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Tequila at Sunrise: Spring Break Travel Motivations and Risk Behaviors of American Students in Acapulco, Mexico

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Abstract

Little research has been completed regarding spring break motivations and behaviors of American students in foreign destinations, specifically in Mexico. This paper looks at push and pull motivations in relation to drug and alcohol consumption and findings indicate greater drug and alcohol use among those who selected “party reputation” and “to go wild” as travel motivations. Binge drinking, sexual activity, and drug use among students on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico were also analyzed and compared to past findings within the United States. Results suggest that students are involved in heavy alcohol consumption and significant drug use. Additionally, high rates of sexual activity occur on spring break and results suggest low condom use, placing students at higher risks for the contraction of sexually transmitted infections.

Keywords

Spring Break, Push and Pull Motivations, Situational Dis-inhibition, Binge Drinking, Drug Abuse, Sexual Activity

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ABSTRACT

Little research has been completed regarding spring break motivations and behaviors of American students in foreign destinations, specifically in Mexico. This paper looks at push and pull motivations in relation to drug and alcohol consumption and findings indicate greater drug and alcohol use among those who selected “party reputation” and “to go wild” as travel motivations. Binge drinking, sexual activity, and drug use among students on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico were also analyzed and compared to past findings within the United States. Results suggest that students are involved in heavy alcohol consumption and significant drug use. Additionally, high rates of sexual activity occur on spring break and results suggest low condom use, placing students at higher risks for the contraction of sexually transmitted infections.

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INTRODUCTION

Spring break travel for the American student has evolved into a vacation riddled with high risk activities in which multitudes of youth flock to destinations where the relaxed atmosphere allows for participation in risk behaviors, including alcohol use, recreational drug use, and unprotected sex (Grekin, Sher & Krull, 2007; Hobson & Josiam, 1996; Jones, Oeltmann, Brener & Hill, 2001; Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich & Smeaton, 1998; Kelly-Weeder, 2011; Lee, Lewis & Neighbors, 2009; Smeaton, Josiam & Dietrich, 1998). Thus, these risk behaviors are becoming a more prominent focus of academic research. Several coastal destinations across the United States are noteworthy as spring break locations for American students, including Daytona Beach and Panama City Beach in Florida, and South Padre Island in Texas. Since 1988, however, the market has split and foreign locations and additional US destinations attempt to attract the millions of spring break travelers (Josiam et al., 1998). According to the U.S. Department of State, “over 100,000 American teenagers and young adults travel to resort areas throughout Mexico over Spring Break each year” (U.S. Department of State, 2013) making this an international phenomenon not previously studied. Although Mexico is a top spring break international destination, very little is known regarding students’ behaviors in this country. Of particular relevance in Mexico is the case of Acapulco, a popular spring break destination on the Pacific south, famous for its legendary nightlife and beaches, and holding particular socioeconomic, cultural and legal conditions that can shape students’ behaviors. Despite its social relevance, though, spring break behavior in Acapulco has not been the object of scholarly research.

Much of the available literature on spring break presents spring break as possessing a ‘disinhibiting effect’ on students, suggesting that it is conducive to higher frequencies of alcohol and drug consumptions, as well as other risky behaviors such as unprotected, casual sex (Josiam et al., 1998; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos, Yu, Yang, Mattila & Yu, 2006). A search of the blogosphere verifies the relaxed behaviors of students on spring break. With the upsurge in social media usage, students document their thoughts on the relaxed atmosphere in Mexico and other destinations during spring break. One student wrote on twitter “If I die in Mexico on spring break, it will either be because of alcohol poisoning or because of a cocaine overdose” indicating a plan to relax and go wild while abroad. Another student tweeted a picture of a liquor dispenser in her hotel room with the caption “[Name] is loving the all-inclusive drinking! We have an alcohol dispenser in our hotel room! #springbreak #Mexico”. Hundreds of other college students cited alcohol, sex, and drugs among their spring break plans, and a search of news articles warns of the dangers of spring break, featuring photos of students passed out, under arrest, and sometimes injured. Death has also been a consequence of the risk behaviors of students during spring break. In 2013, one USC student fell to his death while climbing between balconies at his hotel. Classmates reported that he had been drinking (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013). Another Michigan college student’s death was believed to be the result of excessive alcohol consumption (Greenwood, 2013).

Josiam, Clements and Hobson (1994), and Hobson and Josiam (1996) originally conducted studies analyzing students’ motivations of travel to destinations for spring break. Subsequently, Smeaton et al. (1998) and Josiam et al. (1998) studied students’ travel motivations and the relationship between motivations and risk behaviors of students on spring break at Panama City Beach, Florida. Similarly, Maticka-Tyndale and Herold (1997) and Mewhinney,

Herold, and Maticka-Tyndale (1995) looked at Canadian university students' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors primarily related to sexual activity on spring break in Daytona Beach, Florida. The current study was influenced by and follows the structure formerly laid out in Josiam et al.'s (1998) study, applying it to a popular tourist destination in Mexico. Josiam et al.'s (1998) approach was followed by this study particularly because it proved to be one of the very few, if not the only, studies clearly identifying students' behaviors and because it was the researchers' interest to get data that could be somehow later compared on the basis of two different contexts, the USA and Mexico. Furthermore, the research approach of Josiam et al. (1998) has been subsequently utilized by other researchers studying similar risk behaviors on holidays and is extensively cited in the literature. Most recently (Lam et.al. 2013) this approach was utilized in Australia to study risk behaviors of school-leavers in a similar holiday setting in Rottenest Island.

In this study, we examined the binge drinking behavior of American students while on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico.

The objectives of this study were:

1. To determine the demographic profile of American students who select Acapulco, Mexico for their spring break trip.
2. To analyze risk behaviors of American students during spring break in Acapulco, Mexico.

