Editor’s Note

This Working Paper includes three perspectives on the social norms approach, one from a student (Greg Joiner), a second from a practitioner (Koreen Johannessen), and a third from a researcher (Brad Smith). They were initially published by the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) on their website (www.ICAP.org), which hosts a regular feature with “invited opinions” on current issues in the alcohol field. For the interested reader, a statement of ICAP’s mission is provided below. The Report on Social Norms is extremely grateful to ICAP for allowing it to reprint these pieces here. To complement these three perspectives we have added an overview of the specific social norms campaign that is described in the student paper, and a response (by this Editor) to concerns brought up in the research paper. (Note: The ICAP papers have been edited slightly to improve readability.)

The ICAP invited opinion by student Greg Joiner is possibly the first published report of a student’s experience with a social norms campaign. It reminds us that we must not neglect the experiences and perspectives of our students as we try to document the effectiveness of our interventions. Although the social norms approach is, by definition, accountable to students (who are involved in the design and evaluation of campaigns and their messages) we have rarely taken the time to solicit their perspectives in writing and in case study narratives. With the development of rigorous qualitative research and narrative methodologies this is now possible and should become standard practice in the field.

The first of the two pieces added to supplement the ICAP Invited Opinions is by Jennifer Baurele, the director of the University of Virginia’s social norms intervention. In it she provides an overview of the campaign that Greg has described from his perspective as a student. In the second, I have written a response to Brad Smith’s “cautious” evaluation of the research on social norms to provide a different perspective and conclusion about the research. I have used the word “cautious” to describe Brad’s invited opinion because he had been careful to look at the social norms literature from his perspective as a researcher committed to scientific proof and rigorous experimental design. As such, he is conscious of ways in which social norms research may be lacking. While I agree with Brad that the cumulative research literature on social norms does not yet meet the “scientific gold standard” that he articulates, I offer an alternative perspective incorporating practitioner’s needs, suggesting a both/and conclusion that augments Brad’s call for more research with the need for continued careful implementation of the model.

If you have any thoughts about these invited opinions or perspectives that you would like to share or have considered for a future issue, please send them to me.

Sincerely,

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“The International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) is a not-for-profit organization funded by 101 major international producers of beverage alcohol. The mission of ICAP is to reduce the abuse of alcohol worldwide and to promote understanding of the role of alcohol in society. ICAP is actively involved in building partnerships and encouraging dialogue between government, the beverage alcohol industry, research, the public health community and others involved in alcohol policy.”
T he first day in college is a milestone in many people’s lives. Mine was no different. With so many anxieties and fears facing me on my first day, safe drinking habits were lost in the shuffle. The buzz on the hall was of all the crazy fraternity parties planned for that night and of how drunk “everyone” was going to get. Should I go? I retreated from the chaos of the hall to the bathroom. Then I saw it on the back of a bathroom stall door, “2 out of 3 UVA students have 0-4 drinks per week.” Maybe not everyone is going to get “trashed” tonight.

The quote I read was from an issue of the humorously titled Stall Seat Journal, a monthly poster series that spreads the social norms message to first-years at the University of Virginia (UVA). That was my and many people’s first exposure to social norms marketing. It is something that I have learned to believe because I have seen it work. My name is Gregory Joiner and I am a third-year intern in the social norms office at UVA. I would like to discuss briefly my views of social norms marketing as well as how I think it has been an effective alcohol-education tool at UVA.

For many years, UVA had held the reputation of a “party school”—a reputation that it has tried hard to overcome with its high academic standards. However, despite the University’s growth and success, some of its students still party very hard. As a former Resident Assistant and 3-year University Housing resident, I’ve seen that excessive drinking is definitely a serious problem facing UVA students. College is a unique experience and provides many once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Unfortunately, there are students who choose not to envelope themselves in academia but rather in gratuitous partying in which alcohol plays a central role. One former resident explained to me, “When else in my life can I get wasted every single night?” Various degrees of this attitude seem to prevail throughout UVA and on college campuses everywhere. Alcohol abuse is definitely a problem and education about drinking is definitely necessary.

There are many approaches that are currently employed on college campuses across the country to deal with this problem. Two of the most prevalent are abstinence education and, most recently, social norms. I have always felt that any alcohol-abuse education program that solely teaches abstinence or attempts to create a dry campus is wholly inappropriate for two reasons. Firstly, given the high degree of alcohol availability and the lack of supervision and responsibility that comes with college life, underage consumption of alcohol is inevitable. If you only teach abstinence, when drinking does occur, you’ve equipped the student with no means of dealing with the consequences that can come from overconsumption. However, secondly, and more importantly, if you do not allow students to make informed decisions on their own, you run the risk of alienating them from your message entirely.

