

THESIS

BARSTOOL CONSEQUENCES: COLLEGE STUDENTS' RISK PERCEPTIONS WHEN
INTERACTING WITH BARSTOOL SPORTS' MODELING OF THE COLLEGE
EXPERIENCE THROUGH INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

BARSTOOL CONSEQUENCES: COLLEGE STUDENTS' RISK PERCEPTIONS WHEN INTERACTING WITH BARSTOOL SPORTS' MODELING OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE THROUGH INSTAGRAM

This study focuses on how college students engage with the various Instagram accounts run by Barstool Sports (e.g., @chicks, @barstoolsports, @5thyear, and college-affiliated Barstool Instagrams) and how engagement influences their perceptions of risk and risky behavior decision-making. Through this study, I review the literature surrounding Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and risk communication. I also give an overview of Barstool Sports and how they present college students in the previously mentioned Instagram accounts. I looked to answer two research questions: RQ1: How does Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college-student-produced videos model destructive and risky behaviors? RQ2: How do Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts influence college-aged consumers' perceptions of risk and decision making in the college experience? I conducted fifteen interviews with recent college graduates of universities who have previously consumed and/or currently consume media with Barstool Sports' affiliation. My goal was to understand how participants' consumption of this media specifically affects their cognitive development, risk perceptions, and, ultimately, the culture of their college institution. I coded the interviews through thematic analysis and discovered three, key themes in RQ1: Glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm," imitation and "one upping" to be featured, and college life as opportunity for Barstool content causes a need to be vigilant of one's actions. Five, key themes were uncovered in RQ2: Being featured on Barstool and

consuming Barstool for “coolness,” popularity, and social clout; dissonance from personal morals; cringy and risky images provide entertainment, but to a certain extent; recognition of the unexpected (and sometimes expected) negatives of Barstool features and a student’s selective disengagement and its association to a college’s mission and conduct expectation. Because college is a time when students run the risk of developing negative habits that can damage their academic standing, negatively impact their health, and result in struggles with university student conduct codes, this research can provide clarity on why students choose to partake in the behaviors and actions like those portrayed on these Instagram accounts.

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Introduction

On July 1, 2018, the University of Wisconsin Barstool Instagram account, @badgerbarstool, posted a video. It showed students suspending a television from atop of one of the college's fraternity buildings, with hundreds of students below, looking on, cheering, and laughing. The students then threw the television to the ground as a student walked near where the television fell. As several students looked on from a safe distance, this single student was nearly crushed by the falling television. Students' gasps of shock as the television fell were quickly overtaken by celebratory cheers and sprays of beer, and students pounced upon the now-smashed television, continuing to destroy it. By the end of the clip, the woman, who just missed being crushed by the television, was nowhere in sight, and any concern for her well-being was basically forgotten. The caption on the video read, "This girl was an inch away from death @5thYear" (Badgerbarstool, 2018). Less than 24 hours later, 5thYear, the account tagged in the University of Wisconsin's Barstool Instagram account's caption, uploaded the same video. Their caption read a bit differently: "WARNING: Stay alert for potentially dangerous objects being thrown off the roof @badgerbarstool" (5thyear, 2018b). In the aftermath of the situation, Meredith McGlone, a University of Wisconsin spokesperson, stated that "...student organizations are responsible for operating in ways that maintain the health and safety of their members and guests; if they do not, they are held accountable through the student organization code of conduct... Given the clear risk to individual safety in this case, the university response will reflect the seriousness of the act..." (Channel 3000, 2018).

The word to highlight in McGlone's response to the Barstool video is *risk*. There are many ways to define risk. The College Student Life Space Scale (CSLSS), used to measure

engagement in risky behaviors, includes activities such as smoking, substance use, minor delinquency, and conflicts with parents and friends as important elements of risk (Brackett & Mayer, 2006). Arnett (2000) further connotes that risky behaviors often include unprotected sex, most types of substance use, and driving at high speeds or while intoxicated. As a whole, risk is defined as college students engaging in behaviors that can result in physical or mental harm to themselves or others, as well as leading to possible disciplinary issues within a university's conduct system and/or the law in general (Arnett, 2000; Reis & Riley, 2000).

