcoholic, though at an earlier stage in the disease's progression. So the dependence classification, from a medical perspective, can cut across our four categories. Our four labels are descriptive of teens' behaviors from what we heard described through our research.

The parent's comment above that her son, an abstainer, is "invited to every party because he's the designated driver" reminds us that these four categories of teens do not live out their lives in separate spheres but, rather, shoulder-to-shoulder. A typical teen party might show members of all four categories in attendance. While some teens, the partiers, might be perceived as more "cool" than others, there are different pathways toward respect in teen culture. Someone who does not drink, or drink much, because they are trying to get into a top-notch university or the police cadets may not be seen as "cool," but may still command respect and have their place at the party. Indeed the partiers may rely on the presence of moderate drinkers and abstainers at their parties to create a social ensemble and to build in certain kinds of safeguards. In other words, there is a way in which the four identities as well as being antagonistic to one another are inter-dependent with and help reproduce one another in high school culture. The accounts we heard of parties in teen focus groups suggest a certain acceptance of other teens' drinking

patterns or category (with the exception of the “losers”) on the part of different teens, with some teens matter-of-factly pointing at others who showed every evidence of being accepted in the group conversation and saying, “he doesn’t drink.” This is something to bear in mind in the context of discussions about the role of peer pressure in encouraging teens to drink. Much of the literature implicitly presents teen social gatherings in an overly simplified way, as if peer pressure to drink constituted a predominant force and teens had to decide whether to give in to that pressure or not. One of the most important conclusions of our research is that teen social groups are more pluralistic than this model suggests, making room for different roles vis-a-vis alcohol. Moreover, the teens who one might expect to be applying peer pressure to others to drink may actually tolerate, or see utility in including, moderate drinkers and abstainers at their gatherings. If this is true, we need to rethink intervention strategies that are based on a misconstrued analysis of peer pressure and, instead of thinking about how to teach teens to resist peer pressure, explore ways of exploiting the pluralism of teen social groups.

What we did not get from our research at this point was an understanding of how fluid the categories are. How much do teens move between different roles and how much are they locked into an identity they have performed around their peers and friends? For example, could a teen be a partier for a period of time, and then a moderate drinker, and perhaps even an abstainer on occasion? What types of abstainers exist? We know there are some who are ‘permanent’ abstainers, and there are probably some who abstain periodically or often. Could someone labeled by others as an abstainer be a moderate drinker for a period of time? Similarly, could the moderate drinker float from between the one category to the other, depending on the circumstances? What we do know is that these four categories of youth behavior did emerge, and that the teens themselves had general respect for others’ behaviors (except, of course, the “losers”).

c) What Teens Consume

Experts on teens and alcohol have generally been more interested in the age at which teens start to drink, the messages they receive from media, families and peers about drinking, the frequency with which teens drink, and the amount they drink at one sitting than in what teens drink. There has been particularly strong attention paid to the incidence of “binge drinking,” which is generally defined as the consumption of five drinks in one sitting by a male or four

drinks in one sitting by a female. Alcohol tends to be treated as a single entity in such discussions, with the literature on binge drinking, for example, providing metrics of interchangeability between beer and spirits so that both can be encompassed within a single definition, rather than making distinctions between different forms of alcohol.

Parent focus groups suggest that parents are a little more interested in the question of what teens drink. Many parents agreed with one who said that teens “drink whatever they can find,” but many parents were aware that boys are more likely to drink beer, while girls prefer fruity drinks. Many parents were also aware that, for purposes of deception, teens like to drink clear spirits that can pass for water.

Teens themselves do, as some of their parents suspect, say that the kind of alcohol they drink is substantially driven by availability and opportunity: what is in the parents’ liquor cabinet or a neighbor’s garage, what they can afford, what a friend or older sibling is able to provide, or what is easy to conceal. However, within the constraints imposed by availability and affordability, teens do have preferences. Overall, teens tend to choose spirits because they can be mixed with juice, and because they have an effect more quickly; in the words of one high school youth, “Liquor is strong; it hits you, boooom!” Beer is also widely used, but much more by boys than by girls. Teens say that they rarely, if ever, drink wine. In the words of one focus group participant, wine is “for use by older people.” Many teens also claimed a strong aversion to the taste of wine – though it seems clear that this is a socially constructed judgment.¹⁹ Teens in another focus group identified wine as more of a European than an American drink, and a number of teens who had spent time in Europe reported having drunk wine there in a way they would not in the U.S..

d) Where Teens Get Alcohol

It is an implicit assumption in interviews with experts and key informants that alcohol is readily available if teens want it. Experts are not, however, so concerned with how and where teens acquire it.

We agree with the key and expert informants on the ease with which teens can procure alcohol. We do believe that the relative inattention to how and where teens procure alcohol is a significant lacuna in the literature since a better understanding of teen procurement strategies

does offer the possibility of at least reducing the amount of alcohol teens consume – whether through interventions at the family or the societal level.

Teens themselves talked forthrightly about how they can get alcohol. While preferred strategies for obtaining alcohol showed local variations, the reported ease of acquiring it was strikingly uniform across social classes, ethnic groups and geographic regions. The primary source given is older youth, notably including older siblings. On many occasions, youth report using alcohol from their parents' liquor cabinets, often replacing clear alcohol with water. In some locations, garaging – stealing from refrigerators in neighbors' garages -- is a source; "it's not the main source, but if it comes down to the wire and you need some alcohol you just hop into the garage, and open the fridge."

In some locations, teens report that they can easily obtain alcohol from stores or alcohol-serving establishments. It can be easy to get alcohol without an ID card if you know the person selling the alcohol, if you 'look the age', or if you are female and the store clerk is male. Youth in one location reported flashing an ID card to the cashier for the sake of the surveillance camera, but with an awareness that a real ID check was not being done. Fake ID cards were also used, though there are indications that this is more typical of college than high school youth, and teens said it was getting harder to acquire fake IDs in the post 9/11 environment. There are many ways of acquiring a fake ID; one is to have an ID card from a similar-looking older friend or sibling and use it to obtain a "replacement" ID card. Another is to use someone else's bills and tax records to get an ID from a governmental agency.

A few teens also reported stealing alcohol from supermarkets and other stores. This can be done by putting alcohol in a shopping cart and walking out very confidently, as if it's paid for. Self checkout lines in stores also offer opportunities for obtaining alcohol despite being underage.

Many parents had a good general idea where and how teens procure alcohol, but without much knowledge in detail. (Seized by a sudden curiosity, one father actually called his son during an interview to ask where he had got his fake ID some years earlier). While teens in focus groups often enjoy recounting the devious ways in which they procure alcohol in some detail, parents tended to give terse responses when asked where teens get their alcohol: "they steal it;" "fake IDs;" "from parents" and so on. The only source of alcohol parents tended to describe in detail was their own liquor cabinets, often recounting at length precautions they take to police this source. Many were aware that alcohol in their own homes was a temptation to

teens: “It’s so accessible. If you open my fridge, I have beer in the fridge and wine in the basement, and I’m not there all the time.” Some also mentioned that teens will sometimes stand outside liquor stores and ask strangers to buy alcohol for them. One found that her daughter had been getting alcohol from a local convenience store with the help of others.

e) Where and How Teens Consume Alcohol

Just as experts, and the expert literature, have little to say about the kind of alcohol teens like to drink and where they acquire it, so also they say little about the specific places and contexts where teens drink. Drinking often comes across in the published literature as a sort of abstract, albeit very dangerous, behavior not grounded in specific places or contexts beyond “parties.”

Since teen drinking is illegal, it goes without saying that it is hard, if not impossible, for teens to drink in public and in many private contexts as well. Unless the teen looks old enough to “pass” and thus obtain alcohol without having an ID card checked, the teen who wants to drink ends up in settings that serve alcohol, but without personal access to it: bars, restaurants, concerts, weddings, office parties, picnics, and many family gatherings, for example. Thus, they can “live” some of the adult experience without all that can accompany it.

Many teens (and their parents) report that they are sometimes allowed to drink a glass of wine with the family at dinner, at least on special occasions. (In most, but not all, jurisdictions this particular kind of exercise of family discretion is legal). In terms of the semantic categories that teens use, however, this does not quite count as “drinking” – a term preferred for describing contexts where teens drink without their parents or other adults being present.

Youth report that “drinking” takes place primarily at “parties.” These parties can vary in size. They generally take place in the homes of friends or acquaintances. The parties with the most potential for alcohol abuse take place at homes where the parents are out of town, and digital communications technologies (texting and instant messaging) make it possible for such parties to grow large quite quickly, often pulling in guests outside the peer group of the teens who live in the home. These are the parties most likely to get out of hand. Said one boy, “The under control parties are usually when the parents are around, but when the parents go out that’s when more people come and people get rambunctious and out of hand.” At such parties it is not uncommon for a teen to drink 4 or 5 shots in less than an hour. Alcohol consumption may be

increased by drinking games such as beer pong, Kings (more of a girl's game) and flip cup. In such a situation, sometimes a good friend abstains and looks out after those who are drinking to excess – what one teen called a “mother of the night” role.

Parties also take place when parents are home, and the presence of alcohol at such parties may be surreptitious, openly acknowledged and monitored by parents, or discreetly tolerated by unspoken agreement. In such cases, the partying often takes place in basements which become the preserves of the teens. As one high school girl put it, sometimes teens drink in the basement while parents are home and “the parents are just clueless about it.”

Sometimes youth report drinking in school, whether in the school bathrooms or by using alcohol during the school day, drinking it from a bottle where it is disguised as soda.

Teens almost always drink with friends and peers. Teens who drink alone, especially at school, are looked down upon by their peers as problem drinkers.

When teens talk about drinking, often heard are reports about heavy drinking. As noted with the four categories of teen drinkers, this heavy drinking would most often occur with those in the “Partier” or “Loser” designations. The Partier would be a teen whose drinking pattern is frequent and/or with large quantities. Some teens report that the “normal” teen alcohol drinking pattern is heavy drinking. All-too-often, teens in our focus groups reported that those teens who do drink alcohol tend to drink a lot. Thus, the question of how teens drink can be illustrated by the four categories; what is important is that teens have varying motivations and factors affecting their decisions, and can thus change categories. However, how often and why this occurs is not well understood.

f) Gender

According to the expert literature on underage drinking, recent years have seen a narrowing of the traditional gap between girls' and boys' alcohol consumption, in high school as well as in college. Our research bears out this claim. We can only speculate on the causes for this trend, but plausible explanations would include the general increased equality of the sexes in the post-feminist era; increasing participation of girls in athletics; and, if we assume that alcohol consumption is a way of coping with academic stress, the increasing pressure on girls to do well in school so that they can ultimately have good jobs in adult life. While the increasing consumption of alcohol by girls is troubling enough in itself, there are also collateral implications in terms of an increased risk of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

Although the rate and quantity of girls' drinking is increasing, teens still report that boys do drink more than girls, and boys in particular believe that they can hold their liquor better than girls. Still, the increased rate of drinking among girls may be particularly dangerous when combined with their eating patterns: "the girls don't eat on top of it. A guy is, like, let's go have cheese steaks and then go drinking but girls don't really eat, or have a salad but don't fill themselves." Girls may be put at further risk of getting more drunk, or drunk more quickly, by their general preference for fruity drinks that concentrate alcohol more compared to the beer that boys tend to drink. It is well known for boys hoping for sexual activity with girls that their chances will increase the more they can persuade the girls to drink. As one teen put it, "if you get more drunk, you are more vulnerable, you are more easy, and a lot more likely to give it up." Some girls report being warned by their mothers that, in such contexts where the hope of sex mixes with increasing intoxication, they should not let their drink get out of their sight then drink from it again, in case it has been laced with a date rape drug like rohypnol. If they let their drink out of their sight, they are advised to begin a new one.

Despite the increasing gender equality in alcohol consumption, important gender differences remain, and indeed teen consumption of alcohol is a heavily gendered phenomenon. Teen boys and girls have different preferences for what to drink, with boys more often drinking beer while girls prefer fruity drinks, often vodka-based. And there is a sort of gendered gift economy that underlies teen drinking parties in which the boys are supposed to provide the alcohol (a pattern that continues after high school in college fraternity parties). Some teens report that, in such contexts, girls may act like they are drunk and fall over, when in fact they are not drunk. "They do this to get attention from guys."

g) First Experiences: Trial by Fire

One of the things that makes teen drinking so potentially dangerous is that it is done in secret, usually without adults present, and often without the benefit of basic factual knowledge about the interaction of alcohol and the body. Over time teens learn that alcohol is metabolized faster on an empty stomach, that spirits contain more alcohol by volume than beer, that the delay between drinking a shot and feeling its effects can be deceptive, that mixing drinks is a recipe for disaster, and that it is possible to choke to death on one's own vomit. Such knowledge is either acquired the hard way or learned in snippets from peers, adults and media over the years.

Perhaps because teen social life tends to be quite stratified by year in school, so that younger teens may not benefit from the experiences of older teens, it is striking how naïve teens often are when they first drink. Take this example, excerpted from a focus group in the Southwestern United States:

A: I was drinking for like two hours. I drank a liter of vodka, half of a fifth of scotch, and a bunch of jungle juice...

Q: Where were you?

A: Like off of [the road outside of town] there are a bunch of hills and stuff way back and like I had gotten a text message from someone saying there was gonna be a party out there.

Q: Just out in the open air?

A: Yeah. Turns out I'll never go to one of those parties ever again.

Q: How old were you again?

A: Fifteen.

Q: So, a bunch of people brought a bunch of alcohol and you showed up with some friends?

A: Yeah.

Q: Had they ever drunk alcohol before?

A: Yeah. I've had a beer or something like that, but I had never drunk enough to know what it feels like to be drunk... I didn't know what drinking was until I had done it. I should have gone to the hospital.

Q: So I'm surprised your friends didn't tell you to slow down.

A: Oh they were gone the second I got there...you should have seen it. There were like 300 people there... I found a new group of friends right away.

Q: Were you throwing up?

A: I was trying to. I was really, really trying to. It wasn't easy. I was dry heaving.

Q: Was anyone taking care of you?

A: Well, no...finally I called my brother and was like, "Dude, I don't know what to do

here. All these people are all messed up and I'm messed up. Could you come pick me up?" He told me, "don't move and I'll be there in 10 minutes".

Q: He was older?

A: He was 26. And he showed up faster than I've ever seen anyone show up coming from town. He was afraid I was gonna die, and he picked me up, and the second he picked me up he had a loaf of bread sittin' there and was like, you have to eat all of this now. So I ate the whole thing and it soaked up the alcohol and I puked it up.

Q: I've never heard of this remedy. Have you ever heard of this remedy? You learn something new every day.

A: It doesn't work terribly well...But it worked.

Q: Did he talk about taking you to the hospital and decide not to?

A: Well I wouldn't let him. I told him that I would jump out of the truck if he tried to because I didn't wanna get caught by my parents.

Q: And did he talk to you about it the next day?

A: Oh yeah...I got to hear about it for the next three months.

Q: Did your parents ever hear about it?

A: Two years later.

Q: And what was their reaction.

A: Well they were of course stunned, but they get stunned watching *60 Minutes*...

Q: When you and your brother talked about it, what was the conversation? Did he think it was funny, or?

A: It was a seven day long lecture. While I was in a nearby city, which was for seven days, all I heard was, "you gonna drink again? You gonna drink again? Sucks, doesn't it. It sucks." He just pounded it into my head.

A number of things are striking in this account. The teen in question had drunk a little beer before, but did not realize that he did not understand the difference between that and more serious drinking. Because he did not know that distilled spirits are more concentrated, that it is bad to mix drinks, and that drinking fast gets you into trouble, he ended up in a situation that was, by his own account, very dangerous. Although he went to the party with friends, they did not instruct him on how to drink, and they did not take care of him when he needed help. And,

although he had a brother eleven years older, his brother did not instruct him on drinking until after he had almost killed himself drinking dangerously. Meanwhile the fact that he turned to his older sibling and that his parents did not find out about this incident for two years dramatizes the important, and under-researched, role of older siblings in the dynamics of teen drinking. Older siblings can procure alcohol for younger siblings and egg on their drinking, or they can counsel restraint or, at the very least, provide reasonable accurate information about drinking that young teens might not seek or trust from parents or other adults.

Another illustration helps to document the social environment surrounding teens' drinking experiences. That is, teens do not always do what they intended to do. One young person said: "I was young when I first started drinking because I saw my friends doing it. I was looking at the way they were acting, and you know, how crazy they were acting. It really didn't occur to me that this was the wrong way, that it was the wrong thing, and they shouldn't be doing that. So I just said I would take a little sip. Once I took that sip, the whole cup was gone."

While plenty of teens ease into drinking more gently and never have experiences as dramatically awful as this, unfortunately this account is not so unusual. Teens' first experiences with alcohol are often among their most dangerous.

h) Why Teens Consume Alcohol

The ongoing question, sometimes rhetorical, is why teens drink alcohol. After all, teens have been drinking (legally and illegally) for years. We asked teens this question directly, and the typical response was that it appears to be "the thing to do." The youth report that they and their friends drink because it helps to get a buzz, it helps to cope with their feelings, and it's part of a teen's life. Other teens reported that their personal insecurity about life is a reason for drinking alcohol. Some focus group participants reported that teens drink because of their own ignorance. Responses such as "there is no limit" and "drinking until your feelings go away" served as standard reasons. Further, some youth report that teens don't need a reason; "I know kids that drink for no reason at all."

In this section we play off teen responses against what experts and community leaders say about the reasons for teen drinking. While the views of experts and community leaders provide a good starting point for discussion, these views are also sometimes skewed or

insufficient. In interviews, experts and community leaders suggested seven reasons why teens drink: (1) as a “rite of passage” to adulthood; (2) because alcohol is valorized in the wider culture; (3) because teen affluence gives them the resources to drink; (4) to relieve stress; (5) for pleasure; (6) because teens are unable to resist negative peer pressure; and (7) as a result of poor parenting practices. From the perspective of these professionals who work closely with and/or study teens, it is these reasons that serve as central to teens’ resulting decisions to consume alcohol.

Starting with the first, in the words of one expert, “alcohol symbolizes adulthood to youth.” The dividing line between adolescence and adulthood, and the relationship of alcohol to that line, is a matter of some ambiguity in the contemporary U.S. Some experts suggested that it is confusing for teens that they can fight in a war, vote and get married at an earlier age than that at which they can consume alcohol, leading to a state of dissonance as to when adulthood has been achieved and eroding the legitimacy of legal bans on underage drinking. To confuse matters further, teens are aware that their counterparts in other countries can drink at a younger age and that their parents, if they were raised before the elevation of the drinking age in the 1980s, were allowed to drink at eighteen. This situation may lead parents to send their teens mixed messages about the proper drinking age. In this situation of dissonant or ambiguous age status, drinking alcohol may be a way of forcing different schemas of adulthood into alignment (by treating the drinking age as if it were the same as the ages for voting and going to war). It may also, in the words of one expert, constitute a “passage to adulthood” – especially given the relative absence, apart from high school graduation rituals, of other rites of passage to adulthood such as military service, extensive foreign travel, or early marriage.

The second reason experts give for teen drinking is that many teens see that drinking alcohol is normalized and valorized in their cultural environment, and thus learn to see drinking alcohol as part of normal social functioning. Teens see that drinking alcohol is celebrated by the media, whether in advertisements or on television and in movies and, in the words of one expert, “they are surrounded by drinking rituals, as there is so much drinking in the culture.” Many teens learn from watching adults they know, and from those they see in media contexts, that alcohol is an integral part of socializing. They see alcohol served at Thanksgiving, Christmas and weddings, at barbecues, when football is on television, and when friends and family come over. “We need to gradually change the culture of alcohol” said one expert.