That is where the beauty of social norms comes into play. The social norms message is not preachy or demeaning. It treats its audience like mature adults faced with a decision: How much, if at all, should I drink?

Rather than use the extreme scare tactics often employed by many education programs, social norms simply gives students the facts about their peers’ drinking habits. I feel that this makes it a far superior message to traditional alcohol abuse education. It encourages students to think and to decide for themselves what they want to do. People like to be empowered, not lectured.

Proponents of social norms marketing can make the same theoretical argument that I made above and can even produce statistics to validate the success of social norms. It is a tried and tested method that has found success at college campuses all over the country. However, as the year went on, something remarkable began to happen. On the weekend when guys would stop by one another’s rooms to see what each other was doing, more and more guys were staying in and opting not to drink. Frequently, you would hear the abstainer explain to his friend, "Dude, not everyone goes out and drinks every night." Many times, the friend would pause, think for a bit, and then stay in too. That was the norming message, and it was actually sinking in. The same guys who were partying almost every night earlier in the year were now staying home.”
The University of Virginia's Social Norms Marketing Campaign

This article provides an overview of the University of Virginia’s (UVA) social norms marketing campaign that was described by Greg Joiner from his perspective as a student. Initiated in 1999 (prior to Greg’s arrival on campus) the Office of Health Promotion has been conducting a social norms marketing program to reduce high-risk drinking among first-year students.

Each spring the Health Promotion Survey is administered to a random sample of undergraduate students to measure alcohol-related knowledge, perception, attitudes and behaviors. During the spring of 2003, the anonymous surveys were distributed via email to 4,580 students. 2,345 were completed and collected, representing a 51% response rate. The high response rate may be due to the up front two-dollar bill, a token of appreciation, as well as the multiple forms of contacts to the participants. The results of this survey indicate that, like other students across the country, students at UVA overestimate the extent to which their peers drink.

Data from this survey is used to update a series of posters called the Stall Seat Journal. The eight posters in the series are rotated monthly in the bathroom stalls of the first-year residence halls. The posters provide students with accurate information about the drinking behaviors of other first-year students. This year a theme with local significance, the logo “Hoo Knew,” was introduced on the posters as a way of linking the first-year campaign with a wider campuswide campaign in 2002-2003 using the same logo.

The results of this survey are encouraging. A large majority, 98.7%, of first-year students in the sample, reported seeing the Stall Seat Journal bathroom poster at least once, with 96.7% seeing it twice or more. The second most common source of alcohol information for first-year students was the RA, with 30.8% of first-year students reporting having had a conversation about their drinking at least once with their RA. It is notable to mention that 16.6 % of first-years surveyed mentioned seeing a Peer Health Education Program at least once.

The negative consequences that UVA students experience from alcohol continue to trend in a positive direction. Thus, all 17 of the negative consequences declined in year 2003 from year 2002 for first-years. This is particularly important to note as decreasing the negative alcohol-related consequences experienced by UVA students is a major objective of the social norms marketing project. Misperceptions about drinking declined from 1999 to 2002 and are at the same level in 2003, with a gap of a median of three drinks per week difference between perception of consumption and actual student consumption of alcohol.

An emerging idea that our program has incorporated is the concept of “connectors” and “influencers.” This subject is discussed in Malcom Gladwell’s book The Tipping Point. A researcher at Kansas State University, Dr. Fred Newton, put this theory to work with a survey instrument that he developed. The instrument contains a number of questions regarding influential people on campus as well as people who tend to know a variety of people across the university. Dr. Newton gave permission for the instrument to be used at UVA this past fall in order to determine who our campus influencers are. A group of names were gathered from these surveys and the students were contacted and invited to participate in a series of focus groups held throughout the 2002-2003 school year. The idea is that by determining the connectors at UVA and their issues of importance, it may be possible to tailor UVA’s social norms marketing campaigns to affect a further decrease in alcohol consumption.

The continued success of the Social Norms Marketing program at UVA is in large part due to the close collaboration with our students. The collaborations take myriad forms, including focus groups, intercept interviews and internships. The students’ input into how to reach the various populations and which messages are salient has been invaluable. Greg Joiner’s experience provides one of many examples of how students are involved in our campaign and how they are affected by it.