This single video exemplifies the thousands that have been posted to Barstool Sports' college-affiliated accounts and 5thYear account. Erika Nardini, the Chief Executive Officer of Barstool Sports, mentioned in an interview that Barstool's account, 5thYear, is devoted to videos of college students "...doing things you can imagine college kids doing..." (Everett, 2018). But much of this content features students participating in dangerous behaviors, including but not limited to throwing televisions from the tops of buildings, binge drinking, punching one another, and destroying campus property. The account takes on a very similar theme as Instagram accounts like that of Total Frat Move, a website and social media account founded in 2010 and dedicated to highlighting risky college student behavior (Shontell, 2014). The site, like those belonging to Barstool Sports, shares the goal of sharing pictures of "...attractive women with shocking headlines, crazy party stories, and original content about college life" (Shontell, 2014). Barstool Sports' 5thYear takes this a step further with designated accounts for colleges across the United States, and an intended broader audience than those who participate in fraternities or sororities, as the name Total Frat Move implies.

Much of these defined *risky behaviors* can be seen simply by scrolling through Barstool's 5thYear account. All of the content on the 5thYear account is user-generated, and the factors that

motivate college students to produce this content are not clear. Obviously, the content is created to entertain others (Bowman & Willis, 2003), but it could also trigger others' responses so that they, too, will want to participate in this culture of risk and receive the same attention and admiration as other content creators (Shao, 2009). With the controversy surrounding some of these posts, one would assume that students would seek to change their actions in order to distance themselves from trouble and potential harm, but with the social media pages continuing to feature new user-generated content every day, it is clear that the craze of doing dangerous stunts for social media glory is not stopping anytime soon.

The potential glory that stems from these dangerous stunts shows the large role social media plays in college students' day-to-day lives, especially with the use of the internet on school campuses increasing dramatically in recent years (Maurya, Patel & Sharma, 2018). Students surround themselves with the influences of social media, especially social network sites and apps like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. In the United States, Statista (2018), an online statistics portal that provides access to data from market and opinion research institutions, noted that emerging adults (18- to 29-year-olds) make up more than half of the adults who use Instagram. As recently as 2017, Forbes reported that Instagram has more than 500 million active users, making it the second most popular social media network in the world behind only Facebook (DeMers, 2017).

Clearly, Instagram has a significant impact on a younger age demographic and, unlike some other social media platforms, Instagram makes it easier to identify certain demographic data, including "followers" of the different Instagram accounts (i.e. those who subscribe to participating in these accounts regularly), how many users are engaging in certain content on various accounts, how many "likes" videos and pictures receive, how many schools have these

Barstool college-affiliated Instagram accounts, etc. Instagram is also an important social media outlet to explore the impact of Barstool Sports as it is home to Barstool's accompanying account 5thYear. While present on other social media platforms, the 5thYear account does not hold the same popularity or following on other platforms when compared to Instagram. The consistent and repeated exposure Instagram provides makes the account much more public and outward-facing to its audience. A user could open the Instagram application at any point and be welcomed to a new video or photo posted by the account, see how many people have viewed it, if any of their friends have liked it, and where this video is coming from through the accompanying caption or location tag that may have a college institution's Barstool-affiliated account tagged.

Because so many young adults use Instagram, social media affects not just student's mediated life, but also their online and offline interpersonal relationships. Social media use has been and continues to be strongly defined by group identities, "...as individual viewers tie in their personal taste and lifestyles with shared 'mediated' experiences" (van Dijck, 2009, p. 44). Social media usage has become a way for people to share their experiences and interests beyond their face-to-face relationships and into their online relationships as well. Digital identity – or the ways people, and more specifically in this research, college students understand themselves within digital contexts – is a growing research field for student development theory as technology continues to influence students' lives (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Students' digital environments are increasingly considered part of their developmental and learning ecologies (Prensky, 2001b; Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008). This is especially true as *digital natives*, a generation born roughly between 1980 and 1994, grew up with, are familiar with, and rely on information and communication technology (Prensky, 2001a). Students currently in their undergraduate career have never known a world without the internet and digital

spaces. Their skills and interests in the digital media experience are influenced as a result of their immersion in a technology-rich culture (Bennett et al., 2008).