While there is an obvious plausibility to this explanation, it is important to note that teens in our phone polls and focus groups did not themselves often volunteer this as an explanation for teen drinking. It may be, however, that the broad cultural normalization and modeling of alcohol that bothers some experts is a background condition that has become so naturalized that teens can hardly bring its cultural force into awareness.

In a context where drinking alcohol is modeled and valorized in adult society while the age of adulthood is ambiguous, the third reason given by experts for teen drinking is that many teens today have the resources that make access to alcohol possible in a way that might not have been true to the same degree for earlier generations of teens. The things that make it easier for teens to throw parties with alcohol are (a) money to buy the alcohol; (b) cars that give teens the mobility to access parties in homes without adults and escape the orbit of homes where adults are present; and (c) cell phones or other digital communications technologies that enable rapid communication among networks of teens about parties as they emerge. In the suburbs and exurbs, in particular, many teens have jobs, cash, and even their own credit cards as well as cars and cell phones. This represents a constellation of resources that enables teen partying.

The fourth reason experts give for teen drinking is to relieve stress. Adolescence is traditionally a stressful time anyway and, in our late capitalist economy where competition for jobs and for admission to good colleges is increasingly intense, experts report that teens today are under unprecedented pressure in school. Drinking and getting drunk may be ways of relieving the concomitant stress – a sort of “self-medication” in which alcohol is “used as a drug” in the words of one expert. And, because youth are under “a lot of pressure and stress, when they drink, they drink heavily.” One key informant told us that a survey in their community showed 73% of teens living there saying they used alcohol to deal with stress or to help cope with feelings of depression.

Such an interpretation is certainly consistent with our phone poll, which showed teens across the country reporting school as by far the largest challenge in their lives.²⁰ When teens in the phone poll were asked why they thought teens in their peer groups drank alcohol or got drunk, many volunteered stress as a reason. The same was true of teens in focus groups. Speaking about drinkers, one high school freshman said “They have a lot of pressure from their parents and school; they might drink to feel better about it, so they are not as stressed.” The pressure, according to youth, is to get good grades, to be a good athlete, and “all the work you have to do, all the expectations.” Parent focus groups also showed parents aware of and

concerned about this. As one parent said, “we also put a lot more requirements on kids these days. When my daughter says she’s doing community service, I’m thinking okay....so she’s trying to get into college. She’s got to be in sports, and orchestra, and she’s thinking about building this resume, and she’s got dyslexia, and I’m thinking, when is she gonna have time to read. And now she’s gotta compete with out-of-state college students who are wanted because they have to pay more money to the school.”

The fifth reason experts and community leaders give for teen drinking is what one expert called the “pleasure principle.” In this way of looking at the issue, teens drink for the same reason that many adults do (up to a point) – because it often makes them enjoy themselves more. Alcohol lubricates social events and produces a change in consciousness and sensation that is, to a point at least, experienced as pleasurable. In the words of the expert, “the pleasure-seeking motivation far outweighs any potential or previous alcohol-related consequences.” Again, this is borne out by the phone poll, which showed many teens reporting that they heard from other teens that alcohol is “fun,” “cool” and “tastes good,” and that they think their peers drink because “it makes them feel good,” “they like how it feels,” they want “to feel a buzz” and so on; in short, drinking alcohol is viewed as pleasurable and desirable by teens for a variety of reasons. What is important from the perspective of these experts and community leaders is that these elements of teens’ pleasure be addressed, because these are fundamental to their decision to drink alcohol.

A sixth theme in expert discourse on teens and alcohol is that teen drinking is facilitated by peer pressure. Parents, worrying that their children increasingly take their cues from peers rather than from their parents as they grow older, also often give this as a reason for teen drinking. In the words of one parent, “What I see as the overwhelming problem is peer pressure... We’ve been really lucky that our daughters focus on the straight and narrow, but if peers talk about alcohol, and it’s available at parties, whether or not parents provide it, the temptation is there, and when the peer pressure is on, that’s when they cave in.”

While experts and parents see peer pressure as a major factor pushing teens to drink, it is worth noting that teens themselves often emphatically minimize the significance of peer pressure.²¹ One teen said that “adults put too much emphasis on peer pressure. There isn’t a lot of it; if you want to drink, you drink, and if not, you don’t.” While conceding that some teens encouraged others to drink, and might exclude them from their ‘circle’ or ‘clique’ if they did not drink, teens often insisted that, nonetheless, they made their own decisions, and most seemed to agree with the teen who said, “my good friends just accept me for me.” Another said, “I have

seen where people antagonize people that don't drink for not drinking, but for the most part I think people respect them, they respect their choice to not drink." Some teens pointed out that, if you do not want to drink but feel a lot of peer pressure to do so, you can always put soda in a red cup and pretend it is alcohol.

The dominant teen perspective on peer pressure undoubtedly shows some denial or minimization of reality. Sometimes it seemed that nothing short of having one's arm twisted behind one's back as one was forced to drink from a bottle of alcohol would count as peer pressure in the minds of some teens. Take this comment by one teen in a focus group: "You go to a party knowing there's gonna be alcohol there. You know ahead of time if you're gonna get wasted. You choose." The radical individualist emphasis here on a sovereign person making their own calculated choices treats teens as if they make their choices in a social vacuum and hardly matches many of the actual stories we heard of drinking at teen parties. The comment does not acknowledge that the person making the choice may be conflicted, wanting one thing consciously and another thing unconsciously. Nor does it allow that a little alcohol on arrival may erode the capacity for rational decision-making, so that a little alcohol may quickly lead to a lot of drinking. Above all, it does not acknowledge that the person making the choice does so in a context where all his (or her) friends may have just chosen to drink, where people are saying, "everyone else is having some" in their ears, where a person they despise has just been made fun of for not drinking, where the girl they want to impress is watching to see whether they drink, where everyone around is buzzed and he wonders if a beer would help him share the mood, and so on. Recalling the various categories of teens, this scenario can incorporate the complex interaction of abstainers, moderate drinkers, partiers and losers; these various types of individuals will each be having an influence on others, whether through intentional persuasion or simply by behaving as they normally do. Echoing the work of attribution theorists in social psychology who have explored processes of misrecognition in the way people attribute causal power to "the person" versus "the situation,"²² we can say that teens, in attributing causes to the behavior they see, deeply underestimate the power of situations to coerce and constrain behavior and overestimate the power and freedom of the individual person. Put more simply, they have a very thin notion of peer pressure that underestimates its power. We might add that "peer pressure" here connects to culture. "Peer pressure," like "culture," may be largely invisible to those whose behavior it sways, but no less powerful for that.

Although we think that teens often underestimate the power of peer pressure and misunderstand the pervasive dynamics of its functioning, we would, however, counterbalance this with a reminder of teens' own frequent observation that there are different kinds of teens and that it may be acceptable to say one is not drinking (ever, or just for that event). To hear parents and experts talk, one would sometimes think that the only peer pressure in operation among teens was in favor of drinking. We found, in fact, some teen subcultures in which the peer pressure (or peer influence at least) runs in the opposite direction, and a teen who drank regularly would have a hard time being accepted. We should also take seriously teens' frequent insistence that it is possible to declare a temporary or permanent identity as a non-drinker and still find an accepted place in the complex social ecology of the teen peer group. One may not be in the inner group of the coolest kids, but one might still be an accepted member of the group whose presence at parties is welcomed, or at least tolerated. In this context, a somewhat startling statistic from our phone poll bears mentioning. Teens, asked on the phone what percentage of their friends they thought had consumed alcohol in the last month, suggested, on average, just 27%. Almost 30% of the respondents to this question thought that none of their close friends had drunk alcohol in the last month. In fact, other studies show self-reported alcohol consumption is just above 40% by high school seniors and 30% by 10th graders.²³

Once a teen has found a place in a group with a particular pattern of drinking choices (say, as an abstainer), it may be hard to change their public identity and become a drinker or a different kind of drinker. At least one teen said a teen who wanted to shift their relationship with alcohol in a fundamental way would probably have to find new friends. It is easy to interpret this observation in terms of peer pressure, but it might be more useful to think of it in terms of interpellation and identity: a particular relationship with alcohol, a particular set of close friends, and a particular relationship with the wider peer group become mutually entwined as they stabilize. If the first changes, the other two will probably have to shift as well.

Experts, as well as key informants we interviewed, were concerned about one more factor underlying why teens often drank: poor parenting practices about alcohol – though here we should point out that, in a context where there is considerable disagreement over such practices as “social hosting,” “poor parenting” is often in the eye of the beholder. Many attributed teen drinking in part to mixed messages sent by parents: some who could not agree with one another about the rules, others who drank in front of their teens while telling the teens not to drink, and others who told their child to be careful and “not do anything stupid”; they pointed out that teens

will invariably do as their parents do, not as they say. Those who opposed “social hosting” saw this as another example of poor parenting. One key informant said, “I think a lot of parents are supplying the alcohol to students. When there is a level of permissiveness of like, ‘oh well, you can do it at my house if we take away the keys,’ I think that is introducing a whole level of problems. I think parents think they are helping, but I really don’t think they are at all. I think they are making it a lot worse.”

Many key informants remarked that parents are too busy to be involved in their teens’ lives, and that drinking often thrives in the empty space in an adolescent’s life this leaves. Parents “don’t want to take one hour after work to spend building their relationship with their child,” said one.²⁴

Some key informants felt that parents were abnegating their responsibility to teach their kids about alcohol to the schools. Others charged that parents are too keen to be friends to their teens rather than be parents. “Parents need to be parents and not rely on someone else in the community teaching their child right from wrong,” said one. “I think the parents are forgetting that we are the parents, we are not the friends,” said another.

Teens themselves have a slightly different perspective on why they drink. At the outset, it should be said that many are unable to formulate much of an answer to this question at all: 32% in the phone poll, for example, skipped the question of why they thought their friends drank. The inscrutability of teen drinking was captured by one teen who said, “I know kids that drink for no reason at all.” Of those who did answer the question, just under 60% attributed teen drinking to social factors – wanting to fit in, wanting to feel less inhibited with other teens, having a good time with friends, and so on.²⁵

Our best information on the ambience of teen drinking and the possible motives for it comes from the teen focus groups. The picture that emerges here is that teens who have not ever consumed alcohol are often curious to know what it would be like – “oh, wow, this is something I’ve never tried, so why not?” said one – and are also attracted to alcohol as a forbidden fruit and therefore an effective means of rebelling: “people want to be excited about drinking because it’s illegal – the bad boy routine,” said one teen. They also report that it helps them with shyness in social occasions and it may make them feel less stressed out. But, above all, however tautological it may sound, teens get together and drink because it is the thing to do: it has become a normative way for teens to socialize with one another. Many teens said they found the idea of getting together in groups with their teen friends without alcohol unthinkable. Asked what they

would do if alcohol did not exist, many said they would look for another substance to alter their state of mind. Many said that drinking is “fun” and that the point for teens in getting together was to get “buzzed.” In other words, drinking was not a background activity, but was itself the focus and point of getting together with peers. The point of getting together was to drink, and the point of drinking was to make it more enjoyable to get together. And for many teens at parties, especially those we have identified here as **partiers**, the goal in their drinking is not to get a little more relaxed, but to get drunk. As long as getting drunk does not cross the line into behaving like a **loser**, many teens experience being drunk with friends as a source of pleasure – a pleasure that is preserved in the stories of wild parties teens can tell afterwards.

Any analysis that does not confront this fact of teens’ views of the pleasure of drinking will be grossly deficient. We can talk about teens giving in to peer pressure, using alcohol to medicate their stress, rebelling, or acting out the deficiencies inflicted by bad parenting – and, doubtless, these factors all play an important role in the concerns about teen drinking that has swept across the U.S. However, we will never fully understand teen drinking if we do not look head-on at one of the things teens themselves tell us about why they like to drink: it is fun, and it makes them feel good.

i) How Some Teens Avoid Drinking

Parents and experts were much more likely than teens to stress the role of parents in preventing teen drinking. We see this in the phone poll, which shows 8.7% of teens and 22.8% of parents listing the efficacy of parents and teachers as a reason why teens might not drink. (In other words, parents were about three times as likely as teens to think that their parenting skills would determine whether or not their teens drank). We also see it in many of the comments from our interviews with experts. Agreeing with another expert who said parents have “more influence than they realize,” one expert, speaking for many others, said, “parents who model good alcohol behavior are more likely to have teens who don’t abuse alcohol.” Experts said that parents who were neither too permissive nor too authoritarian, who monitored their children and had good, consistent lines of communication with them were more likely to have teens who did not abuse alcohol or drink at all.

The phone poll shows teens giving the following reasons for why some teens do not drink. (It should be recalled here that a random sample of teens, reached by phone, are giving

the reasons why they believe teens who do not drink are in that category. Some of the teens answering are, presumably, drinkers themselves and some are not). The most common response, which we grouped together under the umbrella category of a “lack of interest or access” and the immunizing effect of “positive attributes of peers” included the following kinds of answers: “not interested in alcohol,” “don’t like alcohol,” “don’t need to drink to have fun,” “don’t have the money for alcohol,” “don’t have access to alcohol,” “are too motivated to drink,” and “are in a group that doesn’t drink.” This category accounted for 32.6% of teen answers. Another 24.0% said those who do not drink are too busy with sports or academics or are afraid that getting caught drinking will prevent them from achieving a career goal. Next, at 18.4%, came the answer that teens who do not drink think drinking is wrong or stupid or are avoiding negative health consequences by not drinking. Another 14.2% thought teens who do not drink are afraid of getting caught and getting into trouble, or just do not want to break the law.

We discussed earlier in this chapter what we learned from focus groups about reasons teens might abstain from drinking. As mentioned earlier, some teens see drinking as an impediment to athletic success, getting the good grades necessary for admission to an elite college or university, or some other kind of career goal. Sometimes teens feel a slightly different kind of achievement pressure. For example, one mother remembered her own teenage years thus: “At all of the parties I was the one who had a big cup that looked like everybody else’s, but I had water in it. I was told growing up that, since my family ran a car dealership, that if I got caught drinking and driving, the whole family would pay. The business will be closed down. I was always the designated driver everywhere we went.” And in one focus group for teens, the one African-American in the group said she did not drink because her parents had impressed on her that they had worked hard in the face of barriers to African-American achievement to achieve upper middle class status, and her drinking could result in a fall from financial grace. Her parents had impressed on her, she said, that in a neighborhood primarily inhabited by affluent white families, a white teen caught drinking could expect to be let off with a slap on the wrist, but an African-American teen could expect no such leeway from the police.

Other youth in focus groups, asked about teens who did not drink, confirmed this sense that young adults who do not drink often make this choice for reasons of ambition. One teen said, for example, that “people who don’t drink have places they want to go, like college and a good career, and people who do drink don’t really care.”

Some teens said they did not drink because they had seen the damage alcohol had done to someone close to them. Stories here ranged all the way from one teen who saw a close friend die in a drunk driving accident and another who watched his uncle slowly drink himself to death to the much more modest revelation of the teen who said, “my older sister completely changes [when she drinks] and I think it is so annoying and I can’t hardly stand it, so I don’t want to be like that, and I don’t want someone to have to deal with me like that, so that kind of holds me back.”

Others reported not drinking because their families were strongly opposed to drinking – though we did also come across teens from families that strongly disapproved of drinking who drank nonetheless and, given their family situation, did so more deeply in the shadows than many of their peers.

If we accept, as we argued above, that many teens drink because drinking is pleasurable, many **abstainers** seem, for reasons about which we can only speculate, not to find the same fun in alcohol that so many of their peers did. As one high school freshman said, “It’s their choice. If they want to do it, go ahead, go do stupid stuff like drinking and driving. There is no real point to getting drunk. You don’t really get anything out of it; you lose most of your skills and make poor decisions, so I don’t really see a point to it.”

j) What Teens Know and Don’t Know About Alcohol

In our phone poll, teens reported that, if anyone talked to them about alcohol, it was most likely to be someone in their family. When asked what adults told them about alcohol, the most common answer was, simply, “don’t drink.” Relatively few teens (about 17%) reported being given explanations of why alcohol might be dangerous to them.

Talking to teens in focus groups, we found that they had got the message from society at large about the dangers of drinking and driving. This is not to say that, their judgment clouded by being drunk in the giddy atmosphere of a party, they would not in fact drive drunk; it is just to say that, when sober and asked to reflect on alcohol, they are well aware of the dangers of drinking and driving. Many were also aware, presumably from media stories and chatter with friends, that someone who is drunk and passed out could choke on their own vomit. In other words, they seemed to have a reasonably strong awareness of the most extreme harms that can

befall a drunken teen – the kinds of scenarios risk analysts characterize as “low-probability-high-consequence” – the high consequences here being death.

The possibility of dying tragically young in a fiery car crash or being passed out in the corner of a raucous party is not uncommon for a teenager’s dramatic imagination. And the risks had been driven home both by society at large and by the lurid storytelling favored by teenagers; teens understand these messages. But teens seem much less well informed – because almost no one in their lives seems to take the trouble to explain this to them – of less spectacular dangers that can be associated with alcohol and of fairly mundane, but extremely useful, factual information about alcohol and its interactions with the human body. So, they were often more aware of the damage alcohol can do to the liver of an alcoholic than they were of its relation to heart disease and blood pressure among heavy users. And, while they had learned of the dangers of drinking and driving, here are some things most teens seem not to have known when they began drinking:

- that it is more dangerous to drink on an empty stomach
- that mixing drinks can make you feel much worse
- that the time lag between drinking alcohol and feeling its effects can lead inexperienced drinkers into dangerous situations
- that it can be dangerous, even life-threatening, to mix alcohol, especially with other medications, especially depressants (such as valium, vicodin, or some cough medicines)
- that alcohol has a stimulating effect followed by a depressant arc, and that the onset of the depressant arc tempts drinkers to keep drinking so as to retrieve the stimulating sensation of the earlier part of a drinking bout

k) Summarizing Teens’ Lives

At the risk of oversimplifying complex behavior, we do want to provide some additional insights about our experiences with teens through our range of focus groups with them. First, it is important to highlight that the teens appeared quite open and honest with us. In the typical focus group, we found them quite forthcoming and straightforward with their responses. As a focus group progressed and teens warmed to the discussion, they often became quite animated and uninhibited, despite the fact that adults were asking them about behavior normally concealed

from adult authority figures. We often found that we had to manage the time well, so that we could cover the various questions and issues that we had identified. At the conclusion of the focus groups, we asked the teens how they felt about talking about alcohol and the various experiences they have had; overwhelmingly, they said that they had been honest and that they enjoyed the experience of talking about alcohol and their lives. We asked whether or not they had had other conversations with adults about alcohol; their overall response was that they had not had such conversations. They appeared most appreciative that someone, particularly adults, had taken the time to hear what they had to say – though it was clear that they also enjoyed the opportunity to bat around stories, observations and ideas about teen drinking with other teens. Many offered that they would like to have other conversations on alcohol as well as other topics. Their participation in a focus group appeared to be an important experience for them, and they indicated they would like to have other such experiences.

In talking with teens about their lives, an overwhelming theme was that they feel a lot of pressure. They feel stress with “all the work you have to do, all the expectations”; these include a range of phenomena: being accepted by others, doing the “right thing” in the home, dating, driving, transitioning into high school, getting ready for college, doing well academically, performing well with sports activities, or others. In the words of one high school freshman “They have a lot of pressure from their parents and school.” Linking this to their motivation for drinking alcohol, one teen, early in the high school experience, said: “Part of drinking is partying, and part of drinking is drinking your troubles away.”

