Sport Club Athletes: Cracking the Code to Work with this Unique Campus Sub-culture

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Learning Objectives:

• As a result of attending this session, participants will:
  • Learn about the breadth of individual and group alcohol behavior found among sport club athletes on one campus.
  • Examine the role of group cohesion, normative beliefs, and protective behaviors on the alcohol use and consequences of sport club athletes.
  • Consider the challenge of gaining access to recreational sport clubs faced by one university and how it may apply to their own campus.
University of North Carolina Wilmington

- Public 4-Year Institution in southeastern North Carolina
  - 5 miles from Atlantic Ocean

- Enrollment: 12,195 (10,989 undergraduate, 1,206 graduate)

- 58% female, 42% male

- 85% white, 5% African-American

- 3rd most competitive state institution for admissions after flagships (Chapel Hill & NC State)
Five year-long focus on gender as a mediator of and point of intervention for high-risk drinking.

- Freshmen
- Conduct interventions
- Fraternity and sororities
- Social norms marketing
- Freshmen athletes

Sport clubs were an untouched group (with the exception of some edu-punishment)

- 25 Sport Clubs: 12 co-ed and 13 single gender
Limited Research Base

- Two published studies on recreational sports and alcohol use in college:
  - Students who participated in rec. sports used alcohol at a greater frequency and “intensity” than non-athletes.
    - Irregardless of race, gender, and Greek affiliation (Ward & Gryczynski, 2007)
  - Intramural participants have more drinks per week, higher typical and peak B.A.C.s and more negative consequences.
    - Drinking games was a mediator (Grossbard et al., 2007)
Small group normative feedback: good match for sport clubs....we think.

- High-risk group, per the literature
- Cohesive social group = good match to small group normative interventions
  - Misperceptions of proximal group norms are more likely to influence drinking behavior (Lewis & Neighbors, 2006)
- Good opportunity to test co-ed versus single gender delivery
  - Same-sex perceived norms strongly associated with personal drinking behavior (Lewis & Neighbors, 2004)
  - Yet, proximal opposite gender norms effect have also been found (Thombs et al.)
Recruitment ...“Fail”

• Two semesters of incentives failed to recruit participants.
  • More incentives than offered to fraternities and sororities.

• Regrouped to examine the campus sport club culture around AOD
  • Web-based survey with team incentives
  • Individual interviews
  • Eventually...9 groups participated.
Survey data

- 327 surveys completed, 50% of eligible sport club athletes.
  - 74% of participants were women
  - 26% were men
- 50% of participants were in a co-ed sport club
  - 45% of participants were on a female sport club
  - 5% of participants were on a male sport club
- 23% had not had a drink in the last 30 days
  - Similar to our campus non-use rate.
Binge Drinking Rates: Gender

Source: UNCW Sport Club Survey Fall 2010, n = 327, UNCW campus-wide Alcohol and Drug Survey Fall 2010, n = 347.
Binge Drinking Rates: Class

Source: UNCW Sport Club Survey Fall 2010, n = 327, UNCW campus-wide Alcohol and Drug Survey Fall 2010, n = 347.
Marijuana Use Rates: Gender

Source: UNCW Sport Club Survey Fall 2010, n = 327, UNCW campus-wide Alcohol and Drug Survey Fall 2010, n = 347.
Prescription Drugs: Gender

Source: UNCW Sport Club Survey Fall 2010, n = 327, UNCW campus-wide Alcohol and Drug Survey Fall 2010, n = 347.
Group Use: When does your sport club drink together?

Participants could check all that apply.

- **27%** At parties
- **1.6%** After practice
- **4.2%** After competitions
- **4.5%** When we travel
- **70.7%** Never/rarely
% of Times Drinking with Club and Binge Drinking Rates

Of the last 10 times you drank alcohol, # with mostly or all other sport club members

- 0 Times: 46
- 1-3 Times: 62
- 4-6 Times: 92
- 7-10 Times: 76

Rate of Binge Drinking
Almost all spoke about joining for the love of the sport and competitive play.

- Winning and team success were important.

Confirmed different profiles of clubs.

- Strong social cohesion- team dinners, working out, playing video games, etc.
- Minimal social interaction outside of practice and play.
- Social interactions including alcohol among team members. Freshmen student introduced to alcohol culture of the club.
Normative Perceptions

- How does your sport club’s drinking compare to other sport clubs?
  - 64.4% Less
  - 33.7% About the Same
  - 1.9% More

- How does your sport club’s drinking compare to other UNCW students?
  - 63.2% Less
  - 32.9% About the Same
  - 3.9% More
Group Environment Questionnaire*

- Measures group cohesion
- Developed using college and adult athletes, further validated with college teams.
- Two overarching concepts:
  - Individual attraction to the team
  - Performance of the team as a unit
  - Task orientation: general orientation or motivation toward achieving the group’s objective.
  - Social orientation: general orientation or motivation toward developing and maintaining social relationships and activities within the group.

* Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 2002
Group Environment Questionnaire

- 4 domains of group cohesion:
  - Individual Attraction to the Group- Task
    - Individual’s feelings about his or her involvement in the group’s tasks.
    - “I am happy with my team’s level of desire to win.”
  - Individual Attraction to the Group- Social.
    - Individual’s feelings about his or her personal acceptance and social interactions with the group.
    - “For me, this team is one of the most important social groups to which I belong.”
Group Environment Questionnaire

- 4 domains of group cohesion:
  - **Group Integration-Task**
    - Individual’s feelings about similarity, closeness, and bonding within the team around the team’s task.
    - “Our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance.”
  - **Group Integration-Social**
    - Individual’s feelings about similarity, closeness, and bonding within the team around the team as a social unit.
    - “Our team would like to spend time together in the off-season.”
Female students were significantly higher on:
- Individual Attraction to the Group - Social
- Higher on the other 3 scales, not significant

Significant difference by class year on:
- Group Integration-Task (between sophomore and juniors)

Noticeably higher on task orientation than the teams that the scale was developed on and intercollegiate athletes. (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 2002; Li & Harmer, 1996)
GEQ & Binge Drinking

- High-risk Drinking (Binge Drinking)
  - Individual Attraction to the Group- Social
  - Group Integration- Task
  - Group Integration- Social

- There was a significant difference between students who did not binge drink or binge drank only once in the last two weeks and students who were frequent binge drinkers (3-5 binges)
- Inverse Relationship: Higher the GEQ score, lower the rate of binge drinking.
GEQ & Days Drinking per Month

- Relationship between Individual Attraction to the Group-Social and Days Drinking Per Month.
Small Group Social Norms with Sport Clubs
Delivery considerations

• Confidentiality
• Facilitator: Professional v. Peer Educator
• Flexibility!
• Information about clickers: www.turningtechnologies.com
• Content adapted from VCU’s Team Success presentation at www.yourstrategy.org
In this presentation, we’re going to be looking at perceptions about alcohol and how your team really feels and behaves.

We’re also going to give you some time to chat about your team success and think about what might benefit your team.
Confidentiality –

What is said here, stays here.
How do you protect yourself?

1. I *always* eat a full meal before drinking.
2. I *usually* eat a full meal before drinking.
3. I *rarely* eat a full meal before drinking.
4. I *never* eat a full meal before drinking.
How does food help?

- Nothing “absorbs” the alcohol – it stays in your stomach

- Food gives your body fuel to process alcohol

- Protein stays in your stomach longer and helps to slow down digestion of alcohol

- Food reduces your risk of vomiting, blackouts, and alcohol poisoning
How important is team success to you?

1. A little
2. Moderately
3. Very
4. One of the most important things in my life right now

- A little: 20%
- Moderately: 20%
- Very: 60%
- One of the most important things in my life right now: 0%
Some behaviors are more likely to lead to negative consequences than others.

“Healthy” drinkers make decisions that involve lower risk.

What could increase my risk?

What could decrease my risk?

What are the risks for my team?
How risky is…

drinking after practice or working out?

1. Low risk
2. Moderate risk
3. High risk
Alcohol & Athletic Performance

• Alcohol & nutrition
  • Alcohol: digested as sugar, turned into fatty acids
    • Body digests fatty acids instead of building muscle
    • Result is lower energy levels and decreased endurance
  • impairs absorption of thiamin, B12, folic acid, and zinc

• Alcohol & muscles
  • protein synthesis is impaired after drinking
  • Slows down muscle development and recovery

• Alcohol interrupts sleep
  • impacts memory and ability to concentrate
How risky is playing beer pong against a group of guys / as a team?

1. Low risk
2. Moderate risk
3. High risk

- Low risk: 33%
- Moderate risk: 34%
- High risk: 34%
Is it ok to come to practice hung over?

1. No problem
2. Maybe, it depends
3. Definitely not ok
Is it ok to come to a meet/game/match hung over?

1. No problem
2. Maybe, it depends
3. Definitely not ok

33% 33% 33%
How risky is...

drinking while on a trip with your team?

1. Low risk
2. Moderate risk
3. High risk
Could the alcohol or drug use of some people hurt my team?

1. Definitely
2. Maybe
3. Probably not
Calculated risks
Small Group Social Norms Feedback

• No overall change in sport club binge drinking rate.

• Overall, there were significant reductions pre-intervention to 30-day post-test in:
  • Playing drinking games
  • Choosing not to drink (protective strategy)

• In addition, at the group level:
  • Reduction in vomiting (2 female groups)
  • Reduction in memory loss (1 female group)
Conclusions

• Sport Club cultures vary widely.
  • Some may be high-risk drinking sub-cultures.
  • Others may serve a protective function.

• Sport Clubs appeared to be protective for men in co-ed groups.
  • Co-ed versus single-gender may explain findings that contradicted the literature.
References