With so many young adults using Instagram, several important implications must be considered, because Instagram has the power to influence not only students' regular lives but also their learning ecologies. Previous research has examined the reasons people view Instagram as a whole, uncovering motivations like surveillance/knowledge about others, documentation, coolness, and creativity (Sheldon & Bryant, 2015), suggesting that students' own motivations for engaging with Instagram are likely extensive and complicated. Still, questions remain regarding how and why college-aged Instagram users are viewing, liking, and sharing content with friends on this social media outlet and how their online behaviors influence their experiences in the offline world.

Social media was and still is an important way that students stay connected with one another. Two of the most important incentives when using social networking sites include the ability for social engagement and entertainment (Wang, Jackson, Gaskin, & Wang, 2014). People using social networking sites for entertainment may use it in order to escape from other problems, relax, get aesthetic enjoyment, fill time, seek emotional release, or experience sexual arousal (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973; McQuail, 1983). Due to this, young people who regularly engage with social media sites have the potential to significantly impact their development both socially and psychologically (Kross, Verduyn, Demiralp, Park, Lee, Lin, Shablack, Jonides, & Ybarra, 2013; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Liu & Yu, 2013; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Whether that impact is negative or positive is not always clear and can be greatly influenced by the content they consume.

Countless studies have examined young adults' behavioral addiction to social networking sites as well as problematic internet use leading to loneliness and preference to online social interaction instead of face-to-face interactions (Caplan, 2003; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Ryan, Reece, Chester, & Xenos, 2016; Marino, Finos, Vieno, Lenzi, & Spada, 2017). This research included young adults' reasons as to why they engaged with social networking sites including online social enhancement, social monitoring (monitoring friends' accounts in order to accomplish social connectedness and social inclusion), and for entertainment value. There have also been studies done concerning the outcomes for students who have gone through their institution's conduct system after they have committed offenses during their college experience (Howell, 2005; Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008; Karp & Sacks, 2014; Stimpson & Janosik, 2015), but limited research explores how young adults *initially* perceive mediated risky behavior and possible conduct issues with their institution *prior* to making the decision to engage in the risky activity when participating in different social media.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; SCT) can provide a useful lens regarding how and why students perform risky actions. SCT stresses the important role mass media plays in influencing human thought, affect, and action (Bandura, 2002). Psychosocial functioning plays a large role in this influence and is incredibly vast and bidirectional. As individuals view themselves and society, personal factors "...in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events; behavioral patterns; and environmental events..." all play a role, interact with, and influence one another to determine a person's decision-making process. (Bandura, 2002, p. 121). Instagram accounts like those offered by Barstool Sports create a narrative that their videos and photos portray what "true college life" is like for all college students. SCT's ideas of modeling strategies, social networks, and moral reasoning can all be used to better understand how

Barstool Sports' postings can lead to dangerous behaviors in college students who regularly engage with their content.

This research is relevant to higher education in that evaluating students' risks perceptions when consuming Barstool Sport's Instagram content may help higher education staff and faculty better understand the students they work with *and* teach in the classroom by better identifying the media outlets these students consume on a regular basis that influence how they decide whether or not to participate in risky actions. As Stimpson and Stimpson (2008, p. 15) state, "College administrators have been concerned about student misconduct for as long as students have been coming to college." The gap in research that exists surrounding students' preliminary actions that lead them to experiences in the student conduct system at their institution is highly problematic, because it fails to illuminate the underlying causes as to why students end up in the conduct system in the first place.