The transition to high school is cited as a major factor, with the stresses associated with high school life. Further, as one high school student said, “high school can make you real lonely.” Another youth said “most people are out there trying to fit in; you better have some friends that are going to the same school or you are going to be by yourself.” Another youth reported that teens drink “because they feel out of place in high school; you’re not in college and you’re not an adult, and you’re not a little kid.” The junior year is cited by some teens as a significant transition time; this is due to the fact that they are driving, and “they don’t depend on their parents anymore, and it’s easier to go places.”

They feel ambivalent about their future, and are not sure where they can turn for assistance. Accompanying the stress is a general sense of ambiguity and what appears to be an overall lack of groundedness. Teens reported wanting information and guidance from someone they would respect and trust; this includes parents, siblings and teachers. They demonstrated

that they lacked a respected and trusted source of information about alcohol as well as other challenges facing them as teens.

A segment of the focus group discussions emphasized what teens thought would be helpful in changing teen drinking behavior. Common responses to this query were “teens will always drink alcohol”, “there’s nothing you can do to change it”, “I don’t think anything could change it”, “I think it’s a way of life, almost, it’s part”, “I think teens think it is what to do now” and “I could care less about it.” However, virtually all teens said that something should be done to try to change it. The overall response was that it might be possible to change some of the most extreme alcohol abusing behavior, but that it would not be possible to change everyone’s behavior, nor to completely eliminated teen drinking. One teen said that “for most of the guys out here, if you tell them to stop drinking, they look at you crazy like ‘who are you supposed to be?’” However, that same teen said “if you sit down and get to know them, you gotta start vibing with them, they’re probably not going to stop drinking, but some of them will slow down. They will take it lower.” Another viewpoint was “I think it’s worth trying. It helps. There are always going to be people who stop and change their minds about it. Trying to is always a good thing.” This was complemented by views such as “You have got to have some other role models outside your family.”

Teen focus group participants were also asked about the types of initiatives that would be most helpful in preventing and reducing teen drinking. Overwhelmingly, youth reported that programs, whether in the school or the community as a whole, need to connect with teens emotionally for them to be effective. Some teens talked about involvement with a youth-based awareness program “where we come up with plans to give back to our communities, and stuff which prevents situations and educates the community. It is fun, too, and you learn.” “I think they need to involve with other teens and stuff. If they get other teens to be joined and do a project with them and stuff, they can actually prevent this.”

In short, teens appear to be disconnected from a larger world view. While much of this is normal for these years of life, the feelings that teens have are such that they do not feel engaged or supported in this process. Teens report being engaged with their peers, and often with parents; however, they all-too-often report that they have not had substantive conversations with their parents, or indeed any adults, about alcohol issues. They are searching for ways of being more grounded, and many often consume alcohol to assist in feeling better about themselves and their futures.

1) Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions

Based on the insights gathered from the processes incorporated in this research design, it can be helpful to try to summarize what contributes to youth decisions. As noted earlier in this chapter, youth can be identified in different classifications (e.g., as abstainers, as moderate drinkers, as partiers, and as losers). Some of the classifications can be viewed as a more positive decision about alcohol, particularly the abstainer classification. Also, the moderate drinker classification, while not legal, is less problematic for parents, youth themselves, and society at large, than the partier and loser classifications. What helps contribute to these more positive or more appropriate decisions among youth? Clearly, no single answer or ‘magic bullet’ exists that protects youth universally from these behaviors. While acknowledging that each youth has different familial, societal, and cultural backgrounds and settings, an overall framework can be helpful in understanding some general considerations that appear to emerge from this research. Just as the common cold may have various causes and contributing factors, and just as addiction is understood from the perspective of the neurobiopsychosocial disease model, some general understanding of what contributes to positive alcohol decisions (and what contributes to more risky alcohol decisions) can be helpful for programmatic and policy considerations.

This section highlights the positive decisions about alcohol among youth. This is seen as constituting four basic themes, moving from left to right. The most essential, fundamental elements are those identified as “Underlying or Core Factors” with the youth, followed by those identified as “Intrinsic or Vital Factors.” The intent of this framework is to identify what is most central (or “Core”) in the ultimate decisions to not use, or at least not abuse, alcoholic beverages. The “Intrinsic or Vital” elements are less central, yet none-the-less very important. Elements classified as “Extrinsic Factors” are those that address the surroundings of the youth, and how she or he is spending time. The “Contextual Factors” are more situational and focus on things that present themselves on a regular or irregular basis. Together, these are seen moving from left to right, or in the case of a circle, from the inside to the outside of a circle.

FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH POSITIVE ALCOHOL DECISIONS			
Underlying or Core Factors	Intrinsic or Vital Factors	Extrinsic Factors	Contextual Factors
*Strong core values *Feel connected to past and future *Has a sense of purpose	*Family bonds *Feeling loved and listened to *Feeling capable (confidence) *Aware of areas of concern *Knows where to turn for assistance *Feels supported *Has balance in life *Good coping skills to deal with anxiety, stress, high expectations *Friends provide support *Friends encourage behavior change as needed	*Spend family time together *Healthy family *Has open communication / conversation with parents *Has meals with families *Has good sense of personal boundaries *Feels affirmation *Has clear and reasonable expectations *Skills to interact with others *Sees parents as partners and guides *Reflect on self *Has positive role models	*Engaged in activities, clubs *Has opportunity to learn by doing, experiment, make mistakes *Is encouraged to stretch and extend comfort zone

With this framework, attention is provided to elements that appear to be central to positive youth alcohol decisions. This is not meant as an activity guide or a master ‘checklist’, but as an overall framework that helps community leaders and parents to understand ways of increasing the positive decisions about alcohol. Many of these factors are based on ways in which parents and other adults interact with the teen, and many (if not most) of these refer back to early childhood days. This framework becomes a way of thinking a bit differently about

teens and their development, drawing upon developmental strategies found with them through early childhood and nurturing processes. Further, this framework can help in understanding the categories of Abstainer and Moderate Drinker. Of interest would be greater understanding of why some teens adopt the Abstainer role permanently, why other teens are generally in the Abstainer classification, and why still other teens choose to abstain on a situational or periodic basis. Similarly, this framework helps illustrate why some teens are generally in the Moderate Drinker category, and are not found in the Partier category. Overall, what will be helpful for further review and analysis is an assessment of the wide range of factors that tend to contribute to lower-risk choices made by youth; also of interest will be a clearer delineation of family, friend, and organizational (e.g., school and community) programmatic and policy initiatives.

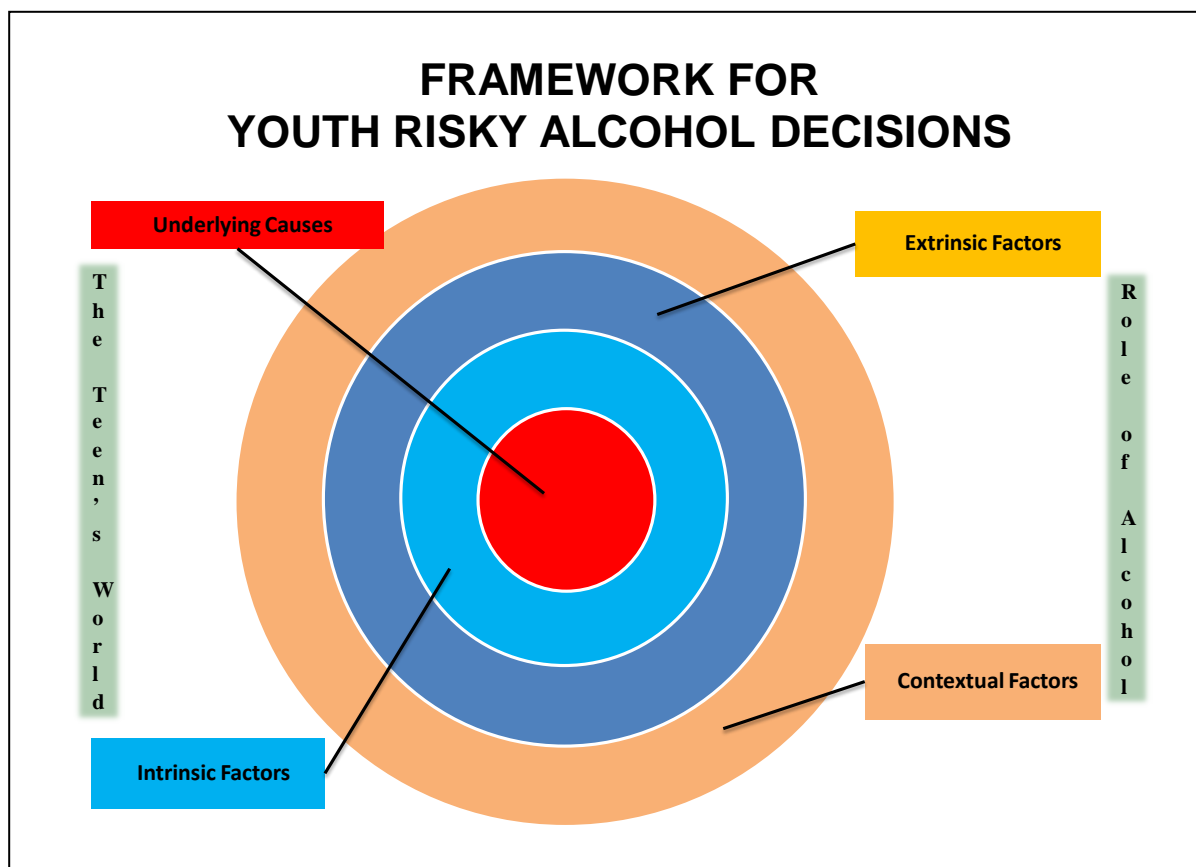
m) Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions

As with the positive alcohol decisions, the framework for the risky alcohol decisions is based on four factors. Again, these are viewed from left to right; similarly, from a circular format, they are viewed from the inside out. In the visual below, the internal to external factors are seen in a format similar to that of an onion; as you get closer to the center, you are getting closer to the factors that are core to the issue. Thus, the Underlying Causes are found at the center of the ‘onion’, circled by the Intrinsic Factors.

Dissimilar from the youth positive alcohol decisions, the framework with the risky alcohol decisions is seen as being encompassed within two broad settings – “The Teen’s World” and “The Role of Alcohol.” Obvious with these risky alcohol decisions is that alcohol is clearly involved; thus, this framework can be used with reference to the Partiers and to the Losers. With the positive alcohol decisions, alcohol may (with the Moderate drinker) or may not (with the Abstainer) be involved. Examining the nature of this risky alcohol decisions framework, those factors identified as more central, as found within the Teen’s World, ostensibly have nothing to do with alcohol itself. Alcohol is involved with the more external elements, classified as “Extrinsic Factors” and “Contextual Factors.” This is important to reflect upon as a review of how current efforts to address alcohol abuse and reduce underage drinking are conceptualized. That is, efforts to address the more external elements (Extrinsic Factors and Contextual Factors) may be helpful, but not sufficient, for reducing risky alcohol decisions.

Said another way, if the Underlying Causes and Intrinsic Factors are not addressed with teens, then they (obviously) remain unaddressed.

FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH RISKY ALCOHOL DECISIONS			
Underlying Causes	Intrinsic Factors	Extrinsic Factors	Contextual Factors
*Stress	*Lack coping skills	*Lack knowledge and information	*Peer acceptability
*Feel pressure	*Boredom (nothing to do)	*Lack meaningful conversation with parents	*Peers' encouragement
*Discouragement	*Not comfortable being alone	*Lack of role models	*Ease of access
*Disenfranchised	*Lack of goals or mission	*Allure (TV, songs, ads)	*Party availability
*Lonely	*Escape	*No substantive, consistent legal consequences	*Alcohol is readily available
*Seeking own identity	*To experience things themselves	*Conflicting messages (adults drink)	*Societal acceptability
*Insecure	*No reflection	* Educational dishonesty, inadequacy, mistrust	
*Hopelessness	*To fit in		
	*To be older		
	*To rebel		
	*Unrealistic expectations (life, situations)		
The Teen's World		The Role of Alcohol	



In this framework, the focus is upon the risky decisions made by youth. The framework separates the “Teen’s World” from the “Role of Alcohol.” With an aim of reducing risky decisions about alcohol, attention is provided with this framework to the types of approaches taken with teens. With attention to the elements included in the “Role of Alcohol”, all-too-often these are accomplished during the later years. That is, these can be viewed as dealing with ‘symptoms’ more than with the primary ‘causes’ of a teen’s risky alcohol decisions. Listening to teens talk about their decisions about alcohol, particularly the teens who end up being classified as Partiers and Losers, it is clear that the elements identified as Underlying Causes and Intrinsic Factors are missing from their lives. These elements appear to be central to their risky, and often problematic, involvement with alcohol. This framework is helpful in understanding, and ultimately more effectively addressing, these risky alcohol decisions to reduce the risk to these youth and those around them.

Just as with the previous framework, this Framework of Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions helps us understand why some youth get into the Partier category of teen drinking behavior. It can also be helpful in understanding the transient state found with the Loser category. Certainly,

some risky decisions can be found among Moderate Drinkers, but more likely these are found with the Partier and Loser categories. This framework can help in understanding the elements that contribute to their higher risk choices, and thus serve to elucidate strategies and approaches that can be implemented to reduce these risky decisions.

A final thought is relevant about this Framework of Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions. From our experience and review of most strategies designed to address teen drinking, it appears that the focus is primarily on the outer two layers (the Extrinsic Factors and Contextual Factors), which we call “The Role of Alcohol.” That is, the community-based and national and state initiatives appear focused primarily on these elements, with the belief that if these can be addressed, then teens will not consume alcohol (or at least not drink alcohol in high-risk ways). What this fails to address are the more central elements that tend to drive teens’ decisions about alcohol, which we call “The Teen’s World” – the Underlying Causes and Intrinsic Factors. The teens’ decisions about alcohol are affected by the entire range of factors, so that if an environment was “successful” in addressing the Extrinsic Factors and Contextual Factors, the drive to meet the more central needs would still remain. Important with this framework is having attention to all aspects of this, including what we have labeled The Teen’s World which addresses these more central or core factors for their decisions.

n) Recommendations for Youth

1. **Engage youth in a meaningful way in planning extracurricular activities, information needs, learning experiences.** Youth have often been left out of meaningful involvement in planning and implementing their out-of-classroom activities. This can be accomplished through establishing a youth advisory board in various settings (the community overall, schools, faith settings, and with national and state efforts) , having youth advisors, engaging youth on planning commissions, conducting youth discussion groups, and more.
2. **Address the core needs of youth, with attention to underlying causes and intrinsic factors.** Building on the Framework of Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions and the Framework of Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions, attention needs to be given to the central elements that affect teens’ decisions about alcohol, called “The Teen’s World.” This recommendation emphasizes primary attention to many of the core issues in youths’ lives

that affect their decision-making. This can be accomplished through workshops, training, mentoring, and activities on topics such as stress management, decision-making, values, relationships, communication, setting guidelines.

3. **Provide opportunities for youth to discuss their needs, concerns, and other issues.**

Teens often report that they do not know many people to whom they can turn for advice or open discussion. These individuals or settings could attend to both alcohol issues as well as other elements identified in “The Teen’s World.” Strategies to accomplish this may include planned events, structured learning experiences, informal discussions, on-line forums, or even through ancillary conversations adjacent to an un-related activity (such as a brief conversations before an athletic team practice, or while walking a dog, or by sharing an article for later discussion). Adults or older siblings helping with these opportunities may benefit from background materials, conversation starters, and discussion guides.

4. **Provide teens with factual information about alcohol and its interaction with the body.**

Many teens expressed to us their skepticism about public education campaigns against teen drinking. While scare tactics work in the short term, over the longer term teens react against them and may become cynical about all anti-drinking messages. Teens were often also cynical about celebrities who tell them not to drink. What teens most need, before they drink, is reliable factual information about the way the body metabolizes alcohol, the problems of mixing drinks with each other and with other substances, and the difference between safer and riskier drinking practices. Some of the horrifying stories we collected about some teens’ early drinking experiences speak to teens’ fundamental lack of factual knowledge about alcohol as they start drinking.

5. **Enroll older siblings as part of the solution.**

Older siblings occupy a role in between that of adult authority figure and teen peer. Younger teens often look up to older siblings as sources of information and perspective without seeing them as disciplinary figures. They may confide more easily in older siblings than parents, and trust their advice. At the same time, older siblings are often a conduit for illicit alcohol. Parents should seek to enlist older siblings as allies who do not provide alcohol to younger siblings but do

provide trusted information about the dangers of drinking and about safer drinking practices.

Summary

This chapter illustrated central factors involved in teens' decisions about alcohol. Through insights from experts, community leaders, parents and teens themselves, focused attention to the teens' world is highlighted. A central point is the four teen drinking classifications: Abstainer, Moderate Drinker, Partier, and Loser. Dependence on alcohol was discussed in the context of its relationship to these roles. The often-found attraction to alcohol as pleasurable, to enhance teens' social lives and for addressing emotional issues was highlighted. Further, extreme behaviors associated with drinking alcohol by teens were illustrated. Teens' knowledge, and their more significant lack of knowledge, serves as a basis for further attention. Finally, the two frameworks offered - one focused on positive alcohol decisions, and the other focused on risky alcohol decisions - serve as ways of better understanding and planning for reasonable recommendations and strategies.

Chapter 4: Parents

In this chapter, attention is provided to the role that parents play in teens' decisions about alcohol. Building upon the importance of parents cited by experts, community leaders, and teens, this chapter highlights further insights about how parents see teen drinking and how they currently address it with their sons and daughters. Attention is provided to the messages parents hear about how to handle teen alcohol issues, and where they seek further information and support.

a) Introduction

As described in the previous chapter, it is taken for granted by experts and many key informants (educators, law enforcement officials, community leaders etc) that there is a strong correlation between the kind of parenting teens receive and whether or not they drink alcohol. The type of parenting that experts tend to cite often is one that conforms to a current middle class ideal in the United States: a style of parenting that encourages youth to develop personalized skills and interests while their parents engage them and monitor their behavior and progress without being either overly authoritarian or too permissive. At its most extreme, this has become known as “helicopter parenting.”²⁶ It is a model that eschews both the authoritarianism of Victorian parenting and the permissiveness of the 1960s and ‘70s, while emphasizing the gradual development of a responsible, autonomous young adult. It is assumed that parents who do not sufficiently engage their teens, parents who look the other way when their kids are breaking the rules, or parents who are mindlessly strict are more likely to produce teens who abuse alcohol. While we have some reservations that the current conventional wisdom may err too much in favor of valorizing a single style of parenting, there can be no doubt that parents play a central role in influencing teen behavior.

Many of the parents we spoke to agree that parents are important in determining whether or not teens drink. For example, in our phone poll, when asked what the differences are between teens who do and do not drink, the most common answer from parents was that family relationships made the difference. Nearly one-third (30.5%) of parents gave this as an answer compared to only 7.1% of teens. Teens were most likely to attribute the difference between drinking and non-drinking teens to the personality and emotional life of the teens in question.