Specifically:

- a. To determine the level of alcohol use among students on spring break
- b. To determine the level of drug use among students on spring break.
- c. To determine the level of sexual activity among students on spring break
- d. To determine the level of condom use during spring break among students

3. To identify the relationship between travel motivations and risk behaviors (binge drinking, drug usage, and sexual behaviors).
4. To compare the results of this study to those reported in Smeaton et al.'s (1998) and Josiam et al.'s (1998) spring break studies in Panama City Beach, Florida.
5. To determine American student's perspectives on Mexican permissiveness regarding alcohol and drugs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

American students and spring break

Spring break is one of the three most important vacation breaks for students in the United States (Grekin et al., 2007; Hobson & Josiam, 1996; Jones et al., 2001; Josiam et al., 1998; Kelly-Weeder, 2011; Lee et al., 2009; Smeaton et al., 1998). Spring break, also called March break and spring vacation in North America, originated from the College Swim Forum of 1938 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in which more than 300 students participated (Josiam et al., 1998). Since then, spring break has experienced exponential growth, with travelers numbering over 2.4 million in 2005 (Neuharth, 2005; Ribeiro & Carnal, 2008). Additionally, Sonmez et al. stated "Spring break has become a North American institution involving the annual movement of over two million college students and several hundred thousand high-school students" (2006, p.896). American college students contribute over \$1 billion annually to the United States economy through spring break travel (Sirakaya & McLellan, 1997; Brosseau, 1984; Hayes, 1988). More recently, statistics indicate that the spring break dollar is worth the aggressive marketing (Jones, 2004). With around 16 million students in the United States spending a total of \$208 billion each

year, discretionary spending, including money spent on travel, is at an all-time high (Jones, 2004).

Mills and Law (2005) reported that the spring break travel market is continually evolving based on travel behaviors, destination choices, and travel motivations of students. American college students report that binge drinking, drug taking and sexual promiscuity are common behaviors at spring break parties. Patrick, Morgan, Maggs and Lefkowitz (2011, p. 108) indicate that “college students reported having understandings with their friends regarding alcohol use and sexual behavior during spring break”. These understandings included having sex while on spring break, and getting drunk. Similarly, a study conducted by Sonmez et al. (2006) reported high intentions among students to get drunk, to experiment with drugs, and to engage in sexual activity with someone new.

There are several popular destinations for students to visit during spring break, such as Daytona Beach in Florida, South Padre Island in Texas, and Palm Springs in California (Hobson & Josiam, 1996, Josiam et al., 1998). Though Florida holds top rank as a spring break destination (Trigaux, 2012), a report conducted by the U.S. Department of State listed Mexico as another popular travel destination for American teenagers and young adults during spring break every year. Mills and Law (2005) indicated that students are willing to spend more money for spring break trips; therefore, some international travel destinations have become increasingly popular over the past few decades, such as Cancun, Mexico. Smeaton et al. (1998) also pointed out that many students are attracted to destinations reputed to be a “party destination”.

Push and pull motivations

Crompton's push and pull motivations have frequently been looked at in tourism research to determine why individuals travel and why they travel to particular locations (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Sangpikul, 2008; Pesonen, Komppula, Kronenberg & Peters, 2011; Kim, Noh & Jogaratnam, 2008; Mohammad & Som, 2010). Push and pull motivations are internal and external forces acting on an individual to influence travel (Chan & Baum, 2007). A push motivation can explain the desire for an individual to travel while a pull motivator attracts an individual to a specific location after a decision to travel has been made (Pesonen et al., 2011). A study conducted by Baloglu and McCleary (1999) suggested four push-pull factors in assessing motivation of tourist. These included adventure/excitement (push), social/knowledge (push), destination attributes (pull), and prestige (pull). Bansal and Eiselt (2004) found five tourist motivations with planning in Canada: climate, relaxation, adventure, personal, and educational. Five travel motivations were also identified by Pesonen et al. (2011). These included "feeling of romance", "once in a lifetime experience", "feel at home away from home", "sense of comfort", and "doing something I really like to do".

A previous study by Josiam, Clements, and Hobson (1994) stated that only 10% of students travel to a specific spring break destination for its "party reputation". However, studies at specific destinations report different findings. Josiam et al. (1998) found that nearly half of the students surveyed on a Florida beach traveled to that location because of its "party reputation". Additionally, Smeaton et al. (1998) looked at motivation to travel on spring break and alcohol consumption, finding that students who selected "good party reputation" as a pull motivation to travel to Panama City Beach in Florida consumed more alcohol than those who selected other pull motivations. Josiam et al. (1998) also reported that students who reported "good party

reputation” as the primary pull motivation for visiting Panama Beach in Florida consumed significantly more alcohol the day before than those students reporting other primary pull motivations. Additionally, Sirakaya and McLellan (1997) looked at factors impacting choice of destination within the United States, and compared findings to previous studies (Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990; Chon, 1991). Results of a factor analysis suggest that student’s primary concerns are costs, convenience, and local services and hospitality. Furthermore, entertainment and opportunities for drinking are of high importance as well. To date, no identified research has looked at push-pull motivations and student travel to Mexico during spring break. This study addresses this gap in the literature by looking at motivations for traveling to Mexico and binge drinking, drug use, and sexual activity while on spring break at a destination outside the USA.