Barstool Sports' college life Instagram accounts provide an excellent context to examine how SCT can illuminate the relationships between students' perceptions of risk when engaging with social media and their decision-making. Barstool's Instagram accounts can be viewed as a potential catalyst for students' decision-making that then results in conflict with their institutions. I will explore Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts' relationship with college students' perception of their college life as outlined by SCT. I look to explore college students' experiences consuming and engaging with Barstool's media and how they perceive risky situations and formulate decision making through this content and in their lived experiences.

I will begin with a literature review, giving an overview of SCT and how it relates to college students' perceptions of risk and decision-making through the avenue of media consumption. I will then further discuss Barstool Sports' relationship with college students'

perceptions of risk through the consumption of and participation in their Instagram accounts. I will propose two research questions, and then present my method, data analysis, and results. The results will be followed by a discussion and implications to both the communication studies discipline as well as the field of student development. Finally, I will conclude by addressing my research's limitations and possible avenues for future inquiry.

Literature Review

Social Cognitive Theory: An Overview

SCT's (Bandura, 1986) focus on the ways media influences actions and behaviors can illuminate how and why students participate in risky behavior during their college experience. SCT stresses the importance of mass media in influencing human thought, affect, and action. It directly addresses the issues surrounding college students and the way their engagement with Instagram accounts like those of Barstool Sports affect their cognition (Bandura, 2002). SCT is derived from an agentic perspective, meaning that people are "... self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces" (Bandura, 2002, p. 121). That is, a person's agency operates in conjunction with the larger social structure of the world to formulate decision making.

Personal determinants, behavioral determinants, and environmental determinants work in tandem to determine human cognitive process (Bandura, 2002). Bandura (1989, p. 1178) explains that "... any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development because the social influences operating in the environments that are selected continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect." This means that any factor (mediated or otherwise) that influences an individual's choice behavior can cause a profound effect on their personal development moving forward. This is due to social influences (e.g. mutual friends and interpersonal relationships) that operate within a person's environment (e.g. a college campus) which they continue to accept and follow, thus promoting certain values, interests, and guidelines

(e.g. a specific campus culture that emerges) long after their decision-making has presented its initial determination in a situation concerning choice behavior.

Most external influences affect behavior through cognition rather than directly, as people are not only agents of action but also examine themselves internally in reaction to their role as human beings in daily life (Bandura, 2002). Learning can stem from observing other people's actions and the consequences they experience as a result of their actions (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). However, the media's distorted representation of social realities can promote misconceptions (Hawkins & Pingree, 1982), which can be dangerous. The more people embed their understanding of reality within what they have seen portrayed in a mediated environment, the greater the social impact of the media on those people and their lives (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

When exposed to new models of thinking and behaving, observers vary on whether they choose to adopt new standards or not (Bandura, 2002). If the new model is viewed as something that could result in a favorable outcome, the observer may adopt these characteristics to create "new blends" of personal characteristics (Bandura, 2002). Thus, when the media portrays a questionable act as one yielding favorable results, individuals might be more inclined to develop warped perceptions of social sanctions and norms around the behavior (Bandura, 2002). This can create a motivational effect that ultimately leads to unfavorable or destructive consequences.

As a result, individuals can distort the relationship between actions and actor, or who is responsible for the behavior (Bandura, 2002). People may displace responsibility by viewing their behavior as resulting from the actions of others, thus displacing personal responsibility. If a certain action is performed by a group, the likelihood of displaced responsibility is even greater (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). This is illustrated through the University of Wisconsin example

seen earlier. Because so many students were present during the event when the television was thrown off the building, SCT posits that this group action likely resulted in no one individual feeling solely responsible for the bad behavior. In addition, because of the positive emotional reaction to the behavior (seen when students cheered and celebrated the smashed television), those who had the television on the roof likely became further incentivized to throw the television over the side of the building, creating a positive but dangerous feedback loop.

Because positive feedback and reinforcement can dramatically influence human behavior, individual consequences can become distorted (Brock & Buss, 1964). When an individual attempts detrimental activity either for personal gain or as the result of social influence (e.g., receiving positive emotional response from bystanders to the act), they are more likely to recall all the possible benefits that could result from their actions, but they are less likely to remember its potential harmful effects (Brock & Buss, 1964). This is where cognitive dissonance can occur, as the behavior an individual enacts does not align with the values they normally possess in their everyday life (Festinger, 1962).

