

All may not be as it seems: College students, alcohol and sex

August 25 2010

College students are less likely to let their female friends engage in risky sexual behavior after a night of drinking alcohol. Recent findings in the journal *Communication Education* examine how and why college students protect their friends who have been heavily drinking.

Three quarters of the study's participants reported that they would not take risks when it comes to making sure a female friend is safe while under the influence of alcohol. Participants said they would persuade a female friend not to go home with a new male acquaintance or that they would make sure she got home safely.

The participants reported using three distinct [communication](#) strategies to prevent their female friends from going home with strangers after a night of [drinking alcohol](#). They include:

- Highlight the regret associated with that behavior. Participants said they would remind their friends about the negative health and social consequences associated with going home with someone. These include getting pregnant, developing a bad reputation, and regretting their decision in the morning.
- Use trickery or deception. Students hold the belief that drunken friends can be easily distracted or exploited. To remove their friends from a risky situation, the participants said they would trick their friends by taking them to get food, or putting them

into a cab to go home, instead of going to the male acquaintance's place.

- Direct confrontation. To protect their friends from dangerous situations, the study participants said they would directly confront their friends. This includes specifically telling their friends that they need to leave, or physically removing them from the situation.

"Our research suggests that the claim that college students routinely engage in [risky sexual behavior](#) while intoxicated may be exaggerated," said Linda C. Lederman, a professor of communication at Arizona State University, one of the study authors.

Relational closeness or how well the participants know both their friends and male acquaintance plays a significant role in the students' decisions. [College students](#) value their friendships. The study participants reported that they are more likely to step in and protect a friend during a risky situation. However, the participants appeared to be more willing to let their friends go home with a male acquaintance if both they and their friends knew him.

"Our study suggests friends often try to protect friends. The interpersonal and persuasive skills they use to do this include many of the same skills they learn in their communication courses," said Lisa Menegatos, lead author of the study and an ASU graduate student. "The classroom can be a valuable place for students to discuss health issues and develop communication skills that are relevant to their lives outside the classroom."

In-class activities can help students develop the necessary communication competencies to help them better handle situations involving their friends, drinking and sex, and other significant health

issues.

Using a simulation that places students in a risky situation, researchers provided a context for when and how decisions are made. This creates a safe place for students to better understand the role of communication that is needed during complex situations.

Lederman was a member of the research team that examined student responses from a scenario-based simulation of alcohol-related decision-making, to better understand how students make decisions in risky situations. Using immediate response technology (electronic clickers), participating students selected answers about what they would do in a scenario where they are at a party with their friend "Jane," who has been drinking and is invited to go home with a guy she meets at the party. No hypotheses were tested during the study, which provided observational data and interpretations.

The study was conducted by Menegatos, a doctoral student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University; professor Lederman, who is the dean of social sciences in the College of Liberal Arts at Arizona State University and the executive director of ASU's Institute for Social Science; and Aaron Hess, assistant professor at Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne.

More information: This research is reported in "Friends Don't Let Jane Hook Up Drunk: A Qualitative Analysis of Participation in a Simulation of College Drinking-Related Decisions," which appears in *Communication Education*, Volume 59, a journal of the National Communication Association.

Provided by Arizona State University

Citation: All may not be as it seems: College students, alcohol and sex (2010, August 25)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-college-students-alcohol-sex.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.