We break with the normal way parents are discussed in the professional literature on teen drinking, not in the sense that we want to deny the responsibility of parents for their children's

behavior, but in a different way: the literature largely abstracts parents, representing them as causal factors in a matrix that can be mapped with regression analyses and other statistical tools. We learn that “this kind of parent has a statistically significant probability of producing this kind of teen”, while “that kind of parent has a statistically significant probability of producing that kind of teen”, and from this the proper mode of parenting is divined by abstraction. What we are less likely to learn from the research literature is how it feels to be a parent in a society where alcohol is easily available to teens but nonetheless illegal, what parents do and do not know about teen drinking, what parents are thinking as they make difficult choices, and how they perceive their children and other parents reacting to their decisions. This chapter uses information from our phone poll and focus groups with parents to explore what teen drinking looks like from parents’ perspective.

b) Parental Knowledge

Teens believe that adults, including their own parents, underestimate the amount of drinking teens do, overestimate the age at which they start drinking, and are particularly likely to have a blind spot where their own teens are concerned. We tend to agree with this. When asked in our phone poll what percentage of their teen’s friends they thought had drunk alcohol in the last month, 44.0% said none at all, and 11.9% said less than 10%. In other words, over one-half of parents thought that 90.0% or more of their teen’s friends had not had any alcohol to drink in the last month – according to countless studies, a substantial underestimate of drinking rates in most teen populations. It may well be that parents think that teens in general drink, but not those teens they actually know.²⁷ Thus parents in focus groups, asked what percentage of teens in general drink, made guesses ranging from 50 to 80%. When asked what they thought their teens were told about alcohol by their peers, nearly two of five (39.0%) of parents in our phone poll said they did not know.

Parents do know that teens drink, however, and they have a pretty good idea how they go about doing it, even if they are hazy about the precise details. Although parents may fall prey to wishful thinking about their own sons or daughters, and although a comparison of teen and adult testimony in our focus groups suggests adults miss a fair amount of the teen drinking going on around them, nonetheless parents have a reasonably good sense of the phenomenon in broad outline. For example, when asked where they thought teens acquired alcohol, parents gave

answers that matched what we learned from teens (“they steal it,” “with fake IDs,” “from parents”), albeit without a lot of elaboration. The one source of alcohol parents tended to describe in detail was their own liquor cabinets, often recounting how they came to realize that their vodka had been watered down and so on. Many were aware that alcohol in their own homes was a temptation to teens: “It’s so accessible. If you open my fridge, I have beer in the fridge and wine in the basement, and I’m not there all the time.”

Many thought that teens were being given alcohol by their own parents or even by others’ parents, but more listed older siblings and friends as a source. Older siblings home from college for a holiday were a particular concern.

Several parents mentioned that kids can get fake IDs, though few seemed to know exactly how teens would acquire them. Many parents were aware that, as teens get older, they work and thus have money with which to buy alcohol – even if they are not old enough to buy it legally. Others said that teens will sometimes steal alcohol. One had learned at a workshop that teens will steal from the open garages of neighbors: “kids garage shop, and a garage that is open and has a refrigerator in it, they will take alcohol out of there. So as a parent you should be constantly monitoring what is in supply and make sure it is what it is.” Some also mentioned that teens will sometimes stand outside liquor stores and ask strangers to buy alcohol for them. One found that her daughter had been getting alcohol from a local convenience market with the help of others.

Asked what teens drink, parents were aware that “they drink whatever they can find,” but particularly beer and distilled spirits. They were often aware that, for purposes of deception, teens like to drink clear liquor that can pass for water, that boys are more likely to drink beer, and that girls prefer fruity drinks (mixed with alcohol).

Perhaps the biggest lacuna in parental knowledge concerned the age at which teens start drinking. Asked at what age teens start drinking, parents’ answers were all over the place: anywhere from 10 to their high school junior or senior year, with all the years in between. It seems that parents have a better idea what teens drink and how they get it than when they start.

Asked where teens drink, parents were more likely to identify places outside their own home than inside -- notwithstanding such discovered traces of drinking as beer bottles in sock drawers, watered-down vodka, and so on. These parents associate teen drinking with other people’s houses, especially their basements, and especially if there is to be a party or a sleepover. “I knew every time she was going to go drinking because she slept over. Sleepover meant

drinking,” said one parent. “I wouldn't let my kids go to their houses, but they could come to ours,” said another parent.

There are three main ways parents learn about specific instances of teen drinking, including the drinking of their own teens: from other parents, from teens themselves, and from physical evidence.

In general, adults in networks of friends and neighbors know more about each others' teens' drinking than they share with one another. Parents with a zero tolerance or “don't ask, don't tell” policy about alcohol are particularly likely to know less about their own teens' drinking patterns than other parents do. There is a well known ethic, in suburbia especially, of minding your own business and of not saying things to people's faces about their children that might cause awkwardness or embarrassment. However, “if a party gets busted, everybody in the school knows whose house it was, and whose mom called, and all the kids that were there,” said one parent. Such incidents will become the subject of lively gossip among both teens and parents. Many of the parents in our focus groups told stories of other parents' obliviousness to the dangers of teen drinking. “I called the mother of the sleepover and I warned her that there was some plan afoot. And she said ‘my child would never do something like that.’ Well, guess what! They all got drunk, my boy threw up and reported it to me the next day, and the mother of the sleep over still doesn't know that they raided her liquor cabinet.” Said another: “I think there are a lot of parents who are clueless, and just turn their head away and say to themselves ‘my daughter doesn't do that.’”

Parents are well aware that different parents have different rules about drinking and are not sure how their revelations to another parent about their son or daughter might be received. Some parents report telling other parents about their teens' behavior and not being believed or being met with coldness. “What I learned is that some parents absolutely do not want to know what their kids do,” said one parent. So me and my husband now go to the parents of any kids who are participating in behavior that threatens the health of their kids. And what we've learned is that some parents are appreciative, but about 40% of parents went into denial.” Others report being forced by their own teens to agree not to share a confidence as a condition of hearing it.

To a surprising degree, parents find out about teen drinking directly from teens themselves. Finding the right way to ask and the right moment to ask, are key here. Sometimes a teen, feeling conflicted, will confess to a parent what they have been up to. As one parent said, “sometimes I'll ask my daughter about a party after a party. And then I state things that I think

happened as if I thought they were facts, and she'll tell me. I trip her up a lot.” Another mother said, “if I’m driving a group in the car, and I will drive them and their friends around and they will forget that I’m there, and then you’ll hear something.” Conversations in which teens share confidences or reveal secrets about teen drinking seem to be disproportionately between mothers and daughters.

Many parents report finding evidence of drinking on Facebook pages or text messages on their kids’ cellphones (see below). A number of parents have also stumbled across evidence in their homes. Take these examples: “I found beer bottles in the drawers of clothing where they store their laundry.” “We discovered the tequila bottle was filled to the very top, and what they don't realize is that there is always a little gap in between the top and the gap. And my husband noticed that the color was lighter.” “I've had like two or three of my friends’ sons sleeping over and a friend of mine stopped by and I went downstairs to get my friend a soda and the fridge was filled with beers, and he [a visiting teen] just brought them in a backpack and I just figured he had like a toothbrush and sleeping stuff in there.”

While some parents stumble across evidence of teen drinking more or less fortuitously, others take active measures of surveillance. The sense that one’s children, as they become teens, are separating and developing lives that are no longer readily accessible to adults can be difficult for parents, especially when they stumble across evidence (such as a beer bottle in a sock drawer) that their teen now has secrets – evidence that inevitably leads a parent to wonder how much more they do not know. In this situation, it is tempting to resort to techniques of surveillance. These techniques raise the question of where appropriate monitoring ends and inappropriately intrusive surveillance begins. Different parents answer this question differently.

c) Techniques of Vigilance

The prevalence of two-breadwinner families and teens’ easy access to cars creates a situation where teens can often get together without adult supervision. Meanwhile the emergence of such digital technologies as computers and cellphones enables teens to communicate with each other by text and email or to talk on the phone out of parental earshot in ways that were not possible fifteen years ago when teens often had few alternatives to landlines in their parents’ homes that were more susceptible to parental monitoring. The new ease with which teens communicate and mingle away from parental oversight creates a temptation for parents to engage in various strategies of surveillance, some of which are enabled by new digital

technologies and some of which are quite primitive. In such a situation a sort of arms race can emerge between strategies of detection and evasion. (An example: teens learn that their parents can smell alcohol on their breath, so they chew gum. In turn, parents have learned to treat gum-chewing as a suspicious sign).

Examples of relatively simple ways of checking up on kids at home include using a razor blade to mark the level of alcohol in a bottle (though teens can backfill the bottle with water to get around this), and counting the beers left in the refrigerator.

A number of parents said they use technology of one sort or another to monitor their kids. “I know some people might not think this is right, but we keep a baby monitor in the ceiling right above where they hang out so we know whenever something's going on,” said one mother. Another family had a security system that beeped every time anyone opened a door, and they used this to keep track of kids going outside, possibly to escape surveillance within the home and sneak a drink.

It is common for parents to use cellphones to check up on the whereabouts of their kids when they are out, but some parents go further. One mother reads her daughter's email and text messages. She reasons, “she has to know because she actually chooses to save these conversations. So she knows that they're on there and she knows that I could read them if I wanted to.”

Several parents said they monitor their and other teens on Facebook. “I have a Facebook [page] and part of it was to be able to see other Facebook [page]s. It was very fascinating to see that a lot of kids drink to create an identity for themselves. Come Monday morning, there are pictures floating around that are cool and talked about, and now they have a cool identity, not a dorky one.”

However, just as in an arms race, some teens develop countermeasures to which, in turn, the parents take their own countermeasures: “they get very smart very fast. They say you can look at their Facebook page and they start a second Facebook page. So then THIS is their real Facebook page... You learn very quickly that you don't know all their email accounts. They get very sophisticated. There is software you can use. There's a keystroke software that lets you recreate every key stroke that was done and you can basically recreate their emails, their Facebook chats, everything.”

Parents are particularly concerned about parties, and with good reason since parties correlate with risky behaviors such as drinking games, binge drinking, and drunken driving. One

group of parents mounted a sort of police action at one party: “the way the mom handled it, and it was a very good idea, was that there were six parents, and every kid that came in, they would say ‘coats and bags in that room, and kids downstairs.’ They had to dump everything. The parents had cased the basement and made sure the basement was cleaning clear of anything.”

Some parents deal with the danger of drinking and driving after a party by taking away everyone’s car key when they arrive for the party. However, one parent at a focus group responded that some kids will hide a spare key in their sock so they can drive anyway. One person reported of her neighbors, that once they realized their son’s parties involved drinking, “every time someone leaves their house, they use a breathalyzer to make sure that they’re not driving.”

It is in the nature of suburbia that teens are usually much more tightly networked than parents, and can use their tight networking (through text messaging, recess conversations and so on) to identify unsurveilled spaces where they can drink. Given this, tightening their networks with other parents and inviting them to collaborate in the project of surveillance is an obvious countermeasure. Thus one mother said, “I sent an email out to everyone that I could there that if they ever saw my teen drinking at all, that I wanted to know. I described what her car looked like and everything.” Another mother reported, “I had called a couple moms and said... I just feel like we need to band together and deal with this, and you know it takes a village to raise these kids and we all need to watch over everybody's kids. So it started out with four of us and then it got to eight, then 12 and my daughter comes home from school and goes ‘Mom, what are you doing?’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ She told me that there are, like, 12 of you moms who are going out and discussing us.”

d) Harm Reduction, Zero Tolerance or Other Approaches

While some parents take the straightforward approach that the legal drinking age is 21 and they will do everything they can to make sure their teens obey the law, other parents seek to create contained spaces for teen drinking. Sometimes these spaces are modest and, in some jurisdictions at least, are allowed by law or fall into a legal gray zone: allowing your 20 year-old to have a glass of wine with the family during Sunday dinner, for example. Others are illegal, but parents justify them as a form of “harm reduction,” sometimes saying that their actions are in alignment with the norms of many in their community even if they are against the law. Thus

some parents, whether explicitly or through a sort of “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, allow teen gatherings with alcohol at their homes on the principle that teens will find a way to drink one way or another and it is better it happen in a context where adults can ensure that the drinking does not get out of hand and that teens do not drink and drive. Some parents were also concerned that, as one put it, “if you forbid it, then your kid is gonna be the one who's doing it the most.”

The more modest end of the scale of such **contained drinking** includes parents who reserve the privilege of underage alcohol consumption for special occasions. One parent said: “We let our kids drink with rituals. We’re Jewish, and we drink on Shabbat, and they hate it. From the time they were 13 they were allowed to do that.” A number of others followed a practice that they often explicitly marked as “European” of allowing their teens to drink some wine with dinner. “A glass of wine... I spent some time in Sweden and it’s not a big deal. So it’s a very different philosophy. They’re not getting drunk with their parents; they’re having a glass of wine as part of dinner, which I think is extremely different than taking a shot of tequila.”²⁸ Some parents saw a glass of wine with dinner as a way of teaching teens that alcohol can be used as an accompaniment to the main course rather than as itself the central focus of consumption. However, although none of the parents in the focus groups seemed to realize this, they were also offering their teens the one form of alcohol that teen focus groups revealed they most despise (wine), and they were offering practice in a form of drinking quite different from that engaged in by teens once they are away from adults. It is unclear that teens transfer the drinking skills they learn at the dinner table to teen parties.

At the other end of the scale of **contained drinking** are parents who allow, or turn a blind eye to, teen gatherings with alcohol in their homes. Such parents often said they made sure such gatherings were small, so they did not get out of hand. Some made sure other parents knew that alcohol would be present; many did not. Parents who allow some alcohol to be consumed in their homes follow a logic of harm reduction – it is unrealistic to expect teens not to drink, so better they do it relatively openly where it can be monitored – analogous to the logic of those who would provide condoms to teens although they would prefer they abstain from sex. One parent cast this in terms of an ethic of moderation: “I’ve taught her moderation since she was five. You’re gonna come across everything in life, whether you drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes, you don’t want to do anything in excess. Whether it be eating healthier eating junk.

You don't eat five candy bars in an hour or you gonna be sick. You don't drink five beers in an hour.”

Instead of drawing the line at any drinking at all, such parents speak of drawing the line at excessive drinking and, especially, at drinking and driving – the thing that tends to scare parents the most. As one parent said, “I have the rule in my house that, yes, temptation happens. I won't question you, but don't drink and drive; do not get behind the wheel. I just do not understand how parents in our community who let children come into the home and drink and then drive.” Some parents worried about being so successful at preventing their kids from drinking in high school that they would arrive in the much less supervised and more dangerous environs of college naïve in regard to alcohol, and preferred that their teens go through alcohol initiation while still under parental supervision.

There are multiple risks to this strategy of harm reduction. One is that teens will abuse the trust placed in them and find ways to escape what is supposed to be an experience of contained drinking, drinking more than they are supposed to, or finding ways to drink and drive. Another risk concerns the law. For example, in 2007, Elisa Kelly and George Robinson were both charged by Virginia prosecutors for providing alcohol to several teens at their son's sixteenth birthday party. According to the *Washington Post* Kelly “believed the kids were going to drink regardless. She reasoned that supplying the alcohol and keeping them home would be safer than having them out drinking and driving. Court records show she spent \$340 on beer and wine for the party that night. She said she made a deal with her son that no one could leave” and she “collected car keys... to prevent anyone from leaving.” The court was unimpressed by this defense, sentencing Kelly and Robinson to two years each in prison.²⁹

Lawsuits are also on parents' minds. One mother tells of her son who wanted a New Years Party with alcohol at her home: “I told him, ‘you don't know the danger you put me in. I'm the one that's going to get sued because it's at my house and I let this happen.’”

In some parts of the country, adults can be subject to hefty fines if teens are discovered to have consumed alcohol in their homes. We excerpt here from a focus group we did where several teens talk about a party they attended where things got out of hand. The teens were partying in the basement and the parents had agreed to stay upstairs, out of the teens' way.

Q: Were the parents drinking as well?

A: No.

Q: Did they come down and check on you once and a while?

A: I think they're kinda new, and it was New Years. They locked the door so you couldn't go outside, and they took everyone's keys.

Q: Where did the alcohol come from?

A: They kinda knew it was there, but they wanted to make sure that no one was driving, and if you wanted to leave early, then your parents had to come pick you up.

Q: So there were rules?

A: Yeah. But they never explicitly said, you guys are gonna drink.

A: It wasn't condoning, it was just accepting.

The teens panicked when one of the girls started sweating, throwing up a lot, and then lost consciousness. At this point the son texted his parents upstairs and asked them to come down to the basement. "There were a bunch of us who were crying, I mean, it was that scary," said one girl.

A: Well, at first the sober kids were taking care of them, but then the parents came down because their son texted them and they were like, oh my gosh what is going on. And she was sweating and they saw her move, and they knew...Alcohol poisoning.

Q: So she threw up on herself, how did her parents not know?

A: She changed at the sleep over.

Q: So the parents who took care of that child did not tell the parents of that child?

A: No.

Q: Now, what do you think about those parents for not telling? Does it make them cool?

A1: I think it makes them cool.

A2: I think if they would have called it would have caused a lot of trouble. The parents were probably worried about the girl's parents calling the cops or something. And that's like, if the cops find out, the parents get charged \$1000 a head.

A3: It's actually \$1000, then \$2500 per consecutive head after that.

A4: Oh my god!

A5: This could be like a \$40,000 fine.

We see here the dangers of both the harm reduction and the zero tolerance approaches. What was supposed to be an exercise in safely contained drinking got out of hand. While it is impossible to tell from the second-hand accounts of teenagers how seriously ill the girl in the story really was, it is worth noting that some of the teens were worried that her life was in danger. It seems obvious that it would have been best if the parents had called an ambulance, but they did not do so because they feared thousands of dollars in fines in a jurisdiction that sought to deter teen drinking with a strict zero tolerance stance. If we accept that the parents probably would have called an ambulance but for the county's policy of fining parents thousands of dollars in such situations, then a policy intended to deter teen drinking ended up endangering the life of a teen girl. And, at least according to the teens, her parents never even knew.

e) Talking to Other Parents

In addition to the dilemma about what overall approach to take (e.g., zero tolerance, harm reduction, or some other approach), parents confront another challenge of how to talk to other parents about issue.

Discussions with other teens' parents are impaled on the horns of three dilemmas. First, different parents have quite different attitudes toward teen drinking, and it can be difficult to reach agreement as to how it should be treated if, for example, one parent is a teetotaler and another a social drinker who thinks the drinking age makes no sense. One woman said she belonged to "a church group, and there were about 25 parents, and it was split 50/50. Half would say it's illegal therefore my children are not to participate, and the other half would say that they're going to do it, so we let them do it at home, and we check the kids that come to our house and don't let them drive if they've done it, and they monitor it and manage it." Second, because teen drinking is illegal and those who permit it in their homes are accessories to crimes, it is difficult – and might even be dangerous – for some parents to try to discuss this with others. Third, for those who accept that teen drinking is a fact of life, there is the fundamental dilemma that one is less liable if teen drinking happens in another family's home, but one can be less sure that one's teen is safe if this is the case.

These dilemmas, and the differences of opinion underlying them, became apparent in some focus groups. Where parents usually listened to one another's stories and opinions with polite attentiveness in the focus groups, participants were mostly likely to cut one another off or

make strong declarative judgments when it came to discussing parents who allowed teens to drink in their homes.

The strength of people's feelings, especially those who favor zero tolerance, is illustrated by an exchange in one focus group where a mother spoke of the time her son "actually asked me for a permission slip for him to be able to drink. The parents of the party asked for permission slips from children so they could drink." Another mother immediately responded that she should report those parents for prosecution. Another parent agreed, saying "I really think that's a message we should send. Because it's against the law...but not only the kids have to be punished, but the community needs to see the parents punished."