The complete report of the survey methodology and results is available on the Health Promotion Web Page at http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/hp/. Click on “Social Norms Marketing” for more information.

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A Practitioner’s Perspective

I

typical United States college stu

t a heavy drinker? The answer is

no. Several national surveys docu

ment that heavy consumption is not typi

cal of the majority of students. According to

the Harvard School of Public Health

College Alcohol Study, the NIAAAA

Monitoring the Future Survey, the Core

Alcohol and Other Drug Survey and the

National College Health Assessment,

most college students are not heavy

drinkers—in fact the majority drink mod

erately or not at all.

There is, however, more to the story.

Although the majority are not problem

drinkers, a minority of students tend to
drink most of the alcohol consumed by

students in any given week. Most are

drinking some and some are drinking

way too much.

At the University of Arizona (UA),

only 22 percent of our students account

for close to 70 percent of all the alcohol

consumed in a week by undergraduates

(Campus Health Annual Health and

Wellness Survey 2002). Heavy drinkers

are more likely to experience serious con

sequences more often than their moderate
to light drinking counterparts—these

include driving under the influence, alco

hol poisoning, passing out and failing

grades. Students who drink heavily fre

quently report higher rates of trouble with

police and school authorities. Heavy

drinking students tend to attract both stu

dent and public attention. Public safety

and public health officials, parents, and

civic leaders are now challenging univer

sity administrators and public officials

across the country to “do something

about student drinking.”

Is student drinking a health and safety

problem in the United States? Yes. Is it

a problem for most students? No. Enter

social norms.

According to social norms theory,

public exposure to images and informa

tion that focus on college heavy drinking

has led to “misperceived norms—percep

tions that usually exaggerate what is typi

cal for other students…” “These percep

tions “lead(s) to increased drinking

behavior as students attempt to conform
to what they believe ‘everyone else’ is
doing. Therefore, effectively informing

students of actual drinking norms should

reduce student drinking” (Perkins and

Craig, 2002). In other words, if misper
ceptions about college drinking can cause

college students to drink more, then cor

recting misperceptions should encourage

them to drink less.

In the early 1990s, Northern Illinois

University (NIU) became one of the first
to use social marketing techniques to

broadcast the true drinking norms of NIU

students and correct misperceptions.

Michael Haines and his colleagues sur

veyed students using an in-class survey.

Information about the true norms for

alcohol use, infrequency of negative con

sequences as well as basic alcohol infor

mation was provided to students in ads

sponsored by Health Enhancement.

The information appeared in ads in the

school newspaper, on health posters, and

other NIU-specific health education mate

rials. Posted norms and other alcohol infor

mation was reinforced by student workers

who provided a small monetary incentive
to students who could correctly answer

questions about the norms when

approached in small groups in public

areas of campus.

Students were exposed to normative

messages challenging their beliefs about

peer alcohol use and other health related

topics, and messages were seen multiple
times in a single year. In 1995, UA

Campus Health conducted a similar cam

paign beginning with a random mail sur

vey and utilizing ads in the campus paper,

posters in residence halls, norms informa

tion at orientation presentations and in

health/wellness newsletters. The results at

both schools were dramatic. At NIU,

heavy and high risk drinking decreased

significantly—down 44% over a ten-year

period. At UA, heavy and high risk drink

ing decreased 29% decrease over a three

year period.

Social norms projects at Western

Washington University, the University of

Virginia, the University of Missouri at

Columbia, and the State University of

New York at New Paltz followed and

have also shown significant and encour

aging results. In 1996 the first computer

based social norms marketing campaign

was established at Hobart and William

Smith Colleges, resulting in a 44% reduc

tion in self-reported high-risk drinking

over a four-year period.

A number of other college cam

paigns are showing evidence of positive
change, delivering the norms through

small group interaction.

Although results are encouraging,
social norms is not without its critics.
The Dec. 9 issue of the New York Times

Magazine listed Social Norms Marketing

as “one of the 80 ideas that shook the

world (or at least jostled it a little) in

2001.” It went on to ask the question—

“What’s the best way to stop college stu

dents from drinking? Invoke their inner

lemmings.” This less than complimentary

statement may be at the heart of the issue

for many critics of social norms. The

Times Magazine article describes social

norms as the “science of persuading peo

tle to go along with the crowd”—a con

cept that feels almost anti-American. [Ed:

Volume 1. No. 2 (Winter 2002) of The

Report includes responses from four

experts to this article.]