Youth behavior on holiday

Situational disinhibition

Several identified past studies have noted that irresponsible behavioral occurrences on holidays may be deemed acceptable, a condition known as situational disinhibition. Situational disinhibition describes a sense of decreased inhibitions tied to a specific environment (Milhausen, Reece & Perera, 2006). In regards to vacationing outside a person’s country of residence, Carr (2002a; 2002b) noted that many individuals report more liberal and hedonistic behaviors when abroad than at home. Many studies indicate that students drink more, participate in more drug use, and engage in more sexual activity when they are in a vacation setting than they do when at home (Carr, 2002a, 2002b; Carter, Horn, Hart, Dunbar, Scoular & MacIntyre, 1997; Clark & Clift, 1994; Egan, 2001; Josiam et al., 1998; Ryan, Robertson & Page, 1996)

Some scholars have attested that spring break is conducive to a setting in which normal rules of society or moral codes do not apply (Maticka-Tyndale, Herold & Mewhinney, 1998). Binge drinking, casual sex, and drug abuse are accepted and become the norm in these situations (Ribeiro, 2012). A study done by Eiser and Ford (1995) found that many respondents indicated agreement with the statement that “I am a different person on holiday” and more sexual activity was reported among young tourist who reported feeling higher levels of disinhibition while on vacation. Smith and Klein (2010) analyzed female alcohol risk-taking behavior while traveling abroad, finding that disinhibition sensation-seeking predicted female participation in binge drinking while abroad. Further study conducted by Maticka-Tyndale, Herold and Oppermann (2003) showed that situational disinhibition combines with a woman’s prior plans to determine if she will or will not participate in sexual activity, while men do not consider prior plans.

Carter et al. (1997) noted that the number of new sexual contacts while abroad was significantly higher than the number of new sexual contacts while at home, suggesting a level of situational disinhibition while on vacation. In contrast, Bellis, Hughes, Thomson and Bennett (2004) reported that differences did not exist between the number of sexual partners in the 6 months before and the number of sexual partners while staying in Ibiza. However, they did report that nearly half of respondents who arrived in Ibiza, Spain without partners engaged in sexual activity on vacation, and almost 40% reported foregoing the use of condoms.

In a mixed methods study conducted of Australian school leavers indulging in risk behaviors in a holiday context, Boggards et al. (2000) found that students expected excessive alcohol consumption to facilitate and legitimize other risk behaviors. Consistent with this, Measham (2004) pointed out that young people and society at large had been giving increasing

importance to leisure that included the pursuit of “time out” - a time where the normal rules of society do not apply.

More recently, an ethnographic study by Briggs (2013) of British youth on holiday in Ibiza, Spain found that they perceived the holiday to be a place where excessive alcohol consumption and self-indulgent and hedonistic behaviors were the norm. That deviance and risk were actually expected, and even endorsed, in this holiday space. Furthermore, that youth tourists were with others participating in similar hedonistic and risky behaviors, reinforcing their own self-expectations of indulging in such activities.

Student behavior during spring break in Mexico

Research regarding the behaviors of students on spring break began about two decades ago. Behavioral patterns have been the topic of more recent studies. Often, students display looser moral standards and inhibitions when on spring break compared to when on campus or at home (Ragsdale, Porter, Zamboanga, St. Lawrence, Read-Wahidi & White, 2011). Students often view sexual activities as casual, and without long-term consequences (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Mewhinney et al., 1995). Josiam et al. (1998) looked at the use of sex, drugs, and alcohol of students during spring break at a popular beachfront location in Florida. Additionally, Smeaton et al. (1998) conducted a study analyzing alcohol consumption and binge drinking of college students on spring break. More recently, Apostolopoulos, Sonmez and Yu (2002) looked at HIV-risk behaviors, while Sonmez et al. (2006) conducted a study analyzing the relationship between casual sex and binge drinking on spring break. Furthermore, a comparative study looking at risk behavior of female college students during spring break and a period before found that drug use and risky behavior increased significantly during spring break (Ragsdale et al., 2006).

Though frequently examined at American destinations, little research has been conducted regarding spring break travel to foreign locations. Hobson & Josiam (1992) looked at travel patterns of spring break and found a significant percentage of students visited international destinations, including Mexico. While Canadian students' sexual behavior during spring break has been examined (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997), no previously identified study has examined alcohol and drug abuse of American students on spring break at locations abroad, nor have the sexual behaviors of American students visiting foreign destinations on spring break been studied. Ribeiro and Hickerson (2013) recently conducted a comprehensive review of spring break research dating back thirty years to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Gaps in the literature were identified within the study, including the need for spring break study at destinations abroad. Accordingly, this study looks at the behaviors of American students at a Mexican beachfront spring break destination named Acapulco.

Acapulco is located on the Pacific south of Mexico. As a tourism destination, it is famous for its beautiful beaches, warm weather, large number of leisure activities and its legendary nightlife. Since the 1970s Acapulco has become largely popular and a highly accessible destination for both domestic and international tourists; it soon became a massive tourism destination for visitors of different social strata (Valenzuela y Coll-Hurtado, 2010). As a spring break destination, Acapulco, among other Mexican destinations, is very attractive to American students because of the dollar's strength against Mexican currency, the legal drinking age (18 as compared with 21 in the USA) and Mexico's many bargain all-inclusive resorts (Yancey, 2009). Furthermore, as more popular destinations such as Cancun are putting restrictions on the reckless behavior of American college students on spring break, Acapulco is gaining in popularity

(Weissert, 2005). Accordingly, the researchers chose Acapulco as a suitable site to survey American students on spring break.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers designed this study to examine the phenomena of binge drinking on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico, in addition to looking at other risk behaviors among American students, including drug use and sexual activity. A quantitative approach was used for this study, with researchers using a survey to gather information from students on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico. The survey method has been widely used in similar research, including Smeaton et al. (1998), Josiam et al. (1998), and Apostolopoulos et al. (2002), in which the behaviors of young travelers were explored.