Differences of opinion can manifest within families as well as between them. One woman says of her son: "He's 14, and his stepfather and his father, both of them have given them alcohol, in the sixth and seventh grade, just to taste...which made me furious... I found a bottle in his room and a flask, a little bottle of whiskey, and my husband gave him the flask... And then we caught him with a bottle of vodka trying to go to a sleepover. I was out of town, and I told him he could not go on the sleepover. My husband took the bottle of vodka and then let him go to the sleepover."

The difficulty of reaching agreement on these issues is nowhere better captured than in this story told by a mother who caught a group of kids drinking at a party and decided to talk to the other teen's parents to see if they could agree on a common punishment: "Some people thought this wasn't a big deal; others were going to ground their kids for three months. We thought one or two weeks was good for us. It came down to, everybody did different things."

We take no position on the vexed question of whether it is better for parents to adopt a policy of zero tolerance or harm reduction in regard to teen drinking. We do note that many parents feel as if they are flying blind in regard to these issues, and they treated our focus groups as an unusual and welcome opportunity to discuss teen drinking with other parents. That said, the conversation is not an easy one since parents who favor harm reduction can find it hard to articulate their case in the face of what they experience as the rigid moralism of zero tolerance parents, and those who favor zero tolerance often see harm reduction parents as undermining community solidarity in the face of a serious problem and teaching teens – not only their own, but others' as well – disrespect for the law. Still, rather than yet more number-crunching studies seeking to correlate teen drinking with parental style, we feel that what would best serve

communities in the face of a national concern about teen drinking would be fora in which parents can talk to one another about the issue in a way that recognizes the full complexity of the issue.

f) Discipline

This brings us to the final parent dilemma: how to discipline teens who break the rules. The most common punishment is grounding. Some parents reduce computer privileges as well or instead. At the more extreme end of the spectrum, we heard of one set of parents who removed the door to their teen's bedroom. Some parents also ban other teens who they have caught bringing alcohol to their house. The parent at the end of the previous section who tried to negotiate a common punishment with other parents, then gave up, took this stance in regard to her own daughter: "I felt that negative punishment wasn't so effective because I had seen kids come off the ground and go right back and do the same thing again. So I made her do community service... I required her to earn back a privilege, which was going to a dance that they all wanted to go to. She had to get in so many hours before she could go to the dance."

A special dilemma presents itself when a teen drinks, but is then responsible enough to call a parent and ask to be taken home rather than keep drinking or drink and drive. Do you punish the drinking or reward the reaching out? "I've said no matter what, call," said one parent, in what seems to be the predominant policy. A mother said, "I've always said to her, "you know how I've feel about drinking and I don't want you to do drugs. But if you are ever in a bad situation I want you to know you can call me no matter how bad a shape you're in."

The most difficult and intractable dilemma is experienced by parents of teens whose drinking (usually combined with drug use, stealing and pathological lying) gets consistently out of control. These are parents of **partiers** in the process of becoming **losers** in a downward spiral before which parents feel helpless. Therapists we interviewed suggested that these kinds of teens are disproportionately likely to come from families scarred by divorce. Beyond the fact that such children may have been wounded by divorce, as single parents their parents often lack the emotional and temporal resources to provide the intensive parenting such teens may need. (Many therapists went out of their way to emphasize that this was true regardless of the financial resources at the command of such parents). In this situation there is an obvious risk that their child will end up in the hands of the criminal justice system. Much research suggests that such children are more likely once in the criminal justice system to internalize labels of themselves as troublemakers than to be reformed – a further twist of the downward spiral.

Therapy, including family therapy, is one intervention option for such teens whose behavioral problems are beyond the reach of normal strategies of family discipline and outreach. One mother reported sending her daughter to “a program in California that is for alcoholics and drug addicts” for 4 months. Another had a 15 year-old nephew sent to boot camp for 40 days in the wilderness away from alcohol and other substances. The long term efficacy of such programs is for other research studies.

g) Expectations of Schools

Parents are aware that teen drinking is facilitated by teen networks that are centered on their schools. Some parents say they have smelled alcohol at school. Parents also report stories of kids hiding alcohol in water bottles, and even of teachers drinking on the job. “The kids know who is messed up in class, my daughter knows who’s messed up in class, and the teacher will just ignore it,” complained one parent. “I’ve watched good headmasters not muster up the courage necessary to say, *you’re out because this is the line as long as I’m the administrator,*” said one father, “and we just saw the head of our local High School who did carry a tough line on student behavior across a very broad brush of events...he’s out. They put another guy in.” Of course, public schools are more limited than private schools in their ability to expel students. And, in the case referenced above, another parent in the group responded that, if the problem is that kids are drinking because they are “underparented, I feel this problem isn’t being solved by kicking kids out of school.” Other parents, acknowledging the difficult situation of school administrators, also mentioned cases where parents whose kids were suspended from school for drinking then filed suits against the school district. Parents also sometimes complained that schools seemed to give a free pass to athletes caught drinking, and that they could be capricious in who they punished.

Parents were aware, or assumed, that schools do some alcohol education, though most seemed very fuzzy on the details of what such education might involve. Some mentioned DARE programs approvingly, and a group in one of our research locations was impressed by a school exercise that simulated a drunk driving accident to the extent that a crashed car was installed in the school grounds, certain students were designated as dead and eulogies were said for them. Another parent in this location said, “They used to show this video to kids when they were learning to drive that showed horrible accidents with people who had seat belts and people who

didn't, and kids respond to that blood and gore, kids are all about that.” Some school administrators we spoke to were, however, skeptical of the long term efficacy of such scare tactics in changing behavior, and even parents who approved of them observed that it was ultimately up to parents, not schools, to shape teens’ behavior around alcohol.

h) Recommendations on Parents and Families

- 1. Provide opportunities for parent-to-parent discussion of dilemmas and challenges.** While many parents are aware of teen alcohol issues, a relatively high number reported not knowing answers to many of our questions. Further, many parents in focus groups felt like they did not know where they could discuss their concerns about teen drinking and develop strategies for dealing with it. They welcomed the opportunity afforded by the focus groups to discuss the dilemmas and challenges surrounding alcohol and teens. This need can be accomplished through having facilitated discussions, support groups, or unstructured opportunities for parents to talk and learn from one another. This could include the development of guidelines for parents for their consideration, serving as a stepping off point in discussions with other parents. Parents can talk with other parents about their values in regard to alcohol. This can be helpful in knowing what to expect if a son/daughter goes to a party in another parent’s home. Because parents often disagree about the pros and cons of allowing illegal but somewhat supervised drinking in their homes, these conversations can be difficult. While it is tempting to rely on stereotypes (ethnic, religious, or class) to make judgments about which other parents will share personal values about teen drinking, these stereotypes often turn out to be misleading.
- 2. Promote trust and ongoing dialog with teens about their lives.** Through discussions with teens about alcohol, it was quite common to find that they had not had any meaningful discussions with their parents about alcohol. While some teens reported talking on a regular basis with their parents, more common were statements that “they had the conversation – once” and that they had never really talked about alcohol. Further, many teens report that they are not sure where they can turn for general assistance and guidance in their lives; typically, teens do not easily identify trusted mentors or advisors for the challenges they face. This gap provides an

opportunity for parents and older siblings. While parents cannot address all of a teen's questions or concerns, greater engagement in the challenges of the teens' lives can be helpful. The emphasis here is upon conversations that, ideally, will be occurring about teens' lives throughout their developing years. The focus of this recommendation is not specifically about alcohol, but focuses on the range of issues central to their lives. This highlights a wide range of issues of importance to teens; these include, but are certainly not limited to how to handle stress, how to interpret friends' behaviors, how to fit in, ways of thinking about short- and long-term goals, having reasonable expectations, and personal security. The link to alcohol is to talk about how some teens may address some of these issues with their decisions around alcohol. As part of promoting this trusting, open relationship, parents should not read their children's email or text messages, or otherwise monitor them too intrusively. Such surveillance undermines trust and tends to drive problematic behavior deeper into the dark. Finally, it is important to beware of assuming that, when it comes to parenting, one size fits all. Parenting strategies that work well with one child may work less well with another. Using the typology introduced in Chapter 3, an "abstainer" and a "partier," for example, would require very different styles of parenting around alcohol. If part of a parent's philosophy is to allow an occasional drink of wine with dinner, to help them "practice" with alcohol, it is important to be realistic in understanding that this has limited applications.

- 3. Provide parents and older siblings with current, accurate information and resource assistance.** This recommendation comes from our observation that many parents were not sure where they could go for quality and reliable information about alcohol as well as how to talk with their sons and daughters about alcohol. It also comes from hearing from teens that they learned much of what they know from older siblings or peers, by trial and error, and our observation that they had significant gaps in their knowledge or concern about alcohol issues. Further, teens reported not having engaging information or resources at school or in the community about alcohol, and often not believing what they did hear. The recommendation is to have information that is age appropriate and culturally appropriate, and available in print as well as electronic format (e.g., on-line, DVD). Factual information, used in

- appropriate settings, can be helpful in opening the conversation about alcohol issues. Further, the emphasis of much of this conversation can be on issues related to many of the Underlying Factors or Intrinsic Factors highlighted in one of the frameworks.
4. **Enhance parents' skills and confidence for having ongoing conversations with teens about alcohol, consequences, and underlying causes.** Not only do parents not know where to turn for guidance about alcohol information, correcting myths, and appropriate strategies for discipline or expectations, they feel unconnected from other parents in addressing these challenges and dilemmas. Even with good resource information, parents would benefit from greater skills and confidence in engaging in these situations. This can be accomplished by offering a range of 'conversation starters' that can be used with teen discussions. These can address alcohol directly, and they can also address the larger general perspective about coping with the range of life stressors and life issues. For example, when a child is an early teenager, and before they face many influencers about alcohol, it is vital to talk with them about alcohol in a matter-of-fact manner. It is important to explain factually how alcohol interacts with the body, why some adults enjoy using it, and how it can be dangerous, particularly for a developing teen. The teen should clearly know the dangers associated with underage drinking, mixing drinks, drinking on an empty stomach, drinking too quickly, drinking among strangers, and other risky situations and factors. Knowledge of these facts is very important, regardless of parent attitudes about teen alcohol consumption (e.g., tolerance for some teen drinking vs. a zero tolerance attitude).
 5. **Encourage parents' and older siblings' skills and responsibilities.** Our discussions with teens revealed that they often turned to older siblings and their siblings' friends for guidance and information (as well as for access to alcohol). Much of the information the teens received was from these older teens or young adults who shared their experiences, insights, and information they had received as teens. We also heard teens asking that their parents establish clear, and reasonable, expectations; the teens wanted these guidelines or standards, even though they may complain about them. We heard community leaders, experts and teens say that they wanted "parents to be parents, and not the teen's friend." Greater emphasis on the

important role that can be played by parents and older siblings is reasonable for helping address teen alcohol cultures. This means that it is important for a parent to establish clear guidelines and consequences; it also means that older siblings can have an important role as a positive influencer in the lives of younger brothers and sisters.

Summary

Parents know all-too-well that they have an opportunity to affect the positive development of their sons and daughters. However, they are often unaware of how to address teens' decisions about alcohol consumption and non-consumption. They report being unaware of many of the issues surrounding alcohol in the lives of teens. Further, they find it challenging to know where to turn for current, accurate information; they also report not having opportunities to talk with other parents about how to address many of the dilemmas surrounding alcohol, such as varying attitudes, legal considerations, and other family standards. The important role of other family members, particularly older siblings, can be most helpful in helping teens make responsible choices about alcohol.

Chapter 5: Community Leaders

Complementing the important role of parents is the engagement of community leaders with teens. This chapter summarizes many of our insights gathered from these individuals, some of whom work fulltime with teens (without any specific alcohol focus), some of whom focus entirely on teens' alcohol issues, and all of whom have regular interaction with teens. We describe school-based efforts, where much of the emphasis appears to exist. We also highlight community-based strategies from the perspective of the various community leaders interviewed. Through our research, we determined recommendations to help strengthen current efforts on teens' alcohol-related decisions.

a) Introduction

One of the major components of our research was engagement with a range of community leaders. These 'front line' personnel were currently involved in a variety of roles with youth; they included professionals in the school setting (such as principals, teachers, or guidance staff), substance abuse counselors, law enforcement personnel, faith community leaders, medical personnel, and youth leaders. The methodology of the research involved both one-on-one interviews as well as group discussions. In the latter case, this typically involved intact groups, such as a local community's steering committee or advisory board. As cited at the outset, the research design primarily focused on teens and teen alcohol cultures; the research did not set out to review systematically community efforts, school curricula or policies, or how communities and schools are organized. While the research did include a substantive literature review, it did not seek to review in a systematic way the range of strategies used, their fidelity, their effectiveness, or other factors; these would be helpful new directions for future research to complement this teen-focused research.

Findings from these various individuals were rich and insightful. These community leaders had, overall, a great sense of what was important to the youth in their location. They appeared to know what was important to these youth, how they spent their time, and how to reach them. These individuals had varying knowledge about alcohol abuse prevention research and current strategies, as their professional roles did not necessarily overlap with alcohol as a specific focus area. That is, while alcohol decisions may be a part of the lives of youth with whom they work, the major focus of these professionals' work was typically of a broader nature (such as curriculum, recreation, health, religion, or law enforcement).

In addition to these key sources, the other methodologies provide insight into what is and is not happening at the school and community level. This section will highlight, from the youth and parental perspective, what youth are hearing in school or in the community. Similarly, expert opinions about the role of schools and community will be provided.

This chapter incorporates findings regarding both the school and broader community settings. These two groupings are distinguished because all-too-often they are viewed together. While schools are part of the community, schools can be distinct from the community with their own distinct needs and issues. Further, schools are often the setting identified as ‘responsible for’ alcohol abuse prevention efforts among youth; while schools have some responsibility for these efforts, they are not viewed as being entirely responsible for these efforts. Thus, these two parts of a community are separated in these findings.

b) School-Based Efforts

The literature review prepared as part of this research identified nine of the 250 articles published during the five-year review period as having to do with schools. These articles offer local data collection activities, such as self-reported by youth, regarding their involvement with alcohol. These studies identified the positive role that schools can play in reducing alcohol consumption through increased positive relationships with the school (school affiliation, school bonding) and academic motivation. Two studies documented the level of awareness among teachers and counselors regarding teen alcohol use, and identified the need for increased training on appropriate assessment and screening of teen alcohol use. Also recommended by several authors was the incorporation of alcohol abuse education into the middle school curriculum. Overall, these nine articles provide limited insight into what schools are doing to address alcohol issues among youth, whether from a descriptive perspective or in terms of levels of effectiveness.

The telephone poll conducted as part of this research revealed that, from both the teen and parent perspective, academics and school issues represented the toughest challenge faced by the teen during the past few years. Among teens, over one-third (37%) of responses highlighted school-based issues, with over two-thirds of teens (70%) citing school issues as one of their top three challenges. Youth and parents were also asked what messages they heard at school about alcohol, with a focus on messages from teachers or counselors. Over one-third of responses (34%) heard by teens were knowledge- or fact-based, and 28% of the messages were “don’t drink”; parents had similar assessments of what teens had been told. Interestingly, messages

about not drinking and driving rated at 9%, policies and laws were 4% and responsible decision-making³⁰ was 14%. Almost one in ten (9%) of teens reported that teachers and counselors do not talk about alcohol at all.

Another telephone polling question was about the consequences if the teen were to be caught with alcohol by school authorities. From the teens' perspective, nearly three-quarters of respondents (72%) reported that they would be suspended or expelled. While only 4% said they didn't know, one in ten (12%) said they would have to go to a special education program, and another 5% said that someone would talk with them. Parent responses were similar, with nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) saying their son/daughter would be suspended or expelled, nearly one in ten (9%) citing a class, and 9% reporting that they didn't know what would happen.

Teens involved in the numerous focus groups associated with this research reported insights similar to those revealed in the telephone polling. They were fairly clear in their view that consequences in school for drinking on school property, or coming to school intoxicated, would be suspension or expulsion from school. They also reported that if their offense occurred outside of school, there would not be a school-related consequence unless they were a student-athlete. As one high school freshman said, "I know for sports, you sign some stuff, some contracts, that if you get caught drinking or are suspected of drinking, you get in trouble and get suspended. I know that's one thing athletes have to do. But some still do it and don't get caught, but if they do, I don't know they get in trouble." Students also reported that teachers and school personnel, overall, do not know whether a student is intoxicated while in school. Through these focus group discussions, it was obvious that most teens assume that the consequences of being drunk or caught with alcohol are less than the consequences of being caught with marijuana, which may also include criminal charges.

The teens in focus groups also had insights regarding the messages they heard about alcohol in the school setting. It was clear throughout the focus groups that youth had been exposed to the topic of alcohol in school. There were two settings for such exposure, the primary one being in a health class; the other setting, less universally found, was with school-based programs such as assemblies, bulletin boards, or displays (such as the 'crashed car' placed in front of the school building). The youths' reactions to what had been covered in school was that it was done to a very limited degree, and, for the high school juniors and seniors, had typically been covered during their freshman year in school. The sense was that the topic of alcohol was covered as one lesson during the health class, which was part of a health and

physical education requirement. They also recalled that it might have been covered as part of their driver education program, with a focus on not drinking and driving. Thus, the actual time spent covering alcohol issues was quite limited. Further, the sentiment about how this was covered was that it was quite boring, appeared exaggerated sometimes, and used out-of-date resources.

Also apparent from the focus groups is that teens felt a discrepancy existed between what they were told about alcohol by their schools and their personal experiences. While the classroom information may have preceded, or was concurrent with, teens' personal exposure to alcohol, the youth reported that school curriculum typically exaggerated the dangers of alcohol. That is, when the youth hear about various dangers and concerns associated with alcohol use, and then have the opportunity to witness or personally experience alcohol consumption among themselves, they report finding that what they had been told did not match what they observed or experienced. This leads them to report skepticism about whatever else they might hear about alcohol or other health-related issues in school. According to youth in the focus groups, the educational programs in school focused on body toxicity issues such as liver damage and the effect alcohol has on the developing brain, but did not focus on longer-term health issues linked to heart disease and blood pressure. The youth also reported that the reasons that adults consume alcohol, particularly the pleasure many adults find in drinking, were not discussed. Some quotes from high school juniors and seniors help illustrate their reactions about school-based education:

- “I remember we learned about it, but I don’t remember any specifics at all. It was just something we had to do.”
- “They gave you reasons, so it made it more important like you shouldn’t drink because it’s bad for your growing brain; I remember something weird like that. It actually gave you reasons that made sense, so I said ‘yeah, why make yourself stupider?’”
- “We talk about it in health class; they tell us everything bad about it, but there isn’t much the school can do but encourage you to not to drink because it’s done outside the school usually; I just think they can’t do a whole lot.”
- “They tell you about your health, your body, and where this liquor is going – straight to your liver.”
- “They show you how it progresses; in middle school they tell you about it informationally, and then in high school they try and scare you.”

In summary, schools appear to have a limited focus on alcohol issues. While the message is clear that if a student is caught with alcohol, removal from school is a likely result, too little factual information is conveyed in an educational or programmatic vein. We derive this conclusion from the professional literature (which does not have current articles about the range of school-based programs, training or policies) as well as from the perspective of teens themselves. When information is covered in the school setting, it all-too-often appears to be irrelevant to teens' lives or inaccurate. While formalized research attention to school-based programs would be helpful (including the efficacy of strategies implemented, results obtained from the curricula, and reactions from and impact on teens), that was beyond the scope of this research. Again, noteworthy is the observation that attention to these issues, and more, was not found in current published literature.

c) Community Strategies

Beginning with the literature review conducted for this project, community-based strategies were among the thematic topics in articles found on teens and alcohol. Of the 250 articles published in the last five years, 10 focused on the role of community and neighborhood characteristics, and another 23 addressed the enforcement or policy aspect of community life. The general community articles address community factors that complement parent and peer roles regarding teen drinking. Issues highlighted in these articles include alcohol availability, neighborhood safety and cohesion, socio-economic status, and perceptions of community attitudes. Two of the articles noted that opportunities for civic participation led to lower rates of teen alcohol consumption. The complexity of communities and ways of understanding how their structures and environments might affect teen alcohol decisions was highlighted.

