Drinking Games and College Students
Part 1: Problem Description

ABSTRACT
College students seek peer acceptance and opportunities for social interaction. For many, it may be the first time away from home, away from the supervision and watchful eyes of parents and other family members. Whether for fun, thrill, competition, or the need to socialize with others, approximately two thirds of U.S. college students participate in the risky binge drinking behavior called drinking games. Regardless of the game type, the goal of this behavior is to become intoxicated in a short period of time. Significant consequences and harm can result from this dangerous social behavior. This article, the first of two parts, will describe the problem; Part 2 will discuss the implications for community and mental health nurses.

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Ping pong, card games, checkers, and word games are safe ways to socialize in the college environment, right? Hardly! Often, these games are combined with drinking and promote risky behavior. Drinking games are popular on college campuses, with reports of 47% to 62% of college student participation (Borsari, 2004). Although the specific game, grade level of student, and type of alcohol consumed may vary, participants of drinking games often become intoxicated quickly. Many students meet the criteria for heavy episodic drinking (i.e., consuming four or more drinks in a row [women] or five or more drinks in a row [men] during the past 2 weeks) or binge drinking (i.e., a drinking pattern that results in a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08% or higher) (National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2002). Drinking behavior has also been defined using the categories of heavy and frequency. Using these two categories, Presley and Pimentel (2006) grouped student drinkers into three categories of risk: nonheavy, heavy (i.e., consumption of five or more drinks at least once during the past 2 weeks), and heavy and frequent (i.e., five or more drinks at least once and three or more days of alcohol consumption during the past 2 weeks). Agencies, organizations, and academic institutions may use any of these or other definitions to describe drinking behaviors.

What Are Drinking Games?
Drinking games can be organized into six categories: consumption, gambling, media, motor skills, team, and verbal skills games (Table). All of the games described are designed to cause intoxication in the shortest period of time.

What Are the Motivators to Participate?
Motivation to participate in, avoid, or stop playing drinking games are not well researched. Reasons for participation include competition and thrills, conformity, novelty, desire for a sexual encounter, fun and celebration, relaxation, and boredom (Borsari, Bergen-Cico, & Carey, 2003; Johnson & Sheets, 2004; Zamboanga, Rodriguez, & Horton, 2008). Students stop playing drinking games for many reasons: They get too drunk, sick, or bored, or are influenced by others who choose to quit (Johnson, 2001). Students abstain from drinking games because of negative views of alcohol, social isolation, unfamiliarity with the games, past bad experiences with drinking, or personal choice (Johnson & Cohen, 2004). Motivations to play, stop, or not begin at all offer clues to the development and implementation of interventions aimed at preventing this risky behavior.

Who Is at Risk?
Although there is little evidence in the literature to explain motivators to participate or not, there has been considerable research to determine the populations at risk. Of great risk are those who began drinking between ages 14 and 16 (Borsari et al., 2003). College students at high risk include athletes (Grossbard, Geisner, Neighbors, Kilmer, & Larimar, 2007; Zamboanga et al., 2008), fraternity and sorority members (Capone, Wood, Borsari, & Laird, 2007), and those who abuse drugs (in-
Peer influences also increase the likelihood of participation in drinking games (Borsari & Carney, 2001), which may explain why students who live on campus may be at a greater risk for participation (Sharmer, 2005). In addition, holidays and college events, such as pregame tailgating and themed parties, create an environment conducive to drinking games. Although an extreme example, anyone who has viewed the popular movie Animal House (Reitman, Simons, & Landis, 1978) will remember the drinking behaviors portrayed by actor John Belushi at the fraternity house “toga party.”

**TABLE**

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<th>Category</th>
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| Consumption (or endurance) games | No strategy or rules except that the player drinks as much as possible in the shortest time. | • 100 minute club (i.e., one shot per minute for 100 minutes)  
• Chug-offs  
• Shotguns  
• Beer bongs  
• 100 beer club  
• Power hour |
| Gambling games                    | Use of cards or dice and based on chance. Losers must drink a designated amount. Games of chance increase the risk of becoming intoxicated. | • Three man  
• Up and down the river  
• Presidents  
• Kings  
• Beer checkers  
• Beer hunter |
| Media games                       | Players are cued to drink by a certain television show, video, movie, or song. | • Hi Bob (i.e., player drinks when any performer on The Bob Newhart Show says “Hi, Bob”)  
• Have a drink on me, Roseanne |
| Motor skills games                | Certain motor skills are to be performed. Failure to perform results in forced drinking. | • Quarters (i.e., toss quarter into shot glass)  
• Cardinal puff  
• Chandeliers  
• Thumper |
| Team games                        | Two or more teams compete with each other. Most popular game involves playing ping pong in some fashion with the addition of beer. Games stimulate competition. | • Beer pong (or Beirut)  
• Speed  
• Flip cup (i.e., sports-like competition) |
| Verbal skills games               | Long or difficult words and phrases are repeated; if errors are made, the player drinks; if the round is error free, the task increases in difficulty. | • Animal  
• Add-a-word  
• Fuzzy duck  
• The name game  
• Never have I ever |

Sources: Borsari (2004); Zamboanga, Calvert, O’Riordan, and McCollum (2007).
short-term consequences include driving while under the influence, risky sexual behaviors, illicit drug use, violence, and even death due to alcohol intoxication (Hingson, Heern, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). Many factors may influence the potential negative effects of the alcohol (e.g., amount and type of alcohol, length of time of drinking episode). Long-term consequences are those associated with continued alcohol use and abuse. Heavy drinking can cause academic problems such as missed classes and assignments, failed examinations, and further unsuccessful school performance. Of serious concern, students who participate regularly in drinking games may develop a pattern of heavy drinking that can be carried through the college years and into early adulthood.

**SUMMARY**

This article, the first of two, describes the risky binge drinking behavior called drinking games and the serious consequences faced by U.S. college students who engage in such behavior. Although this discussion did not include international research findings, this risky behavior does not appear to be exclusive to American college students. Part 2—to be published in the April 2010 issue—will include implications for community and mental health nurses.

**REFERENCES**


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