I don’t believe that social norms

marketing forgets about the individual.

Social norms marketing is simply a stra

gedy that “turns up the volume” on accu

rate information about the behaviors, atti

dudes and beliefs of one’s peers. By

doing so social norms campaigns inform

students who don’t drink that they are not

alone, inform students who drink moder

ately that most of their peers also drink

moderately, and it provides those who

drink heavily and often with a bench

mark and sometimes a wake up call for

reassessing their own behavior.

Critics have voiced other concerns

about the social norms approach. Some

are suspicious because the alcohol indus

try supports social norms and others

because the strategy does not urge stu

dents to abstain. The social norms

approach appears to be alcohol friendly

and few can argue that making a case for

student moderation would be less com

pelling to potential funders than one that

highlights the tragic consequences of stu

dent alcohol abuse.

As it turns out, however, very few

programs have received support from the

alcohol industry. Almost all of the col

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Practitioner’s Perspective  
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I was surprised to find that a stall in a bathroom I had not yet visited already had the new issue. Puzzled, I asked around how it had gotten there. Finally, a student confessed, “Well, we really wanted the new issue and we noticed that the guys downstairs already had it, so we took one copy for our bathroom.” Surprisingly, this almost “cultish” following was not an isolated occurrence. One fraternity president asks for the monthly issue to place in their bathroom. Two friends of mine who are RAs at other schools both ask me to save them an issue for use in their own halls. The campaign is popular, well-received, and has a surprising following.

While the above two stories speak of the popularity of the marketing campaign, this final story speaks of the success of the social norms message itself. When my residents found out that I worked for the social norms office, they would often rib me by quoting various norming messages to me or the other guys living in our suite. However, as the year went on, something remarkable began to happen. On the weekend when guys would stop by one another’s rooms to see what each other was doing, more and more guys were staying in and opting not to drink. Frequently, you would hear the abstainer explain to his friend, “Dude, not everyone goes out and drinks every night.” Many times, the friend would pause, think for a bit, and then stay in too. That was the norming message, and it was actually sinking in. The same guys who were partying almost every night earlier in the year were now staying home. One resident later explained to me, “We all went out because we though that everyone else was doing it. We were afraid that if we did not do it [go out drinking] we would be missing out on so much. Now I realize just how much I was actually missing out on spending Thursday through Sunday drunk.”

Social norms works and is the ultimate alcohol education method for a college campus. Its straightforwardness and honesty are refreshing to most students who spend their days being told exactly what to think. Additionally, college students’ concentrated living arrangements and generally consistent schedules make them ripe to hear the norming message. This allows for a social norms marketing campaign to reach a very large audience very quickly at a rather inexpensive cost. Every day it amazes me just how many people know of our campaign and have adopted its message. The campaign’s successes have led me to dedicate an increasing amount of time to spreading the social norms message. I have become passionate about it because it works. From my unique experience as a student, resident advisor, and social norms intern, I would recommend the social norms approach to any college or university looking for an innovative and effective approach to substance abuse education.

Greg Joiner, ’03 University of Virginia

Greg is a 21-year-old senior at UVA majoring in systems engineering. This year, he was the Undergraduate Social Norms Intern. Greg is completing his undergraduate degree in three years. Greg can be contacted at: gbj4v@alumni.virginia.edu

Social Norms through a Student’s Eyes  
continued from page two

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References

Interventions based on Social Norming Theory (SNT) have become a popular approach to attempt to reduce problematic drinking among college students. SNT interventions typically involve messages about attitudes or behavior relevant to drinking. Examples include “77% of students at USC have 4 or fewer drinks per occasion” or “94% of students insist on having a sober driver.” These messages are typically conveyed in campus-wide campaigns using a variety of media (e.g., posters, newspaper ads, or screen savers). Another popular SNT method is group presentations by peers or opinion leaders.

According to a survey published in 2000, about 20% of institutions of higher education in the United States have adopted an intervention based on SNT. Considering that about 10 years ago only a handful of schools were using this approach, interventions based on SNT have enjoyed remarkable growth. This growth probably represents the most rapid dissemination of any intervention in the history of higher education and substance use prevention. Unfortunately, the efficacy of SNT interventions has not been established. Consequently, widespread dissemination of SNT-based interventions may be premature. As I will argue below, SNT interventions should be treated as experimental and there are some alternatives to SNT that should be offered to college students with the highest risk for alcohol-related problems.