For example, when examining college student binge drinking (a decidedly risky behavior), Borsari and Carey (2001) note that direct influences on drinking behavior often come from offers of alcohol as well as encouragement from others to drink. If students believe that their friends view drinking positively or perceive their friends are heavy drinkers, they are more likely to engage in binge drinking even if they do not hold the same personal opinion on drinking (Borsari & Carey, 2001). Studies have found that individuals whose peers drink heavily and experience blackouts¹ experience an increased risk of drinking to blackout as well (Merrill,

¹ Blackout is used here and defined as “episodes of anterograde amnesia during which individuals are capable of participating in salient, emotionally charged events of which they will later have no recollection” (White, Jamieson-Drake, & Swartzwelder, 2002, p. 117)

Treloar, Fernandez, Monnig, Jackson, & Barnett, 2016; Schuckit, Smith, Heron, Hickman, Macleod, Munafo, Kendler, Dick, & Davey-Smith, 2015). Interestingly, Wombacher and colleagues (2019) found that participants' accounts of their own blackout drinking behavior evidenced experiences of cognitive dissonance, requiring participants to engage in "... sense-making exercises that enable them to rationalize their blackout drinking behavior" (p. 3).

Another example of cognitive dissonance evidenced directly from the 5thYear Instagram account took place when the Boston Red Sox won the World Series in October 2018. In their celebration, students from nearby Bridgewater State University began destroying bear sculptures on their campus. The destruction was recorded by other students and posted on the Bridgewater State Barstool Instagram feed, where it was quickly picked up by the 5thYear account, helping the video to reach nearly 1 million viewers (5thyear, 2018g). Because of these videos, Bridgewater State campus police were able to identify and arrest three students who participated in the destruction. One of the student actors was charged with vandalizing property, malicious destruction of property, and disorderly conduct (Shepard, 2018). When students were interviewed following the destruction of the campus sculptures, one student laughed and said, "Boston only had one arrest, and we probably had more than they did, so I think that's kind of funny" (Shepard, 2018). This response clearly represents a distortion of the consequences of the actions taken by students, and since this action was viewed as out-of-the-ordinary from how Bridgewater students normally act, cognitive dissonance is prevalent.

In keeping with the trend of cognitive dissonance, Bandura (2002, p. 136) notes that, "By blaming others or circumstances, not only are one's own actions excusable but one can also even feel self-righteous in the process." If no responsibility needs to be taken for the act, the individual no longer has to focus on the consequences of the risky or dangerous action. Studies

have shown that different disengagement factors, such as moral and selective disengagement, “...are systematically varied in media portrayals of inhumanities,” suggesting that the media has a significant influence on how individuals perceive and react to their own risky behaviors (Berkowitz & Green, 1967; Donnerstein, 1984; Meyer, 1972).

In adolescents, for example, previous research found that media content featuring on-screen combinations of alcohol and sex led to increased perceptions that people like them were also combining sex and alcohol, and that relevant others might approve of them engaging in such behaviors (Bleakley et al., 2017). This observational learning is also particularly relevant for adolescents who may be lacking in their own experiences in these areas thus potentially giving these mediated messages higher meaning and significance. This continues into the years of emerging adulthood as Fournier, Hall, Ricke, and Storey (2013) found that alcohol displays on social media were associated with both alcohol-related behaviors and negative outcomes. It was found that college students who viewed a profile with alcohol-related content reported greater perceived peer norms of alcohol use, lending support to a link between social media use and risky behaviors (Fournier et al., 2013).