The survey used by researchers was primarily based on that of Josiam et al. (1998), in which college students on spring break at Panama City Beach, Florida were surveyed regarding spring break motivations and risk behaviors. Questions on the survey were adapted to analyze motivation and levels of binge drinking, drug use, and sexual behaviors among American students while on spring break in Mexico. Questions such as “Your most important reason to travel during spring break” with choices including “wanted to get away”, “a relaxing vacation” and “wanted to go wild”; and “What was the most important reason you decided to go to Acapulco” with responses including “Mexican permissiveness”, “good party reputation”, “good recreation” and “price was right”, were incorporated in the instrument to identify both push and pull spring break motivational factors, respectively. Data was collected one week in March 2010 on a popular beach in Acapulco, Mexico. Observations and informal conversations with locals

allowed knowing where exactly students were staying. Unlike perhaps other forms of tourism, students on spring break tend to congregate in very specific hotels. So students were easily identified as they concentrated collectively on the beach of a particular hotel. For confirming the adequacy of students as potential informants, subjects were asked whether they were students on spring break, if the answer was positive, an invitation to participate in the study was made. Each participant was approached between 11 am and 5 pm while on the beach. A convenience sample was used to obtain participants, with a total of 283 completed questionnaires returned to researchers. Responses rates were rather low, with approximately 50% refusing to participate in the survey, primarily due to students' belief that the researchers were beach vendors.

RESULTS

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1 illustrates important demographic characteristics of the sample population. Of the 283 respondents, approximately 60% were males and 75% were undergraduate students, with 16.4% reporting that they were graduate students and 8.5% reporting that they were high school students (aged 18+). Furthermore, 14% of the sample reported themselves as homosexual or bisexual. Nearly 80% were between the ages of 18 and 23 years old, and a strong majority indicated that this was their first visit to Mexico for spring break (69.5%). Though they can legally consume alcohol in Mexico due to lower drinking age limits, 36.7% of respondents were not of legal drinking age in the United States (18-20 years old).

Push and Pull Motivations for Spring Break travel to Acapulco, Mexico

Students were asked to identify their primary motivation for traveling during spring break, and their primary motivation for travel to Acapulco, Mexico over spring break. The primary push motivations reported to travel during spring break were “I wanted to ‘go wild’” and “I had friends going” (Table 2). With regard to pull motivations to travel specifically to Acapulco, nearly 50% indicated that their primary motivation to travel to Acapulco was its ‘good spring break party reputation’. An additional 25% indicated that their primary pull motivation was because their friends were going to Acapulco.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Crosstabs analysis with chi-square indicated that no significant differences exist between motivations to travel during spring break (push motivations) and gender, education level, age, sexual orientation, or number of visits to Acapulco. Similarly, no significant differences were revealed between motivations to travel specifically to Acapulco, Mexico for spring break (pull motivations) and gender, education, sexual orientation, age, or number of visits to Acapulco.

Crosstabs analysis with chi-square was also employed to determine if differences exist between push-pull motivations and alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, and condom use. The findings indicate significant differences between those who got drunk and those who did not get drunk in terms of pull motivations. Students who got drunk over spring break more frequently reported “good spring break party reputation” as the primary pull factor for visiting Acapulco during spring break (Table 2).

Surprisingly, results were not similar for drug use. No significant differences exist between students who used drugs and those who did not in terms of pull motivations. However, significant differences do exist between students who used drugs and those who did not regarding push motivations. Students using drugs cited “I wanted to ‘go wild’” as a push factor more frequently than those who did not use drugs during spring break.

Binge drinking, sexual behavior, and drug use among students on spring break

The 1993 Harvard School of Public Health’s College Alcohol Survey (CAS) originally defined binge drinking as the consumption of 5 or more drinks by a male and the consumption of 4 or more drinks by females (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens & Castillo, 1994). Almost all studies looking at college binge drinking since the CAS have used the 5/4 rule as a measure for binge drinking (Weschler & Nelson, 2001), including Josiam et al. (1998) in which binge drinking was listed as “men’s consumption of 5 or more drinks and women’s consumption of 4 or more drinks during either the previous day (9:00 AM-6:00 PM) or the previous night (6:00 PM-2:00 AM).

Not surprising, and regardless of time of day, males reported significantly higher levels of alcohol consumption over spring break than females, with over 60% reporting consuming more than 12 alcoholic drinks during both the day and evening periods (Table 3). Males report an average of 10.27 (SD = 4.177) drinks consumed between 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM and 11.17 drinks (SD = 3.397) between 6:00 PM and 2:00 AM. Females report an average of 8.43 drinks (SD = 4.331) between 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM and 9.79 drinks (SD = 4.152) between 6:00 PM and 2:00 AM.

Researchers also noted significant differences among those over 21 and under 21 years of age (Table 4). Students under the age of 21 consumed significantly more than those over the age of 21 in the day time (9:00 AM to 6.00 PM). This is presumably because students under 21 can obtain alcohol legally in Mexico, but cannot in the United States.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The survey also asked respondents to indicate their frequency of intoxication over spring break. Significant differences again exist between genders. Male students were significantly more likely to be report getting drunk at least once a day or more frequently (chi-square = 24.716; $p = .000$), with nearly half reporting getting drunk daily or more (Figure 1). Vomiting typically occurs when blood-alcohol levels reach 0.120 and loss of consciousness typically occurs at a blood-alcohol level of 0.300 (Miller & Munoz, 1982). Moreover, significant differences were found between males and females when asked “did you drink to the point of passing out?” Males reported drinking to the point of passing out more often than females (Figure 2). No significant differences were found between age categories (above/below 21) and frequency of intoxication, nor did the analysis find significant differences between age and drinking to the point of passing out.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Researchers also examined drug use among students on spring break. An overwhelming majority of students (81%) were offered drugs during spring break and nearly one third (88 individuals, 31.1%) engaged in drug use during spring break. Additionally, 20% of all respondents indicated intent to obtain drugs for recreational use. Primary drug of choice for those engaging in recreational use was marijuana, with 27.1% of the respondents indicating use, followed by cocaine, with 15% of participants reporting use. Drug use was more prevalent among males, with 40.7% of males reporting that they used recreational drugs over spring break compared with 16.2% of females reporting use (Figure 3). Significant differences between groups were also seen between age groups. Students aged 21 and older were significantly more likely to engage in recreational drug use than students under the age of 21 (chi-square = 4.934; $p = .026$), as illustrated in Figure 4.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Sexual activity among students on spring break was the third topic of analysis. Almost two-thirds (65%) of the respondents reported sexual activity on spring break. Fifty-six percent of students indicated that they had sex with someone with whom they were in an ongoing sexual relationship. Additionally, 58% reported sexual activity with someone new they met in Mexico, and 59.4% reported sexual activity with a new partner(s) they had met before arriving in Mexico.