Applications of SNT that target college student drinking are based on the premise that perceptions of peer drinking norms have a causal influence on an individual student’s own drinking. According to this theory, the higher the perceived level of drinking, the greater the risk for heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems. This theoretical position plus the common finding that students often grossly overestimate the extent to which their peers drink is the reason why so many social norms campaigns focus on correcting misperceptions of peer drinking norms.

Two major sources of evidence are commonly cited in support of the SNT treatment theory. One source is correlations between perceived drinking by peers and actual or self-reported drinking behavior. The other commonly cited source of evidence is field studies of social norming interventions that have shown that efforts to change perceptions of drinking norms have been associated with reductions in drinking and alcohol-related problems. Both of these sources enjoy some empirical support. However, as argued below, the available empirical support regarding the efficacy of SNT interventions is inconclusive.

Several studies have found a strong correlation between students’ perceptions of drinking by peers and students’ self-reported drinking. Indeed, among US college students it appears that one’s perception of drinking by peers is a better predictor of one’s self-reported drinking than the actual level of drinking by peers. However, these correlational findings do not prove causation. At least two other conditions must be met to conclude that changing perceptions of norms is an effective way to prevent or reduce high-risk drinking among college students. First, studies must show that interventions that produce changes in perceptions also produce changes in personal drinking. Second, the studies must rule out plausible alternative explanations to the effects of SNT intervention. I am not aware of any studies published in respected scientific journals that meet both of these conditions.

Proponents of social norming interventions often cite the results of several field studies in which an intervention was implemented on a single campus and subsequent surveys found reductions in norms and self-reported drinking. It is tempting to attribute these results to the social norming intervention, but there are many rival explanations that need to be addressed. For example, the social norming intervention might be confounded with sweeping changes in campus policy, such as increased enforcement and new parental notification policies.

Another methodological confound is that simply measuring student’s drinking behavior seems to result in reductions in self-reported drinking. Why this measurement effect occurs is currently unknown, but the practical implication is very clear. Without a comparison group it is impossible to tell if reductions in drinking from baseline to follow-up are due to the intervention or simply due to effects of repeated measurement. Unfortunately, in the field studies of SNT interventions there were no comparison groups, so it is unclear if the reported changes are due to SNT interventions, a measurement confound, or some other uncontrolled methodological factor.

Good experimental control with random assignment to treatment and control groups can lead to greater certainty about the cause of change in an experiment. Over the past few years there have been several published studies using randomized designs to test the efficacy of social norming interventions designed to reduce problematic drinking among college students. The findings of these studies have varied widely, but none have demonstrated conclusively that social norming interventions changed both perceived social norms and actual drinking. Indeed, a common finding in several of the more recent studies is that the social norming interventions were associated with changes in perceived norms but there was little or no change in self-reported drinking.

Critics of these randomized studies have commented, and I think quite correctly, that the interventions in these studies were either a) far too weak, or b) too poorly implemented to be considered a reasonable social norming intervention. Thus, one can argue that the randomized studies have not tested valid interventions (technically the randomized studies had poor experimental construct validity). In other words, the randomized studies have not tested the true potential of interventions based on SNT.

It is tempting to propose that if researchers simply used stronger or bet-
The research on social norms can be viewed simultaneously through a number of different lenses. One of these—the standard of controlled experimental design—is the benchmark standard of effectiveness in the scientific literature, with results published in peer-reviewed journals. I would agree with Dr. Smith that the efficacy of social norms has not been conclusively proven by these standards. However, waiting for conclusive proof would prevent us from utilizing almost all of the strategies that are currently employed in our field, including social norms. As noted in the report of the panel convened by the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism (NIAAA), very few interventions (specifically, some for individual abusers) have been scientifically validated in college populations. All of the other practices recommended by NIAAA for collegiate drug prevention (including social norms) have not met the scientific standards enumerated by Dr. Smith. Thus, while I agree with his conclusion that the ultimate standard of proof has not yet been reached for social norms and that more research is needed, I also believe that the field needs to continue disseminating the model in its current form.