For the research articles that incorporated legal, policy or enforcement considerations, some focused on issues associated with the drinking age law, others addressed the impact of zero tolerance laws, and still others reviewed drinking and driving campaigns. Effects of policies such as alcohol taxes and alcohol advertising were also included. One of the main themes from these articles is that, in spite of changes in the minimum drinking age law, teen alcohol consumption remains a significant public health concern. Nearly one-half of these articles conclude that enforcement of current laws is not sufficient. Other data was helpful regarding community-based initiatives, including enforcement and policy efforts. Specifically, our

telephone poll asked teens and parents what the consequences would be if the teen was caught with alcohol by the police. Over one-third of teens (44%) said that they would be arrested or charged, and another one-third (29%) said that the police would call their parents. While 8% said they didn't know what would happen, less than 1 in 100 respondents said the police would "do nothing" and 4% reported that they would receive a verbal warning. Parent responses were virtually the same, with 43% citing arrest or a charge, 40% saying that they would be called, 3% noting a verbal warning, 1% reporting "nothing."

Findings from the focus groups were consistent with the telephone polling data. Teens said that, if they were caught, there would be fairly severe consequences, such as being arrested. However, two specific caveats are integral to this observation. First, while teens acknowledge that the consequences of being caught for an alcohol-related offense such as drinking and driving, underage drinking, or purchasing alcohol would be strong, they were confident that they and their friends would not get caught. Second, they found that, with the exception of student-athletes, community offenses would not have ramifications in their school. The conclusion, in the minds of teens, was that community-based consequences are, in their 'reality', quite minimal. Again, while teens know what the consequences would be if they were caught, they believe they would not be caught, and therefore the consequences are irrelevant for them.

Another community-based insight, whether it comes from community initiatives, enforcement campaigns, or school-based education efforts, revolves around the issue of not drinking and driving. The focus group sessions made it very, very clear that teens do have ingrained in their minds that drinking and driving is unacceptable, unsafe, and illegal. They clearly state that they know they should not drink and drive, and that many dangers (safety, health, legal) are associated with driving while under the influence of alcohol. They also talk about the importance of having designated drivers, with some teens reporting that they choose not to drink so they can be the designated driver to keep them and their friends safe; others report that, because they are a non-drinker always, they become, by default, the designated driver for their friends. This abstract understanding of the importance of not drinking and driving, and of having designated drivers, may not necessarily translate into actual behavior on specific occasions, however. They also might not know how smaller amounts of alcohol can impair driving ability – another problem in what is taught in school-based alcohol education programs.

Another source of information from community leaders was a series of focus groups and key informant interviews. These sessions provided the research team with an opportunity to

hear from those professionals who were on the ‘front line’ in their activities with youth. As noted at the outset, the vast majority of these people were not professionals dealing with alcohol issues on a full-time basis; however, through the course of their professional activities, whether with teaching or practicing medicine or doing law enforcement, they encountered and observed youth in alcohol-related situations.

One thing we learned from these community leaders is that alcohol issues in American culture as a whole are more ‘out in the open’ now than they had been in previous decades. Alcohol consumption among teens appears, to these community leaders, to be more acceptable among teens and their parents; this is not to suggest that the community leaders themselves accept teen alcohol use, but their observation is that the communities at large have this acceptance. One community leader said “If you are desensitized to what is going on (such as violence, drinking, behavior), that becomes the norm.”

Community leaders say they wonder if addressing teen drinking is viewed by many adults in the community as a type of ‘uphill challenge’ where few results are seen. Community leaders tend to cite the perceived lack of effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. program and general lack of results of other programs as the foundation for a question of “do I want to fight the battle?” evidenced among parents and other adults in their communities. As one community leader said about parents, “They choose to let them drink alcohol rather than let them do something else that they perceive as more destructive.” Community leaders tend to place responsibility for making a difference with adults in their communities. They believe that adults (parents and others) in the community need to take more responsibility for addressing teen alcohol consumption. As one community leader said:

“It goes back to adults. Who controls the media? Adults. Who controls the schools? Adults. Everything goes back to adults. Whoever the adult is that’s in charge, that’s the influence. I know what you mean about peer pressure, but the peers are getting it from somewhere.”

Some community leaders offered these views about community-based efforts, and what could be done:

- “A lot of teenagers turn to drinking to help them with social issues that they have to deal with.”
- “We should be talking with them instead of talking at them. It seems we just bombard them with what not to do and what bad can happen. Talk to them about why they’re making the choices that they are, and why they should be making healthy choices.”

- “Peers talking to peers. Developing positive peers with positive attitudes. The deliberate attempt to develop where the message is positive, where it’s acceptable, it’s okay to do what we’re doing, and it’s cool for activities to not involve alcohol.”
- “You have to teach personal responsibility. If I can teach them that the decisions they make today will affect the person you become down the line, then I’m a good teacher. If we can get through to them that the choices you make today affect you tomorrow then some of them will fall into place.”
- “We need to educate the parents. They don’t know how to communicate with the kids because the kids get rebellious and start screaming and yelling, and the parents eventually give in.”
- “I think education is key. It’s going to take getting it from their peers, and the parents should get an education.”
- “Parents want their kids to have a good life. I think if parents realized that this [teen alcohol use] was not leading their children in the right direction they would be more active.”

Overall, efforts in the community that are outside the school setting are vital for addressing teen alcohol issues. While community leaders and experts view enforcement and policy approaches (including being arrested) as important, they also see as vitally important proactive efforts with activities and events, parent education initiatives, and a clear message throughout the community. Further, they believe that community efforts should be planned with a longer-term vision in mind. As one community leader said, “It has to be a community coming together, and not just ‘let’s hope the high school handles this for us.’”

d) School and Community Needs

Schools and communities have a range of issues to be considered as they review ways of addressing teen alcohol use. As noted at the beginning of this section, schools are distinguished from communities as a whole; while schools are clearly part of a community, schools have unique considerations and opportunities that warrant their distinction from the community as a whole. These include, but are not limited to, factors such as mandates, oversight, funding, curriculum, and the large amount of time spent by youth in the school setting.

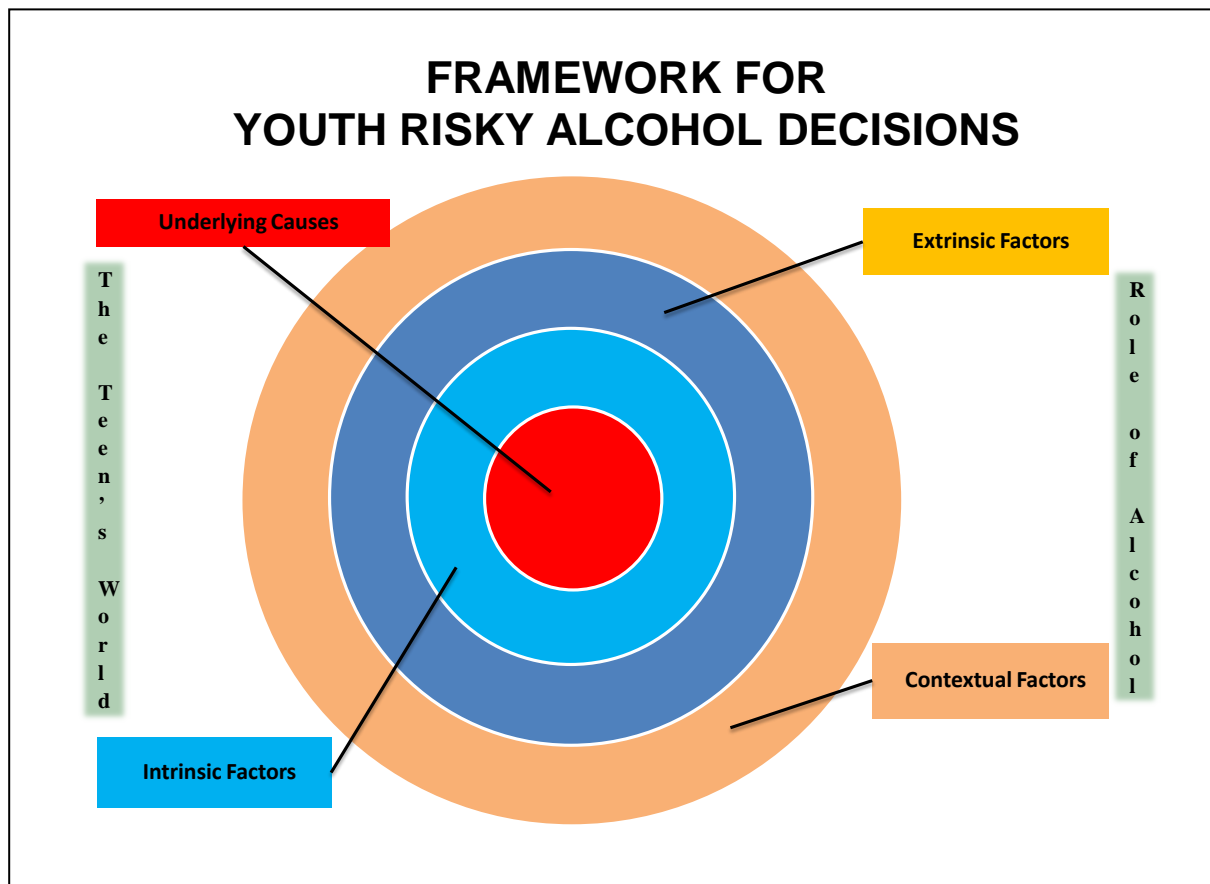
In reviewing the needs for schools and communities, many of the processes and deliberations will be parallel in nature, and many will be separate. For example, both the

schools and the community as a whole will benefit from engaging in a long-term plan regarding teen alcohol use; based on various factors at the local level, this long-term planning may reflect independent processes, they may be one community-wide process that includes the schools, or they may be overlapping processes. On the other hand, curricular issues typically fall within the purview of the schools; this, however, can be muddled due to the manner in which school officials are appointed or elected, and what approval processes for school matters such as curriculum are in place at the community level.

The research activities involved with this *Understanding Teen Drinking Cultures in America* project incorporate a blend of previously conducted research (through the literature review summarizing 250 articles over the last five years) and new, field-based research engaging teens, parents, community leaders and experts. Based on the literature review, summarized earlier in this chapter, and new insights, a wide range of needs exist for schools and communities.

Using the two frameworks introduced in Chapter 3 [Framework of Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions and Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions] as a starting point, it is quite instructive to review current efforts in place in the school and community settings. These two frameworks emerge from the qualitative, field-based focus groups and interviews conducted through this research, and are offered as a way of learning ways of maintaining and building upon the positive approaches (that appear to be working) and reviewing what could be changed to better address those youth who are making risky alcohol decisions. Said another way, and incorporating the typology of youth introduced in Chapter 3, it will be helpful for communities (including parents and schools) to **consider ways to reduce the risk of each group of youth**. If the typology is viewed as a type of continuum, the aim would be to move teens from the more risky ('partier' and 'loser') designations toward the less risky designations 'abstainer' and 'moderate drinker').

Helpful in this process is reviewing, particularly, the Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions. This framework shows, using the 'peeling onion' illustration, that a variety of factors contribute to teens' decisions to engage in risky alcohol decisions.



Viewing the two outermost layers, the Contextual and Extrinsic Factors, the issues cited within these appear to be those highlighted in the current school and community settings; as noted in the table illustration of this model, these two outermost layers represent the role of alcohol; these elements are the intersection of the teens' life and alcohol; the two innermost layers (underlying causes and intrinsic factors) are more about the teen him/herself, and represent core issues for them that, at their basis, have nothing to do with alcohol. What would be interesting is for communities to **conduct a detailed review of the elements within this framework**, to assess the extent to which each of these is adequately incorporated in the school and community settings. What is apparent from our research is that, currently, schools and communities address the two outermost layers of the framework (contextual and extrinsic factors), while the two innermost layers (underlying causes and intrinsic factors) remain relatively unaddressed. Thus, the first primary need for schools and communities involves a

careful and close look at what is currently being done to address all four layers. Specifically, schools and communities need to review what is being done to help address underlying causes, such as stress, discouragement, and disenfranchisement) as well as the intrinsic factors (such as coping skills, goals and expectations). In a similar vein, schools and communities would benefit from reviewing how well they are addressing the extrinsic factors (knowledge, meaningful conversation) and contextual (such as access, availability, and peer influences). Important in this process is ensuring that the range of factors is addressed.

Related to this review is holding a perspective that **comprehensive approaches** are needed in both the school and community settings. Simply having a course on alcohol issues, or a guest speaker, or a crashed car in front of the school for a week, or an enforcement initiative – alone – is not sufficient for making a meaningful difference with teen alcohol cultures. What is important, building upon the two frameworks on youth alcohol decisions, is to have a comprehensive plan that addresses both the teens’ needs and the role of alcohol. Using the view of the various teen roles [abstainer, moderate drinker, partier, and loser], strategies, approaches, messages, and other efforts must be targeted to the unique needs of these different groups. Thus, a comprehensive approach, inclusive of policies, enforcement, curriculum, support services, advising, extracurricular activities and much more should be considered in a deliberate way. Single strategies, of the ‘one size fits all’ nature, are simply not sufficient or appropriate for the breadth and depth of challenges surrounding teen drinking.

Another need identified with this research is that communities and schools need to have both a **long-term plan and short-term points of progress**. Linked to the understanding that a comprehensive approach is vital, it is similarly essential that schools and communities have a very broad, large-scale, and long-term perspective. Hearing from the teens and parents about how imbedded alcohol issues and behaviors are, the point is that a long-range perspective is needed. Community leaders are not sure where to turn, and ‘what to do next.’ Thus, the need is to engage in a long-term, broad-based planning process that not only gets numerous community members participating and investing in the planning, but also identifies the range of resources that already exist and those that are needed. As one community leader said, “One thing that Americans are short on is patience. You have to be patient. You have to have this spelled out, step by step. It’s not going to be by 2015 that you’re going to cure this sucker; it’s going to have to be long, long term.”

Community leaders also reported that, essential with this long-range planning process, is having some short-range objectives. This means incorporating short-term activities and strategies that can help achieve two things. First, the short-term efforts provide opportunities for success or achievement. While working along for the long-term, it is vital to have some more achievable objectives or targets that can be reached; this can be viewed as ‘low-hanging fruit.’ To help keep groups (such as the community planning body, the schools, and other community groups and organizations) as well as individuals engaged, it is important that they have a sense of accomplishment or success. Second, these short-term efforts are helpful in reviewing progress. With appropriate measures of effectiveness in place with the community and school planning efforts, evaluation can help gather data and insights about whether the strategies are or are not working as well as designed. This evaluation can be used in assessing the outcomes sought (for example, specific knowledge achievement or skills acquisition) as well as the processes used (for example, how much the participants enjoyed or appreciated the way in which the effort was done).

To achieve the overview community review, as well as the establishment of a long-term plan with short-term objectives, community leaders and experts reiterated that a **community-based planning process** is essential. This must be inclusive of the range of viewpoints in the community, including the traditional players as well as some participants who may not typically be considered. Several community leaders have viewpoints regarding the planning and coordination activities:

- “Teamwork is really key. There’s a lot of different players around the table; just getting everyone of the same team, with the same message.”
- “Being a physician I think that one of the institutions that has been so underused is healthcare. Pediatricians and the family practice doctors, the ones that see the children and see them grow up, have a golden opportunity. The child perceives a physician totally different than they perceive a parent. When a physician tells them something they listen in a much different manner and we’ve so underutilized that in the healthcare profession.”
- “Parent education has to be a big part of this. We have to get parents to understand that this is a big deal.”

Other needs within the school and community settings are central for better addressing teen alcohol issues. One is that it is vital to be as honest and forthcoming as possible in **identifying what would be locally appropriate** “for *this* community at *this* point in time.” The

strategies for one community may or may not be appropriate for another community. What is important is to know the community, and to understand as best as possible what is affecting – and what could better affect – teens’ decisions about alcohol. Community leaders can use the two frameworks – for positive alcohol decisions, and for risky alcohol decisions – to guide their understanding, as some of the elements included may be more relevant or appropriate for one community compared with another community. The aim is to promote healthier and safer decisions among youth. Using the frameworks offered from this research, community and school leaders could benefit from planning and orchestrating meaningful strategies within a comprehensive framework.

Part of this approach means learning how to **“think outside the box.”** Using strategies that worked elsewhere may or may not be appropriate for a particular community. Similarly, using only strategies that are more of a “feel good” approach (such as brochures, T-Shirts, rallies) is not helpful; such approaches may include those that “have been done for years” with community leaders believing that they “just have to continue doing them.” While these strategies are not necessarily “bad” or “wrong”, they should not be relied up. A fresh look at what to do, and how to do it, is needed. Based on the voices of teens heard throughout this research and summarized in Chapter 3, new strategies are essential for schools and communities. The increasingly frequent requests or mandates for ‘proven’ or ‘effective’ strategies, and ‘model programs’ or ‘promising programs’ are well intended, and essentially challenges, with good reason, the “feel good” strategies. What is needed in communities and schools, however, are strategies that are grounded in good theory and clear intentions. That is, necessary for schools and communities are strategies that have a clear purpose – community leaders should be able to specify, clearly and directly, what is intended as a direct or indirect result of implementing the strategy, event, curriculum, policy, program, etc. The theory would help guide the approach, so that a planner could reasonably conclude that implementing the specific approach has a likelihood of achieving the desired outcome. Simply adopting a curriculum, program, policy or event ‘out of the box’ won’t necessarily be helpful for a community. Community planners need to engage in a deliberate process of identifying the needs, specifying the desired outcomes, planning appropriate strategies, and engaging the necessary resources to accomplish this. “Thinking outside the box” is helpful in better meeting the needs of youth, and for achieving the ultimate aim of affecting teen decisions about drinking alcohol.

As part of these strategies, overwhelming needs were cited regarding how current **curricular approaches** address alcohol. Simply put, teens view the curriculum on alcohol as boring, preachy, and irrelevant to their needs. Some teens cited the materials used as outdated, and others noted the ultimate counter-productiveness of scare tactics. Typically, teens did not learn – at least through their coursework – about many of the immediate consequences associated with drinking alcohol by youth their age. While the understanding in this research of what teens do and do not know was gained, primarily, through focus groups, and described in Chapter 3, further detailed assessment of their knowledge, their understanding, and their applications of this for their lives would be helpful. In planning the curriculum, what is important is to have curricular approaches that are meaningful and relevant for the teens themselves, from the perspective of “their world.” This may include content that is directly relevant to them in their current life, as well as in the near (not distant) future. This also may include content that is presented in a manner that relates to their learning styles; relevant approaches such as Internet reviews, YouTube videos, Facebook content, and blogs can be used in constructive and relevant ways. Teens did acknowledge, in fact, that they did hear an emphasis on not drinking and driving; as cited earlier, this was found in focus groups as well as during the telephone polling. Of the various messages heard by teens, and understood by parents of teens, the dominant one was about the dangers of drinking and driving, as well as about ways of reducing its occurrence (such as using designated drivers).