Clearly, media holds a certain level of power to influence how some behaviors are modeled to its audience, especially when that audience lacks experiences with certain actions being modeled in these spaces (Bleakley et al., 2017). These modeling strategies motivate, inform, and enable the audience to think in new ways and adopt new practices that involve costs and risks (Bandura, 2002). But, in the case of social media, these new practices are also in the hands of an individual’s social network. When media viewers discuss and negotiate certain matters witnessed through the media with their interpersonal network, it can set in motion the course of further behavior change (Bandura, 2002). Though the media may be the initial

influence, social networks provide an even larger catalyst for development and change to occur due to collective efficacy, or “...people’s shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results...” (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). This can then influence how an individual manages their moral reasoning when it comes to behaviors they participate in after experiencing media influence or the influence of a collective group. SCT’s ideas of modeling strategies, social networks, and moral reasoning can all be used to better understand how Barstool Sports’ posts can lead to dangerous behaviors in college students who regularly view their content.

Modeling.

Many aspects of SCT can be applied to Barstool Sports’ creation of a certain culture for their consumers. As technology has continued to develop, so has the social diffusion process (Bandura, 2002). The values, ideas, and styles of conduct are being modeled worldwide through these different technologies and spread more widely than ever (Bandura, 2002). This can lead to the dangerous behaviors that can be seen through students’ actions and behaviors portrayed on their Barstool Instagram accounts. People are often led to behave in otherwise inappropriate or dangerous ways by strategies that sidestep negative self-reactions. If a new practice involves certain costs and risks, the concept of modeling identified in SCT illustrates how reluctant consumers come to see the advantages gained by those early adopters of a new technology or idea (Bandura, 2002). These models not only exemplify and legitimate potentially harmful actions, but “...also serve as advocates for them by directly encouraging others to adopt them” (Bandura, 2002, p. 141).

Shane-Simpson, Manago, Gaggi, and Gillespie-Lynch (2018, p. 277) note that “SMSs (social media sites) offer tremendous potential for self-expression, with technological affordances that draw social attention to one's thoughts, ideas, opinions, artwork, or

experiences.” Thus, social networks like Instagram provide interactive experiences that are personally tailored to the consumer and related to their behaviors of interest, whether that be the creation of a new way to design a profile, recommendations of other users to “friend” or “follow,” or new ways to edit and post photos. This tailored communication has more relevance to the consumer, making the content more memorable, and, thus, more effective at achieving influence (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014; Binns, 2014). Barstool “tailors” to its target audience of college students by representing the values, behaviors, and appearance of “true college life.” They present these extreme and often risky behaviors as the norm, and, as their network continues to grow, more college students adopt their model of college life. In accomplishing their goal, Barstool advertises their 5thYear account as being for everyone, stating, “...whether you’re a lowly freshman looking to make a name for yourself launching from a 3 story balcony to a folding table below, or a 53 year old super senior trying to get in on that last bit of college bar action before heading out into the real world, 5th Year is your go-to place to see it all” (Stone, 2017). 5thYear presents itself to its audience as the top place to see what normal college life is like, no matter where someone is in their college experience.

5thYear provides college students with a psychological motivation that can trigger certain behaviors for the chance to gain recognition, fame, and even popularity on their own campuses by being featured on their account (Bughin, 2007). Media influences are also linked to participants’ social networks, spilling over into their interpersonal relationships (Bandura, 2002). For example, students are often not just absentmindedly viewing this content on their own but rather interacting with the content by sharing it with friends, talking about it within their interpersonal networks, and even witnessing other students recording videos with the intent to submit it to Barstool. The 5thYear Instagram account is followed by more than 2 million people

(5thyear, 2018a). As the account has become more well-known, more college students are impacted by its messages. The greater the exposure to Barstool's modeled values and lifestyles, the stronger the impact to the population consuming it (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2016). Through all of this engagement, Barstool encourages this behavior, potentially influencing how students go about their social lives at their respective colleges due to the expectations and norms projected by Barstool Sports.