An approach that has been recommended by the NIAAA and many other federal agencies is to identify "promising practices" that have strong provisional support from the literature, that are theoretically sound, and that can be implemented and evaluated while the research literature is evolving. Social norms was identified as a promising practice by the NIAAA panel and is one of its recommended strategies. They state:

"Initial results from programs adopting an intensive social norms approach are promising... Together these findings provide strong support for the potential impact of the social norms approach. Although any case report in this literature could be challenged methodologically, the results of each study are remarkably consistent. (2002, p. 13)"

I personally believe that the current research literature in support of social norms is stronger and more thorough than comparable research for any other secondary or tertiary prevention strategies currently in practice for colleges and universities. In addition, the individual approaches that have been scientifically validated (such as BASICS) all use normative feedback, which is the critical ingredient of the social norms approach. (See references for literature reviews.)

Dr. Smith’s concern that measuring student's drinking may cause changes in self-reporting is not relevant because the bias that he refers to only occurs when the same student takes multiple surveys over time, something not common in social norms efforts.

In summary, while more research on social norms is needed and "conclusive proof" may be lacking, the current state of knowledge strongly supports continued implementation of the approach. Dissemination that is careful and faithful to the model is both recommended and warranted.

"...the current research literature in support of social norms is stronger and more thorough than comparable research for any other secondary or tertiary prevention strategies currently in practice for colleges and universities."

Alan Berkowitz is a co-founder of the social norms approach and is the Editor of The Report on Social Norms. He can be reached at alan@ftlg.net.

References
ter-implemented social norming interventions they would get the desired reductions in drinking. However, these suggestions are speculative. For instance, the dosage effects of social norms interventions on college student drinking are unknown and may be nonexistent. Therefore, it is probably more important at this stage to engage in more rigorous research on social norming intervention as opposed to simply providing more strenuous interventions.

Another consideration is that implementing social norming interventions can be devilishly complex. Part of the appeal of SNT is the elegance of the theory with an apparently simple causal mechanism that should have wide applicability. However, my own experience with SNT has taught me that there must be at least a dozen dimensions along which social norming interventions can be varied. These dimensions include the salience of a message, relevance of a message, congruence of a message with other elements of the campaign, target audience, service delivery model, timing of the message, and quality of the delivery of the message. It could be the case that refinements along these dimensions are more important than the dosage or vigorousness of implementation. Again, however, this is an untested proposition worthy of future study. Such investigations should be sensitive to diversity issues and the challenges of SNT interventions on campuses with relatively heterogeneous versus homogeneous populations.

To summarize, there is no conclusive evidence either for or against the efficacy of social norming interventions designed to prevent problematic drinking among college students. Considering that current state of the literature, there are two important implications for further studies of SNT interventions.

First, for relatively low risk drinkers (which is the majority of college students on most campuses in the United States) no interventions have been proven to prevent or reduce high-risk drinking. Indeed, some common alternatives to SNT interventions, such as enumerating the risks of drinking (i.e., “scare tactics), have been shown to be ineffective or even counter productive. Therefore, mistakes of the past should be avoided and new interventions, such as SNT, should be treated as experimental. These new interventions should be carefully evaluated for effects on a campus-by-campus basis and for differential effects on campus subgroups.

Second, there are some empirically validated approaches for dealing with students with elevated risk for heavy drinking and alcohol-related problems. For example, one of the most consistently effective and efficient approaches for helping high-risk students is based on individualized feedback and brief motivational interviewing (BMI). When studying high-risk populations (e.g., college students who frequently engage in heavy episodic drinking), experimental approaches such as SNT should be compared with empirically supported approaches (e.g., BMI) to see if SNT has unique or interactive effects compared to the previously empirically supported treatment (e.g., BMI). Also, because it is unethical to withhold an effective treatment, it is probably inappropriate for studies with high-risk students to have a no treatment control group. All high-risk students should get an evidence-based treatment.

Conclusions about SNT interventions are premature. The theory is elegant, well supported by decades of high-quality research in social psychology laboratories, and the preliminary applied research is promising. Nevertheless, the effects of this approach are unproven for problems such as college student drinking, social justice, sexual assault, and tobacco use. Further investigation, rather than headlong dissemination, is the appropriate course of action.

Dr. Brad Smith is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Carolina. Over the past three years Dr. Smith and colleagues have received two grants from the U.S. Department of Education to support the development and evaluation of social norming interventions designed to reduce problematic drinking among college students. One program is a randomized study of a peer-lead, small-group intervention that targets first-year students. The other is a randomized study of 21st birthday cards. Dr. Smith can be reached at: smithb@gwm.sc.edu.