Differences in sexual activity were reported between both gender and age groups. Males report significantly higher rates of sexual activity than females, with 73.3% of males reporting that they had sex over spring break compared to only 52.3% of females (chi-square = 13.085; $p =$

.000). With regards to age differences, those students who are over 21 years of age report more sexual activity than those students under the age of 21. Over three-fourths (75.4%) of respondents over the age of 21 reported sexual activity while only 47.1% of students under age 21 reported sexual activity (chi-square = 23.169; $p = .000$). Surprisingly, no significant differences exist between males and females in condom use (chi-square = 3.043; $p = .081$), nor between students under age 21 and students over age 21 (chi-square = 1.594; $p = .207$). Additionally, no significant differences were identified in sexual activity in regards to sexual orientation. Homosexual and bi-sexual respondents engaged in sexual activity at the same rates as heterosexual individuals.

Though “the fastest growing rate in cases of HIV infection is found among young people traveling and on holiday” (Wickens & Sonmez, 2007, p. 199), condom use among American students on vacation is alarmingly low. In regards to condom use, nearly 75% of individuals reported “rarely” or “never” using condoms on spring break with those they are in an ongoing relationship. Perhaps more startling is that over 50% of students reported infrequent condom use (selecting ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ on the survey) with sexual partners they met while on break or with new partners they met before arriving in Mexico, despite 62.5% of students indicating that their chance of contracting a STD over spring break as ‘high’ or ‘very high’. Additionally, 81.3% of students indicated that they believe condoms are ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ at preventing STDs.

No significant differences were reported between gender, age, or sexual orientation in frequency of condom use, regardless of partner. However, differences do exist between gender and sexual orientation regarding chances of getting an STD. Males reported that they believed their chance of contracting an STD was higher than female respondents ($F = 6.798$; $p = .030$).

Similarly, homosexual respondents reported that they believed they had a greater chance of contracting an STD than bi-sexual or heterosexual respondents ($F = 16.523$; $p = .003$). Though over 80% of respondents believe that condoms are very effective at preventing STDs, use is infrequent, even among those who believe that they are likely to contract as STD on spring break. This mismatch between the perceptions of efficacy of condoms and their actual use is noteworthy and needs additional study.

Perspectives on Mexican permissiveness regarding alcohol and drug use.

Finally, the survey asked students if they believed it was easier to obtain drugs and alcohol in Mexico than it was in the United States. A crosstabs analysis revealed significant differences between students above 21 and those below 21 years old. More than half of students under age 21 indicated that they believed it was easier to obtain drugs in Mexico than in the United States compared to only 36.7% of those over the age of 21 (chi-square = 4.741; $p = .029$) and over 90% of students under age 21 indicated that they consider it easier to obtain alcohol in Mexico than the United States compared to only 75.7% of students over age 21 (chi-square = 12.154; $p = .000$). More so, results of an ANOVA indicated that students over 21 years old believed that Mexican laws pertaining to drug use are less rigorous than in the United States compared with those under the age of 21, possibly explaining the higher frequency of drug use among older students ($F = 9.737$; $p = .002$). No significant differences exist between groups in regards to Mexican laws pertaining to alcohol use ($F = 1.132$; $p = .288$). Students, regardless of age, seem to find that Mexican laws regarding alcohol use are less rigorous than in the USA.

DISCUSSION

Primary objectives of this study were to identify motivations to travel and binge drinking activity of American college student on spring break in Mexico, as well as their drug use and sexual activity. Motivations to go on spring break were not significantly different between demographic characteristics. However, significant differences were identified in drinking behaviors among those who selected “good party reputations” as a pull factor. Individuals selecting this factor tended to consume more alcohol while on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico. Similarly, Josiam et al. (1998) and Smeaton et al. (1998) reported that individuals traveling to Panama Beach City in Florida also consumed more alcohol when their primary pull was the “good party reputation”.

Furthermore, findings indicate increased alcohol consumption from the 1998 study conducted by Josiam et al. in Florida on Panama Beach. Both males and females reported rates of alcohol consumption much higher than previously reported. Males previously reported an average of 18 drinks during the previous day while females reported a total of 10 (Smeaton et al., 1998). With an average of 21 drinks consumed by males and 18 drinks consumed by females, alcohol consumption in Mexico is shown to vary greatly from previously reported findings in the United States. Additionally, with regards to being intoxicated and drinking to the point of passing out, males reported getting drunk, and drinking to the point of passing out more frequently than females, as was true in previous studies (Smeaton et al., 1998).

Gender differences in binge drinking have been supported by previous research, including Humara and Sherman (1999), Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sonmez, Yu and Sasidharan (2001), and Zucker and Harford (1983). Men are frequently found to consume more alcohol than their female counterparts. Furthermore, though the average number of drinks consumed varied

between this study and the Smeaton et al. (1998) study, both Smeaton et al. (1998) and Josiam et al. (1998) noted gender differences in alcohol consumption of students on spring break in the United States.