Another need for this related to the school curriculum finding is that community leaders and experts remind themselves that community leaders should retain a **sense of hope**. The various observations and concerns highlighted throughout this research identify numerous challenges for addressing teen drinking, and about which community leaders may not feel particularly confident in addressing. When this challenge is coupled with the feeling of ‘not knowing which way to go’ or ‘not knowing what to do’, it is not unreasonable to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Instilling a sense of hope is both needed and reasonable. Hope is vital for community- and school-based efforts, because without some level of hope, a ‘why bother’ attitude would be reasonable. Even a modicum of hope is appropriate and needed; thus, having some ‘low-hanging fruit’ with achievable, short-term objectives is vital for reasonable community initiatives. Further, hope is, indeed, reasonable. Why? Because it is clear, through youth self-report, parent and youth interviews, and insights from community leaders, that youth are getting the message about not drinking and driving. As noted in Chapter 3, how this

translates to their actual behavior is a different question. What is important is that messages can and do get through to teens. This provides a reasonable argument for having hope regarding other messages. While achieving the receipt, understanding, and articulation of messages by teens would be a large challenge, it is also one that is also reasonable to have as an outcome.

Also heard from community leaders is the need for **quality information**. Specifically, community leaders need to know “where they can go” for valid information and resources. Not uncommon among community leaders was an expression of “not knowing what else to do” to better address teen drinking. Through the key informant interviews and community leader focus groups, it was clear that these individuals at the community level have a good sense of what is going on in the lives of the teens around them and with whom they work and come in contact. At the same time, these dedicated and well-intentioned individuals appear to be unclear about “where to go” for helpful, valid information. Those communities who have a “community coordinator” employed benefit from the fact that these individuals typically have a level of expertise not held by others, and they have affiliations (and sometimes funding) from national organizations or associations so they become “linked” to current research, strategies, and listservs with others in similar roles. Some of these individuals are tied into the Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) funding, others are community coalition leaders under the auspices of the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), and still others may be linked to funding from federal agencies (such as the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention) or state grants. The presence of these individuals can be helpful, as they often participate in national, state or regional conferences or training, receive newsletters and briefings, read listserv messages and newsletters, or more. Based on the funding source for these individuals (such as law enforcement agencies, prevention services, schools, treatment services, and the faith community), resources may be targeted in one direction or another. The point is that access to good, quality, balanced, and current information is a challenge for any community; communities with a designated coordinator typically have greater informational foundations. What is important is that these individuals have a broad perspective that extends beyond whatever limitations or constraints may exist due to their administrative location.

Some other school and community needs deserve comment. One heard from numerous sources (teens, parents, community leaders, and experts) is for **mentors**. Some teens end up relying on older siblings as mentors. This can work out well but, given that older siblings are often a source of alcohol for underage drinkers, the dangers are readily apparent too. Some other

teens mentioned an adult outside the direct “chain of command” in their family, such as an uncle, as someone who did not hold disciplinary power over them and could be trusted as a source of advice and perspective. This identified need is for trusted adults with whom teens can talk about alcohol as well as about other life issues. Community leaders may consider, for example, some elements in the frameworks for youth decisions, and ways in which responsible adults can mentor teens regarding them. These may be issues surrounding expectations, peer influences, coping skills, reflection, goal setting and more. One community leader put it this way: “Every group has a person of influence. If we have mentors that can try to reach that person that influences the group and give them another choice, then some will follow.”

Another need identified has to do with the need for **having things to do**; one of the reasons cited by teens regarding why they or their friends drink is the proverbial “there’s nothing to do around here”; this was the case in rural areas where youth were interviewed, as well as metropolitan areas where youth were interviewed. Drinking in rural areas may be particularly dangerous since it is, given the distances between people’s homes, more likely to be associated with driving. Complaints about a lack of things to do may be “translated” into a view that the community doesn’t have things going on that are fun to the teens, and it may also mean that the teens didn’t help to plan what is going on. As one community leader said, “I think you have to find something else to give them. Anytime someone has something they’re deriving gratification from, in order to take it away, you have to give them something just as meaningful.” This means that, to reduce alcohol abuse by teens, you have to provide “alternative activities” that the teens find rewarding, enjoyable, and, ultimately, meeting the same inner needs as provided by the partying; an example would be to find ways that teens can meet their needs, whether for socializing, escaping, or dancing.

A final need with communities and schools goes back to the early identified needs. Specifically, communities and schools need leadership to develop the plans, assess the needs, implement the efforts, and identify the resources. This leadership could be orchestrated by an individual (e.g., a community coordinator such as those available in some communities). Most important, however, is having a coordinating body, leadership group, steering committee, task force, or other broad-based community group that can bring different perspectives and resources to the table. This group can have, as part of its mission, the identification of ways of continuing to nurture and support itself, so that it maintains the perspective of a long-term view. This long-

term orientation is essential to have the patience, perseverance, and prudence to initiate and sustain meaningful strategies for the community.

e) Framework for Community Action

Helpful in summarizing the community foundation for alcohol abuse prevention efforts is an overall Framework for Community Action. This offers a perspective that can aid community leaders in thinking about a comprehensive, broad-based, and inclusive planning process. With a framework such as this, “one-shot” or “quick-fix” approaches are clearly restricted. What this type of matrix suggests is that a variety of individuals and groups should be involved in the planning and implementation of teen drinking prevention strategies. This also suggests that a variety of approaches (not just education or awareness or policy) are valuable for inclusion. Most critical with this framework, however, is that each of the individuals or groups can be involved in doing each of the types of strategy. That is, law enforcement is not relegated in its approach to just enforcing the law, and schools are not relegated to just having classroom discussions.

Community program planners can extend this framework by adding additional groups (more roles), adding additional types of effort (more columns), and incorporating additional specific strategies. Thus, in addition to the five groups listed, it may be appropriate in a community to have local colleges or universities involved; it may also be appropriate to have a local service club or organization engaged. Similarly, a community may determine that they want to emphasize more awareness programs, or they may suggest that specific resources for entertainment or recreation are available for their teens. These could easily be added to this matrix, thus making it applicable to the local community and its planners.

FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

		TYPE OF EFFORT			
		Policy	Program	Training	Environment
GROUP OR ORGANIZATION	Schools	Consistently implemented rules and regulations Standards for school employees and visitors	Curriculum that is meaningful Clubs and organizations After school activities	Personnel preparation with identification and referral	School bonding and community-building activities Recognition for positive contributions
	Law Enforcement	Laws and policies throughout the community Enforcement of laws	Sponsor local events Participate in community activities	Mentoring youth	Community resource officers in school and community settings
	Health Services	Services available for teens	Public awareness materials Community forum and dialog	How to identify problematic use How to be supportive	Promote as trusted source Spokespersons
	Community	Standards and guidelines	Community forum and dialog	Prepare adults and community leaders to understand today's youth needs Group meeting behavior	Volunteering for community events Public awareness activities
	Youth-Serving Organizations	Engage in establishing community policies	Community-wide activities	Mentoring opportunities for older teens	Provide awards for positive contributions

h) Recommendations on Communities and Schools

- 1. Community leaders should prepare a community-wide strategy that engages all partners through a systems approach, and incorporates appropriate benchmarks to monitor progress.** Community leaders and experts cited concerns with the implementation of broad-based efforts. Some community leaders cited the challenges with getting various groups involved in their planning, and experts noted the need to monitor progress. As highlighted in Chapter 5, having a long-term strategic plan with shorter-range objectives is helpful in addressing teen alcohol issues. Focusing only on the laws or policies is limited; strict zero tolerance policies intended to deter teen drinking can backfire and endanger teens' lives in some situations (for example, when a teen needs emergency medical care, but calling for it would bring strong legal sanctions). This requires an overall strategic plan, needs assessments, ongoing monitoring, and periodic evaluation activities. It also requires thinking about the range of groups and individuals that can be involved with the planning as well as the implementation of community strategies; some may be involved as spokespersons, some may be planners, some may serve as mentors, and some may write articles. What is important is to think about the various stakeholders involved with those aspects of the community that link with teens, and to identify ways in which they could be helpful in distributing the message to teens and intermediaries (such as parents, older siblings, teachers, and those in youth-serving organizations). The Framework for Community Action highlighted in this Chapter can be helpful in thinking about specific strategies that can be used within the context of types of effort as well as different groups or organizations.

- 2. Community leaders should seek heightened priority of teen alcohol issues and underlying causes, with increased visibility and attention.** According to many experts and community leaders, dealing with teens drinking is not a high priority. This is not to say that addressing teen alcohol issues is not important, but rather that it is not viewed as an urgent or central issue for schools or communities. Not only is it important to have an orchestrated effort to address teen alcohol issues, but it is also important that this receive the necessary resource assistance and publicity. The public awareness campaign surrounding problems associated with drinking and

driving had clear results, and teens and parents cite the message as being clear. Similarly, other messages regarding teens and their decisions about alcohol can be orchestrated and promoted. What will be helpful is to identify ways that many groups or organizations (including the school, but extending beyond that) can be involved in addressing alcohol issues both directly and indirectly. Incorporating the two frameworks on youth decisions introduced in Chapter 3 (Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions and Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions), attention to the more central or core issues can be included within existing strategies implemented by the schools and community groups.

- 3. Communities and schools should provide a range of positive outlets for youth involvement and engagement.** The youth cited a tremendous lack of things to do that they enjoyed or that engaged them. This gap in available resources and services was very strong among those participating in our groups, and community leaders echoed their understanding of this. What would be important is to promote a range of extracurricular activities, so that youth feel more connected and desirous of participating in these activities rather than hanging out and drinking alcohol, or going to a teen party and getting wasted. Communities need to ask what activities are available, or of interest, to teens that are as much fun as drinking. This recommendation can be particularly challenging during times of, and in locations with, limited financial resources. For example, one community reviewed in our study transformed a former vehicle repair location into a teen activity center; other communities may have vacant storefronts or facilities that could be transformed or used (even temporarily) for a range of youth-focused services. Other communities may have business or non-profit organizations that can provide in-kind resources, or help sponsor youth strategies. Schools should also be actively engaged in providing opportunities for teens' involvement in various activities and events. These can be social, cultural, or recreational, and can be offered in conjunction with other community groups or organizations. As part of implementing this recommendation, it is vital that teens are actively involved in the planning and implementation of these events, so they feel a sense of ownership and engagement; they can help identify ways to accomplish this recommendation, with the realistic challenge of having

limited resource availability. Further, these need to be reviewed quite regularly, as teen needs and interests can change quite regularly.

- 4. Community leaders should identify modes of access to alcohol used by youth and implement consistent standards and consequences.** It was clear, primarily from the youth, that they find it relatively easy to acquire alcohol. The teens reported numerous ways in which they can obtain alcohol, whether through stores, homes, or other means. What was clear was that they could obtain alcohol, even using sneaky or dishonest approaches. Sources included points of sale, home parties, ID cards, social hosting, and more. What is important is for communities to identify clearly these sources, and foreclose them where possible; these are important parts of a comprehensive community-based effort to address teen drinking. Just as it is important to address many of the core issues, it is also important to highlight many of the external factors, identified as the Contextual Factors. Thus, it may be less important how strict schools are in punishing teens who drink alcohol than that they are seen to enforce the rules consistently for all students regardless of the socio-economic class or athletic status of the teen caught violating the rules. We believe that the role of the “**loser**” offers opportunities for stigmatizing extreme teen drinking that have not been fully leveraged. Too often school discourse and disciplinary strategies play into the perception that drinkers are “cool” and “bad boys” and “bad girls” – perceptions that enable the recruitment of “**partiers.**”
- 5. Engage various individuals and groups as communicators or sponsors of teen alcohol abuse prevention messages.** Teens and parents routinely report that their churches or faith communities have ignored the teen drinking issue. Teens also found it hard to identify many adults who could serve as role models for them. Further, some community leaders had an ‘aha moment’ during our discussions about ways in which they might be able to be of assistance with this issue; for example, a pediatrician or family practitioner could incorporate messages about healthy alcohol decisions with teens, parents, and older siblings. It would be helpful for various community groups, including the faith community, businesses, service organizations, local governments, and others to get more involved in outreach to teens about alcohol

- use. Some could include appropriate messages in materials or websites already produced; others could serve as spokespersons on a regular or as-needed basis.
- 6. Establish opportunities for dialog about teen drinking.** Learned through the discussions with parents and teens are that few opportunities exist to talk about dilemmas or concerns about teen drinking. While this recommendation overlaps with others, it is worth highlighting so that community leaders and schools are fully cognizant of the importance of having ongoing dialog, and thus attention, to various factors around teen alcohol cultures. These opportunities could be live, in-person events (such as a discussion about a recent event or controversy, or a forum on local issue). They could also be done in an electronic manner (e.g., blog, webinar, on-line forum). Complementing these activities or services could be media coverage of their presence, further enhancing the attention given to teens and alcohol. Whether done at the community level or done more regionally or nationally, these opportunities could be among parents alone, among teens alone, with teens and parents together, with community leaders, and with other key stakeholders. What is important is having the opportunity to voice ideas, concerns, suggestions, contradictions, issues, and more.
- 7. Schools should provide curriculum material or extra-curricular programming on alcohol that is honest, provocative, engaging.** Due to the finding that many teens reported boring, outdated, and often unbelievable alcohol information in the school curriculum, it is vital that schools take a close look at how alcohol is addressed. Typically offered in health classes, and often tied into teens' curricula on driving preparation, the content and style would benefit from careful review. Parents often believe that schools are doing more alcohol education than is actually the case. Schools should look for ways of building alcohol education into the curriculum in such a way that teens acquire factual information about what alcohol is, how it interacts with the human body, and how it affects judgment and decision-making; further, schools should identify ways to help teens apply this information in realistic situations they face. If such educational programs seem designed to scare teens through exaggeration, however, they will be less effective.

- 8. Incorporate content on alcohol and related issues in a range of courses offered in school.** Building upon several previous recommendations, this is highlighted because teens report limited attention to alcohol during the health course and/or driving curriculum where alcohol is covered; this is also based on the insight that teens do not have many individuals to whom they feel they can turn for good information on alcohol. To offer course content only in a single course, and only in an early year of high school, has limitations. While it can be advantageous to offer alcohol education early in the high school career, when transitions to this new school setting pose challenges and stressors, it can also be helpful to have additional education throughout the high school enrollment. One consideration is to have curriculum modules on alcohol available in courses in biology, history, social studies, literature, sociology, psychology, and other courses. A discussion of a character in a play or a novel who abuses alcohol, for example, may communicate important information to students without their even realizing that they are getting “alcohol education” – and doing alcohol education without putting a sign over it that says “this is alcohol education” is often the best way of doing it. Another consideration is to have some review or update sessions, perhaps in a seminar format, that provide students with the opportunity to have more current applications. Finally, attention to many of the other issues facing teens, found in the two frameworks on youth alcohol decisions, should be considered.
- 9. Host life skills development sessions for youth and parents.** Because many of the issues that contribute to risky alcohol decisions by teens (and similarly, those factors that contribute to positive alcohol decisions) are based on limited life skills, it is appropriate to identify specific or complementary strategies that help improve these. This involves addressing issues such as stress management, coping skills, assertiveness, reflection, time management, interpersonal communication, trust, and positive relationships. Further, our research suggests that the pressure to do well in an increasingly competitive economy is both a source of stress that can push teens to drink and a source of challenging career goals that can make students ambitious and disciplined enough to eschew alcohol. Educators, especially those in schools catering to teens from families with a high socio-economic status, need to be more aware of

this double-edged quality of the contemporary economy, help encourage students to be aware of it, and assist students with skills for coping with it.

10. Identify partnership opportunities. Throughout much of the narrative in this Final Report, the distinction between ‘schools’ and ‘communities’ has been made. We are fully aware that schools are part of the community, that many responsibilities and obligations are separate, and that others are overlapping. We are also aware that some individuals place a lot of responsibility on the schools (i.e., that is a ‘school responsibility’ and these youth are ‘students’ rather than having the youth be seen as ‘the community’s youth.’). Schools do have much responsibility, but for addressing the alcohol issue, it is more helpful to view this as a community responsibility, or a shared responsibility. Partnerships are reasonable and appropriate for some individuals (such as parents, community leaders, law enforcement personnel, faith community leaders) and for some groups (such as business, not-for-profit groups, government agencies, service organizations).

Summary

Communities have a large responsibility for orchestrating a range of strategies appropriate for their setting. While schools have often been highlighted as having the primary leadership role for these efforts, it is vital that community-based efforts be viewed within the larger context, illustrated by the Framework for Community Action. This highlights a starting point for reviewing the breadth of effort and range of groups or organizations that can be involved. All too often, it appears that alcohol information is relegated to a portion of one course early in high school; broader perspectives are essential for attempting meaningful results. Further, it is important to address more of the core issues facing teens, illustrated as the Teen’s World in the Frameworks for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions and Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions in Chapter 3. Having teens actively involved in the design and implementation of resources and services, including those available outside the classroom, is essential for any meaningful results.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Emanating from this research on teen alcohol cultures are numerous recommendations. Since the Final Report is designed for those with opportunities to incorporate strategic changes at the local, state and national levels, the recommendations offered are both grounded and practical in nature. These recommendations build upon the blending of our research and current professional literature. While any leadership group or individual may not view as practical the implementation of each recommendation, the entire cluster of recommendations can help in reviewing, refining, and redirecting strategies to address teen alcohol issues in a more substantive manner. Recommendations have been offered in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 as they relate to those audiences; overall and research-focused recommendations are offered in this chapter.

a) Overview

The various elements of this research serve as a strong foundation for a wide variety of recommendations. As noted at the outset of this Final Report, the research was designed to generate recommendations that would be helpful in reducing teen drinking. As specified in the project's design, the focus prior to any literature review or data collection was to prepare recommendations about the delivery of age-appropriate and key influencer messaging designed to reduce the cultural acceptance of underage drinking.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we explored both youth and parent perspectives on alcohol. Combining the insights gathered from Chapter 5 with the youth perspectives found in Chapter 3, we achieved a greater understanding of influencers on youth decisions about whether or not to drink alcohol. Specifically, we put forward two frameworks in Chapter 3 – one about risky alcohol decisions and the other about positive alcohol decisions. In Chapter 5, we highlighted community-based strategies, including those focused on the school setting; we introduced there a Framework for Community Action.

For each of these three focused chapters (teens, parents, and community), we included recommendations appropriate for that audience or setting. Clearly, overlap among these exists, as recommendations about teens could have a community and/or school focus, and recommendations dealing with parents or family members could be implemented in the community environment. These recommendations in the previous chapters are prepared in ways that are relevant for community leaders; in addition, each of these recommendations can be useful for those at the state or national level. This chapter focuses on other recommendations appropriate for addressing the teen alcohol cultures. Here, we outline numerous

recommendations within an overall structure that can be easily useful for leaders at the local level, as well as for those at the state or national level. The recommendations emerge specifically from the research, and represent our collective synthesis of what we learned in this process. As highlighted in the methodology section in Chapter 1, the research process was formative in nature, as insights from one phase helped shape questions with another phase³¹; we did not start with a fixed agenda, nor did we seek out every nuance. Rather, we sought to better understand the teens' and parents' worlds surrounding alcohol; our questions addressed issues such as what messages they heard, what consequences might be associated with alcohol use, and what experiences teens and parents recounted regarding alcohol. The recommendations in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, as well as those to follow, are based on this fairly directed, yet open, line of inquiry with participants. The blend of public health and cultural anthropology as the foundation for this research thus provides some unique perspectives, both in terms of the processes used as well as the findings obtained. These recommendations were developed based on our research, not on preconceptions, and they were developed solely by the project staff; as noted at the onset of this Final Report, the research methodology, implementation, writing, findings, and recommendations are those of the project staff, and were prepared using the scientific research foundations deemed most appropriate by the project staff. These were prepared in an independent manner, and were not influenced directly or indirectly by the project funder, staff or their advisors.