In the 15 years since the past study was completed, alcohol consumption has not widely increased among high school and college students across the United States. For example, a comprehensive annual national study of students in the USA (Core Alcohol and Drug Survey of Higher Education, 2006) reported that 84.1% of students consumed alcohol in the past year - 2005. The annual Core study (2012) reported that alcohol consumption in the past year had dropped to 81.3% of students in 2011(Core Alcohol and Drug Survey of Higher Education, 2012). It is noteworthy that while student consumption of alcohol has remained relatively stable in the USA, it appears to have increased dramatically among spring breakers on the beachfront. Future studies should address this health-risk issue in greater depth. The results of the current study can only permit one to speculate that this dramatic increase is the result of “situational disinhibition” in the permissive atmosphere of the beachfront in Mexico.

Additionally, alcohol consumption by those under 21 years of age was significantly higher than by those over 21. These findings contrast with the previous study done by Smeaton et al. (1998), in which no differences were found between age groups. This is probably because the legal drinking age in Mexico is 18 years of age, so obtaining alcohol is easier for the under 21 segment than it is in the United States. Additionally, differences were also noted between age and frequency of binge drinking and drinking to the point of passing out in the Smeaton et al. (1998) study, but no significant differences were found between age groups among students in Mexico for spring break.

Josiam et al. (1998) also looked at the use of recreational drugs among American college students on spring break in Florida, reporting no gender differences. Marijuana was most commonly used among students both in Mexico and in Florida. However, unlike the study in Florida, significant gender differences exist among students in Mexico regarding drug use. Additionally, age differences were also significant, with the over 21 segment reporting more drug use than the under 21 segment. Additionally, only just over 50% of students in Florida were offered drugs (Josiam et al. 1998), but this number was significantly higher among those in Mexico (88%), as found in the current study. This is presumably due to a higher prevalence and an increased availability of drugs in Mexico.

Finally, sexual activity was examined among students in Mexico during spring break. Josiam et al. (1998) also examined sexual activity among American college students on spring break in Florida. In contrast to those findings, students in Mexico reported much higher rates of sexual activity. Whereas about 45% of respondents in the USA study indicated that they engaged in sexual activities, over 70% of spring breakers in Mexico reported engagement in sexual activities. However, unlike the study in Florida, significant gender differences exist among students. Results indicate differences between gender and sexual activity, as was found by Josiam et al. (1998). Age differences were also found, with those over 21 reporting less sexual activity than those under 21. When using condoms, over 50% of students selected using condoms 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' when having sex with a new partner. This varied greatly from the study results of the study completed by Josiam et al (1998) in which only approximately 30% of students indicated infrequent use. However, no significant differences exist between males and females in condom use, as was also found in previous studies.

CONCLUSIONS

Spring break beach destinations are found to be a setting with significantly higher levels of binge drinking, drug abuse, and sexual activity. Patterns and trends identified within this study are consistent with previous findings looking at youth behavior on vacation which have found that vacations often promote a sense of situational disinhibition (Maticka-Tyndale et al, 2003; Eiser & Ford, 1995; Smith & Klein, 2010; Bellis et al., 2004). When faced with an environment more relaxed than the home environment, students often let loose and “go wild”, frequently lowering their personal behavioral and moral standards and acting in ways inconsistent with their non-vacation lifestyles. They view spring break as a time to experiment with drugs, sex, and alcohol, and a time in which there are no consequences.

Many popular beach front destinations in Mexico attract hundreds of thousands of spring breakers due to their relaxed attitudes towards alcohol and drugs. As the legal drinking age in Mexico is 18, it is easier for younger students to legally obtain alcohol and there are fewer perceived consequences to drinking in Mexico than at similar destinations in the United States. Thus, consumption rates are higher than what has previously been reported by other studies within the United States. Additionally, the percentage of students offered drugs on the beach was dramatically higher in Mexico (88%) from what was previously reported in the studies conducted on beaches in the United States (50%), again suggesting that Mexico has a more relaxed attitude towards drugs and alcohol use. Students are presented with more opportunities for consumption, with less risk of legal consequences. Additionally, the reported feeling that Mexico is more permissive regarding alcohol and drug use, coupled with students’ feelings of situational disinhibition lead to consumption rates of alcohol and drugs at far greater rates than what has previously been seen at destinations within the United States.

Higher levels of alcohol and drug consumption are known correlates of risky sexual behaviors (Graves, 1995; Graves & Leigh, 1995; Murstein & Mercy, 1994). Consistent with other findings pertaining to drugs and alcohol consumption, this study found higher levels of risky sexual behaviors in the Mexican beach front setting. Again, it appears that situational disinhibition is a major contributing factor impacting risk behaviors.

Despite the seriousness of the effects of binge drinking and risk behaviors on spring break, little research has been completed to date on this topic at destinations abroad, specifically in Mexico. Developing an understanding of these phenomena allow for the development of possible intervention strategies that can effectively minimize the impacts of harmful or risky behavior of American students on spring break at destinations abroad.

In summary, this study contributes to a broader understanding of spring breakers' behaviors. While this study's findings concur with those of existing ones, they suggest that students' 'excessive' behaviors can be accentuated in accordance to the specific conditions of the destination. This study proves that spring break beach destinations, particularly more relaxed social, cultural and legal environments, may be perceived differently by students and so more relaxed behaviors and attitudes may be adopted. So, students' perceptions of more permissive environments may be directly associated with their behavior. Bellis et.al., (2004) have commented that risk behaviors are amplified in foreign settings where tourist are unfamiliar with the culture, language, and legal issues. Hugues et. al. (2009) have also commented that health authorities focus their work within their borders; however, international tourism to holiday resorts with a permissive environment result in youth taking the greatest risks with their health. Briggs (2013) has commented extensively on the role of marketers, vendors, and corporations in encouraging risk behaviors among tourists and profiting from the resulting commerce. The

spring break phenomenon in Mexico, thus represents a need for government intervention, as it places both American tourists and Mexican residents at greater risk of the multiple consequences of harmful behaviors.

Limitations & Future Research

This study was conducted on a less well visited spring break destination in Mexico, and utilized a convenience sample. Further research should take place at more prominent beachfront locations in Mexico, such as Cancun, Cabo San Lucas, and Puerto Vallarta. Additionally, because a convenience sample was used and a limited number of surveys were collected, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all students vacationing in Mexico for spring break. Future studies should utilize a random sampling method and collect significantly more responses to more accurately describe the activities of students on spring break in Mexico. Additionally, data should be gathered for more than one week to ensure a sampling from more colleges and universities across the United States.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate the consumption patterns of high school students on spring break in Mexico. As alcohol laws are less rigorous, and the legal drinking age is lower in Mexico than in the United States, many high-schoolers and younger college students flock to destinations across Mexico. As many as 40% of spring break visitors in Cancun in 1996 were reported to be under aged 18. It would be interesting to note differences in drinking, drug abuse, and sexual behavior among those over 18 and those less than 18 years old.

Similarly, future studies should look at these risky behaviors, not only between gender and age, but also sexual orientation, in further detail. The original studies conducted by Josiam et al. (1998) and Smeaton et al. (1998) did not provide an account of the differences in risky

behaviors between respondents with different sexual orientation, and thus no comparisons could be made. However, as the global population becomes more accepting of homosexual and bisexual individuals, it becomes increasingly important to study these phenomena from their perspective.

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**Tequila at Sunrise: Spring Break Travel Motivations and Risk Behaviors
of American Students in Acapulco, Mexico**

FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the sample

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	172	60.8
Female	111	39.2
<i>Age</i>		
18	24	8.5
19	41	14.5
20	39	13.8
21	49	17.3
22	39	13.8
23	32	11.3
24	16	5.7
25	21	7.4
26+	22	7.8
<i>Education Level</i>		
High School Student	24	8.5
College Freshman	44	15.7
College Sophomore	55	19.6
College Junior	45	16.0
College Senior	67	23.8
Graduate Student	46	16.4
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>		
Heterosexual	239	86.0
Bisexual	17	6.1
Homosexual	22	7.9
<i>First spring break in Mexico?</i>		
Yes	194	69.5
No	87	30.5

Note: totals differ due to missing data

Table 2
Push and pull motivations to travel

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Motivation to travel during Spring Break 2010</i>		
I wanted to "go wild"	70	24.8
I had friends going	67	23.8
I wanted to get away	41	14.5
It's just the thing to do during Spring Break	25	8.9
I wanted a dose of "Sun, Surf, and Sand"	15	5.3
A relaxing vacation sounded inviting	14	5.0
Other	50	17.8
<i>Motivation to travel to Acapulco, Mexico</i>		
Good Spring Break Party Reputation	140	49.6
I had friends going there	71	25.2
My friends said it was a good place	14	5.0
The Price was Right	10	3.5
Mexican Permissiveness	5	1.8
Other	42	14.9

Note: totals differ due to missing data

Table 3
Average number of drinks consumed by gender

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>		<i>F-values</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
Drinks yesterday between 9am and 6pm (Day)	10.27	4.177	8.43	4.331	12.720*
Drinks yesterday between 6pm and 2am (Night)	11.17	3.397	9.79	4.152	9.259*
Total average of previous day	21.44	6.830	18.23	7.652	13.590*

*Significant differences exist between genders at $p < .01$

Table 4
Average number of drinks consumed by age category

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Under 21</i>		<i>21 and Over</i>		<i>F-values</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
Drinks yesterday between 9am and 6pm (Day)	10.38	3.507	9.06	4.680	6.254**
Drinks yesterday between 6pm and 2am (Night)	11.14	3.167	10.33	4.054	3.123(NS)
Total average of previous day	21.53	5.823	19.39	7.982	5.706**

**Significant differences exist between age categories at $p < .05$; NS = Not Significant

Figure 1.

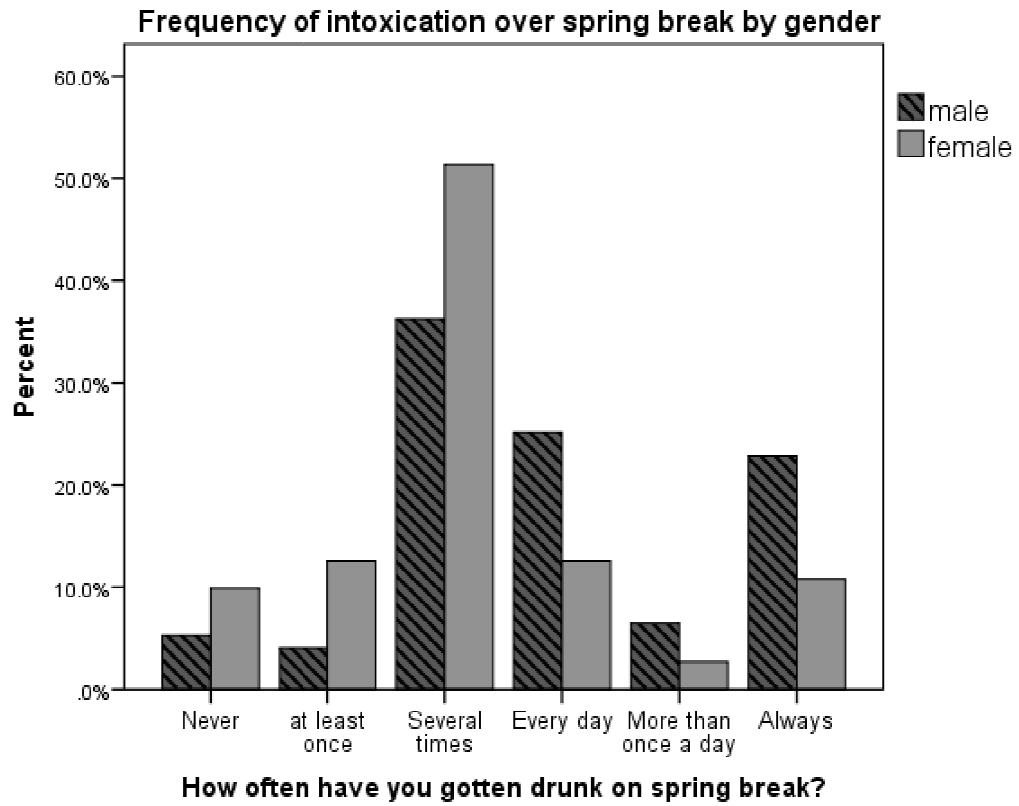


Figure 2.