While many of these recommendations are embedded within the previous chapters, and others identified specifically in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the overall recommendations provided in this chapter cut across specific audiences. Recommendations for future research are also provided. For all recommendations included in this Final Report, each one is prepared as a statement, and followed by a rationale emerging from our research and an explanation of its content and ways in which it might be addressed.

b) Overall Recommendations

- 1. Maintain a perspective that understanding youth alcohol decisions is very complex, based on both the Youth Alcohol Decision Frameworks.** The professional literature, as well as the findings emerging from our research, demonstrate the complexity of youth behavior, in general, and alcohol decisions, in particular. Community leaders and experts cited many challenges facing their work

with teens, with the typical acknowledgement that the necessary strategies were not simple or one-dimensional. Helpful for addressing teen alcohol cultures are the two youth frameworks introduced in Chapter 3: the Framework for Youth Risky Alcohol Decisions and the Framework for Youth Positive Alcohol Decisions. Each of these two frameworks provides a foundation for better understanding why some youth become problematically involved with alcohol, and others make healthier or more positive decisions. With each of these frameworks, it is important to review the broad context of the elements within each of the four categories. For the risky alcohol decisions, it is particularly important to look at the categories of “Underlying Causes” and “Intrinsic Factors”, as these appear to be overlooked or minimized with current prevention or intervention strategies. The opportunity to infuse these strategies into current approaches is an important consideration throughout community-based efforts (including schools) and family interactions (including parents and older siblings).

2. Engage key influencers of youth, particularly those who could be mentors.

Youth often said that they did not know of individuals to whom they could turn for guidance, advice, or adult modeling. Helpful in this regard would be parents, older siblings, other relatives such as uncles and aunts, medical personnel, law enforcement officials, religious mentors, school personnel, and others in the community. It will be helpful to identify and better prepare these individuals to serve as a positive resource and role model for teens. Further, these individuals who serve as community stakeholders can be engaged to serve as spokespersons and resource individuals for teens, as well as for their parents and older siblings.

3. Embrace affirming and fact-based approaches. Teens and parents cited concerns about current school-based curricula about alcohol, with teens reporting lack of belief in much of what was taught about alcohol. Teens also reported that they were not engaged in the learning process. Further, through the focus groups, it was clear that teens had a significant amount of misinformation or lack of information about alcohol and its effects. Thus, it will be helpful to identify approaches that communicate clear messages grounded in facts, as well as those that help address some of the underlying

factors that affect youths' decisions about alcohol. Based on the youth frameworks identified in Chapter 3, addressing the issues that are more 'central' or 'core' to their lives will allow more influence over their decision-making. These can be helpful for working with teens, with parents and older siblings, and with other stakeholders or intermediaries. Also important is that teens be actively involved in reviewing and testing messages and strategies, so that it is clear that these resonate well with them for the desired positive outcome.

- 4. Maintain a perspective that changing teen drinking cultures is attainable and appropriate.** Much in the literature review and our research appears to be overwhelming and presents the problem of teen drinking as enormously challenging. Further, much of the current professional literature has a negative focus, emphasizing problems associated with teen alcohol use. Even with this context, community leaders affirmed that it is vital that a positive, yet realistic, approach be maintained. Chapter 5 identified the need for reasonable, achievable objectives or milestones within the context of overall, long-term goals. Some sense of hope must accompany the patience and perseverance necessary to help modify teens' drinking cultures. The understanding gained through much of this research can be helpful in moving forward for reasonable and appropriate action steps.

c) Research Recommendations

- 5. Facilitate additional qualitative research on teen alcohol cultures by a range of individuals/groups.** Qualitative research has an important contribution to make to the understanding of the dynamics of teen drinking, yet relatively little qualitative research has been undertaken on this topic. This study has demonstrated the importance of qualitative research. Qualitative approaches complement quantitative methods, and certain kinds of information can only be elicited qualitatively. We recommend further investment in qualitative research so that the kind of information generated by more quantitative approaches – statistical measure of the incidence of drinking and its social correlates – can be complemented by research that seeks the meaning of drinking for teens and those around them. Such research may include academic papers, student projects, dissertations or theses, and government/non-

- governmental organization studies. These can be helpful in sharing ‘lessons learned’ on research design, implementation protocols, community organizing, and human subjects review process. While this does not negate the current professional literature, we view this approach as a significant contribution that could be made.
- 6. Review community-based efforts, organizing strategies, monitoring approaches.** Based on the community organizations and leaders with whom we worked, it appeared that they were not aware of collective databases or summaries of strategies used by other communities to get organized, to implement, and to monitor the progress of their approaches. Thus, it would be helpful to compile strategies that community leaders (including schools) use or have used to address teen alcohol issues, including their “lessons learned” and how they addressed challenges they encountered. Research on how these strategies is implemented, and how they are documented regarding their effectiveness, would be helpful. This sharing of strategies, considerations, challenges, resources, staffing and more can be helpful for other communities.
 - 7. Examine curricular materials and methods.** The major challenges noted with the school-based coursework on alcohol issues calls for much more innovative and engaging strategies, including textbooks, resources, and materials. Research would be helpful to identify what is currently being done and how these are evaluated from both outcome and process perspectives. Further, research would be helpful for documenting more effective strategies for the curriculum that would have the desired results both in the classroom setting and in the real world setting of teens. In addition, research on ways of preparing instructors and school personnel for effective implementation of the course materials would be beneficial.
 - 8. Examine messages youth hear on drinking alcohol.** Research about the messages heard by youth, by a variety of sources, would be helpful. As with the previous recommendation, this may be analyzed based on a range of demographic factors, as, for example, boys may hear a message differently from how girls hear that same

message. This would address various sources, such as parents, siblings, friends, acquaintances, teachers, other school personnel, community leaders, law enforcement, advertisements, other media sources, and “society in general.” Particularly helpful in this recommendation would be to incorporate an experimental design with stimuli, such as sample messages from various sources.

9. Explore the role of athletics, service activities, and other extracurricular activities in youth decisions about alcohol. Teens’ involvement in these activities is often viewed as a protective factor regarding teens’ consumption of alcohol, though it may be the case that certain kinds of athletic activities are more likely to be associated with drinking than others. However, we did not find clearly summarized results about the situations or conditions under which involvement in these activities is or is not helpful in helping teens make positive alcohol decisions. It would be helpful to research further the efficacy of these extracurricular activities, to better understand ways in which school and community resources such as these can be used. It would be helpful to gain a deeper understanding of how these are viewed, access to these services, their relative influence, and how the range of demographic factors affects their impact.

10. Research in more detail the four categories of teen alcohol behavior. Our research revealed four teen drinking roles, including abstainers, moderate drinkers, partiers, and losers. It would be helpful to know how youth, parents, older youth, community leaders and experts view these categories, if they are aware of them. Further, it would be interesting to know how fluid these categories are; that is, how much do teens move from one category to another, and how often does this happen? Finally, it will be very important to learn about the group of teens who are abstainers – what contributes to this decision, what factors are involved in making a teen an abstainer on a permanent basis or temporarily.

11. Better understand the role of and opportunities with older siblings in youth decisions. Our research suggests that older siblings have a tremendous influence on

teen alcohol decisions, and often their first experiences. Further research regarding specific ways in which older siblings currently affect, both positively and negatively, a teen's decisions about whether or not, and how, to drink alcohol would be helpful. An aim with this would be to identify ways in which older siblings could be engaged in the process of promoting healthier and safer decisions, ideally about non-use, with their younger brothers and sisters.

12. Conduct a detailed systems analysis of one or more communities regarding alcohol culture. We did not find specific in-depth research about individual communities regarding their teen alcohol culture. Our approach for this research was to become involved with a variety of individuals in groups in multiple communities, through focus groups and individual interviews. We did not conduct more detailed research on the variety of strategies used, community organizing efforts, and how the various individuals and groups viewed the teen alcohol culture. Research on this would include a more detailed and systematic analysis of what specific communities are doing to address alcohol issues among teens. This would include policies, education, training, awareness events, enforcement, consequences, and evaluation results. The intent would be to assess the nature and extent of various elements associated with what communities are doing to address teen drinking, and to see what results have been documented.

13. Gain more detailed understanding of youth knowledge about alcohol, its effects, and decision-making factors. Through our research, we learned that teens have many gaps in knowledge, as well as areas of misinformation. It would be helpful to explore this level of knowledge more extensively, with attention to the range of demographic variables that might affect this knowledge. Numerous knowledge components would be appropriate for examination, including alcohol's effects on judgment, sexual decision-making, overall decision-making, health, and the developing adolescent brain. Also it would be helpful to assess teens' knowledge about interaction effects with drugs, equivalency of alcoholic beverages, interaction with sleep, and linkages with academic and athletic performance.

14. Investigate the relationship between teen drinking and religious affiliation.

Some religious communities proscribe alcohol, while others tolerate it. It would be helpful to know whether there is a relationship between teen alcohol use/abuse and religious affiliation and whether “abstainers” are disproportionately likely to come from families of certain religious denominations. This could incorporate the role of older siblings and their alcohol use, as well as their religious affiliation. It would also be helpful to engage religious leaders in conversation about teen drinking, to discern the contribution they think they might make to addressing it.

15. Further investigate social hosting practices. Some parents discreetly allow their teens, and others, to consume alcohol in their homes on the assumption that they can better monitor their behavior this way. Some parents take away the teens’ car keys, but then leave them to their own devices, while others monitor their behavior more closely. We need to know how widespread social hosting is, how the parents who engage in social hosting think about this choice, whether social hosting is particularly prevalent in certain demographic communities, and what kinds of monitoring practices (if any) parents engage in while social hosting.**16. Examine consistency regarding alcohol issues within households.** Because it appears that many of the parents and teens interviewed through the telephone poll had different views of the various teen alcohol issues, it would be interesting to conduct a more focused, qualitative approach with teens and parents within the same families. This process would involve interviewing teens and parent and matching their responses to see how well parents know their own teens. How many parents know accurately whether or not their teen is drinking? For those whose teens drink, how many parents know the age at which their teens began drinking, the frequency with which they drink and the amount they drink? How many believe they are parents of “abstainers” when they are not, and how many believe they are parents of “moderate drinkers” when they are actually “abstainers”?

- 17. Better understand teens' use of alcohol with prescription drugs.** We are concerned by anecdotal evidence that teens are increasingly mixing alcohol with prescription drugs – either those they have been prescribed or those, found in the family medicine cabinet, they experiment with recreationally. It would be interesting to know more about how common this sort of mixing is and what teens know about the dangers of such practices.³²

Summary

The recommendations included in this chapter complement those found in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 that focused specifically on teens, their parents and families, and community and school settings. These recommendations highlight overall considerations for all dealing with teen alcohol issues, whether a community leader, a state or national policy maker, a nonprofit organization or agency, or a researcher. In addition to these overall recommendations, the need for additional research is highlighted, with specific, focused recommendations noted. One of the important contributions of this current research has been the focus on qualitative approaches; the role of focus groups, and individual discussions and interviews, with specific attention to teens and parents, has been most instrumental in providing rich data. This research is designed with an applied focus, and hopes that meaningful efforts to affect, in a positive way, teen alcohol cultures, can be achieved. Additional research that helps expand upon and elucidate these findings is needed to further the contribution and impact with promoting positive teen decisions about alcohol.

Endnotes

¹ Paschall, M.J., Grube, J.W., Flewelling, R.L., Ringwalt, C.L., and Biglan, A. (2007) "Alcohol outlet characteristics and alcohol sales to Youth: Results of alcohol purchases surveys in 45 Oregon Communities." *Prevention Science*, 8, 153-9.

² Elkins, I.J., McGue, M., Iacono, W.G. (2007), "Prospective effects of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and sex on adolescent substance use and abuse," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64, 1145-52

³ Hamburger, M.E., Leeb, R.T., and Swahn, M.H. (2008). "Childhood maltreatment and early alcohol use among high-risk adolescents." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 69, 291-5.

⁴ Collins, R.L., Ellickson, P.L., McCaffrey, D., and Hambarsoomians, K. (2007), "Early adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising and its relationship to underage drinking," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 40, 527-34; Ellickson, P.L., Collins, R.L., Hambarsoomians, K., and McCaffrey, D.F., (2005), "Does Alcohol advertising promote adolescent drinking? Results from a longitudinal assessment." *Addiction*, 100, 235-46.

⁵ Hollingworth, W., Ebel, B., McCarthy, C., Garrison, M., Christakis D. and Rivara, F. (2006), "Prevention of deaths from harmful drinking in the United States: The potential effects of tax increases and advertising bans on young drinkers." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 67, 300-8.

⁶ Kogan, S.M., Berkel, C., Chen, Y., Brody, G.H., and Murray, V.M. (2006), "Metro Status and African-American adolescents' risk for substance use." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38, 454-57.

⁷ Ramisetty-Mikler, S., Caetano, R., Goebert, D. and Nishimura, S. (2004), "Ethnic Variation in drinking, drug use and sexual behavior among adolescents in Hawaii." *Journal of School Health*, 74, 16-22.

⁸ Darling, N. (2005), "Participation in extracurricular activities and adolescent adjustment: Cross-sectional and longitudinal findings," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34, 493-505.

⁹ National Cancer Institute, Washington, D.C. Theory at a Glance: A Guide for Health Promotion Practice . www.cancer.gov/cancerinformation/theory-at-a-glance

¹⁰ The anthropologist on the team, Gusterson, comes from a tradition that foregrounds the intersection of culture and power and is interested in the application of literary theory to the interpretation of culture. Key texts that have influenced him are Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1989); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: the Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in el Barrio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹¹ For a more extended discussion of these methodological issues, see Hugh Gusterson, "Ethnographic Research," in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash(eds.) *A Pluralist Guide to Qualitative Methods in International Relations*. (New York: Palgrave, 2008, 115-42).

¹² "Cultural patterning" refers to the fact that teens' ways of talking about drinking are not idiosyncratic and personal. Teens who never met one another, in focus groups in different parts of the country, used the same language about drinking and had strikingly similar ways of narrating teen drinking.

¹³ We have in mind here the way the use or non-use of alcohol demonstrates to the wider peer group the academic seriousness, career ambition, or social-emotional style of a teen.

¹⁴ Sheldon Krinsky, *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

¹⁵ Hugh Gusterson, "Project Minerva Revisited," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, August 5, 2008, <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/columnists/hugh-gusterson/project-minerva-revisited>; Hugh Gusterson, "Unveiling Minerva," SSRC web publication, 2008, <http://essays.ssrc.org/minerva/2008/10/09/gusterson/>. In these articles Gusterson suggests that Pentagon funding may have the effect of biasing social science research on terrorism. He suggests that the Pentagon could assure more independent and objective social science research by contracting third party organizations such as the SSRC or the National Science Foundation to distribute their funding for them. The relationship between the Century Council and the alcohol industry follows exactly the model Gusterson advocates.

¹⁶ Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2009). *Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use, 1975-2008. Volume I: Secondary school students* (NIH Publication No. 09-7402).

¹⁷ The classic article on "binge drinking" is Henry Wechsler, "Health and Behavioral Consequences of Binge Drinking in College," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 272(21):1672-1676 (1994). See also Henry

Wechsler and Bernice Wuethrich, Dying to Drink: Confronting Binge Drinking on College Campuses (Rodale, 2003).

¹⁸ The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)* is prepared by the American Psychiatric Association., and offers standard definitions of a range of mental disorders. Widely used by physicians, therapists, social workers, counselors and other public health professionals, the DSM-IV provides the clinical foundation for a diagnosis of “dependent.” The diagnosis is based on the manifestation of three of seven criteria occurring in the previous 12 months; these include tolerance, withdrawal, larger amounts than intended, desire to cut down or control, time spent, reduction of important activities, and continued use despite knowledge of physical or psychological problems. See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.) (DSM-IV). Washington, D.C.: APA.

¹⁹ We say this because the forms of alcohol teens claim have a naturally preferable taste are often more bitter, and are frequently disliked by teens the first time they are used. Also, given that teens in Europe drink more wine, it is hard to believe that there is a natural teen aversion to wine. In the comments we heard from teens, a symbolic taste judgment was translated into a question of physical taste.

²⁰ 36.9% of teens listed school as the toughest challenge in their lives. The next highest score was 21.8% for social challenges.

²¹ The discussion here is largely based on focus group data, but one result from the phone poll bears noting as well. When asked on a scale of 1 (“not important”) to 7 (“important”) “how important is it to be accepted by your peers?” the mean response was 4. In all, 52% of respondents answered either 4 or 5.

²² John Doris, Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991); and Philip Zimbardo, The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil (New York: Random House).

²³ Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2009). *Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use, 1975-2008. Volume I: Secondary school students* (NIH Publication No. 09-7402). Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 721 pp.

²⁴ It is commonly said in the media that teens and their parents are so busy that the family meal has gone the way of the phonograph, and that teens do not much eat with their parents today. We explored this in our phone poll. Asked how often they eat dinner with their family, 32% said 7 days a week on average, 14% said 6 days a week, 20.7% said 5 days a week, and 12.5% said 4 days a week. Thus, in our random poll, 79% said they ate dinner more often than not with their families. When we asked parents the same question, we got quite a similar response: 40% said their teen ate dinner with the family 7 days a week, 16.3% said 6 days a week, 18.2 said 5 days a week, and 8.95 said 4 days a week. Thus 83% of parents said their teens ate dinner with the family more often than not. An obvious bias should, however, be noted in our sample: we were calling people’s home numbers in the evening, and our sample thus doubtless overrepresents those who are home at that time and, therefore, would probably be more likely to eat with the family.

²⁵ It should be noted here that in the phone poll the teens were not asked about their own behavior but about others’: how often they thought others drank and why they thought they did so.

²⁶ For a discussion of this style of parenting and its grounding in the professional middle class, see Margaret K. Nelson, Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times (New York: NYU Press, 2010). The presumed connection between this and other styles of parenting and teen alcohol use is explored in, for example, Abar, C., Abar, B., & Turrisi, R. (2009). The impact of parental modeling and permissibility on alcohol use and experienced negative consequences in college. *Addictive Behaviors*, 34, 542-547. For a National Public radio report on this study that emphasized its prescriptive implications, go to <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127222042>

²⁷ If so, this would be an interesting parental analogue to the perception we found common among teens, that the legal consequences of being caught drinking were likely to be bad, but that only other teens were likely to be caught.

²⁸ We note that several parents allowed their teens to drink when the family was in other countries. This was often described as a sort of modestly carnivalesque exception parents would make for their teens to add to the sense that a vacation was a special time-out-of-time.

²⁹ Daniela Deane, “Party Host Set for VA. Jail Term,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 2007.

³⁰ Responsible decision-making messages included topics such as ‘make good decisions’, ‘be responsible’, and ‘don’t give in to peer pressure.’

³¹ For example, after we completed several focus groups with middle school youth, we changed the focus of many of the questions asked. Also, insights gained from expert and key informant interviews helped refine some of our youth and parent focus groups.

³² A 2010 CDC study found that 1 in 5 teens have used prescription drugs without a prescription, with white teens the most likely to have done so and black teens the least likely. See <http://cdc.gov/media/pressrel/2010/r100603.htm#>