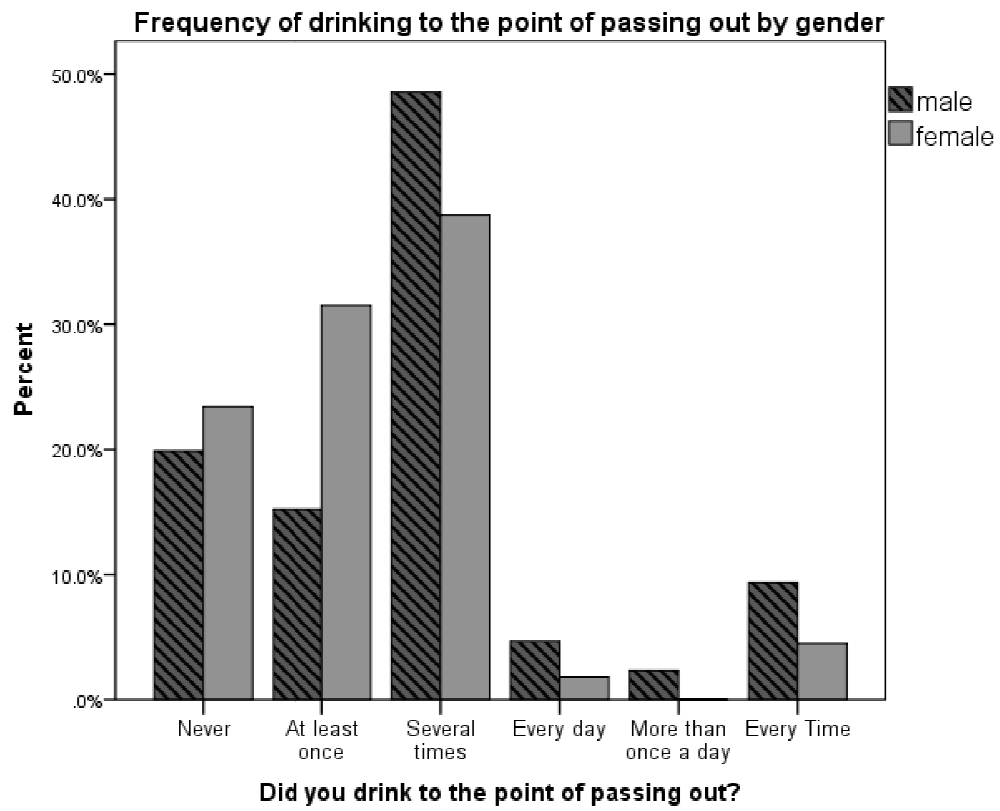


Figure 3.

Drug use over spring break by gender

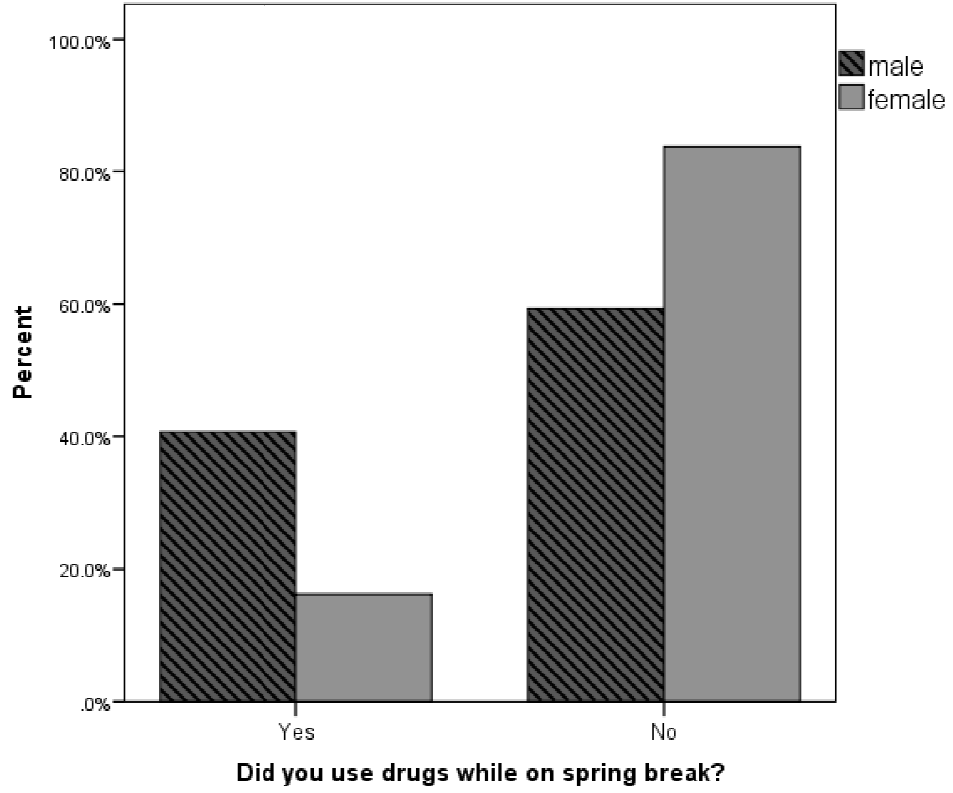


Figure 4.

Drug use over spring break by age