Although some students may initially be reluctant to create content for these accounts due to their presentation of risky behaviors, the possibility of achieving recognition and fame may motivate consumers to adopt new styles and tastes (Shao, 2009). Through the lens of SCT and modeled behavior, Instagram and other media can warp certain conduct like the actions featured on Barstool's accounts to be "...personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy..." purposes (Bandura, 2001, p. 9). The popularity of sites like that of Barstool mask the danger that comes with participating in the actions featured and finding enjoyment in consuming the content. To be featured on Barstool then, is something to be proud of, is viewed as cool, and is "socially worthy" because thousands of consumers view, like, and share the content with friends.

Even so, some college students may consume content portrayed through accounts like 5thYear without participating in the represented behaviors. Modeling influences may impede the diffusion process just as much as they may promote it (Midgley, 1976). This means that the effect the modeling influence has on the consumer could be positive, but it could also be negative depending on the specific consumer. Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood sheds light on why some students may choose to participate in these risky behaviors during their college experience while others may not. Arnett (2007) coined the term emerging adulthood to

describe those in the age range of 18-25 being neither in adolescence nor in young adulthood, but within their own distinct category. It refers to a time when many different directions to take in life are still possible, when little about one's future is decided on for certain, and when independence for exploration of life's possibilities is at its peak rather than most any other time in a person's life course (2007).

Emerging adulthood is generally characterized by instability, identity exploration, reduced parental monitoring, and a general lack of responsibilities and roles of adulthood, leading to a large amount of emotional turbulence for some college students (Nelson & Barry, 2005; Arnett, 2007). In short, this phase of life holds a high level of uncertainty, and leaves emerging adults in a state of peak "identity exploration," or "... the desire to obtain a wide range of experiences before settling down into the roles and responsibilities of adult life" (Arnett, 2000, p. 475). This time of self-discovery is marked by participating in new activities and experiences, which can result in engaging in risky behaviors in response to the emotions related to the doubts and confusion that come with an uncertain path to the future (Rivers, Brackett, Omori, Sickler, Bertoli, & Salovey, 2013) as well as a sense of urgency to try new things before becoming a "real" adult.

Arnett (2000) explained that engagement in several risky behaviors peaks during emerging adulthood. To a certain degree, emerging adults' experiences involving risk are understood as being part of their "identity explorations" because this time in emerging adults' lives are when they crave sensation seeking or the desire for new, intense, and thrilling experiences (Arnett, 1994). And because emerging adults hold a newfound level of freedom over their own decision making as they experience living independently from their parents or guardians for the first time, the ability to participate in high sensation seeking behaviors is easier

and more available to them. Barstool then promotes a riskier form of emerging adulthood to its consumers through its Instagram accounts, causing this “sensation seeking” to expand to sometimes dangerous levels.

No matter the risk involved in Barstool Sports’ media output, their media models behavior that can create new norms for their audience. However, the media does not accomplish this process alone. Without the influence of a person’s own social network, adoption of new behaviors in order to create a new norm is usually ineffective, indicating that personal networks can heavily influence whether or not an individual chooses to adopt and model the mediated messages viewed through social media.

Social Networks.

Social networks impact participation in the model of college life created by Barstool because networks affect social interactions. Here, social networks are defined as interpersonal interactions, focusing on peoples’ relationships with occupational colleagues, organizational members, kinships, friendships, and other relationships (Bandura, 2002), but when dealing with social media, these social networks can exist both in person and within online spaces.

Rosenquist, Murabito, Fowler, and Christakis (2010) found that changes in alcohol consumption within a social network had a significant effect on an individual’s alcohol consumption behavior. In the same realm, if students see fellow members of their interpersonal network adopting the behaviors seen through Barstool’s social media accounts, it may push them to follow Barstool’s content as well in order to engage in conversations regarding what is posted on the accounts (Bandura, 2002).

Once individuals begin to consume the content via Barstool’s social media accounts, they have the option to experience not just their own college environment but also the environment of

other colleges across the country. On Twitter alone, 242 colleges participate in the Barstool viceroy program (Gulczynski, 2018). Campus viceroys, a label coined by Barstool Sports' founder and president David Portnoy, are current undergraduate students hired by Barstool to manage the company's college-specific social media accounts. In describing the position, Portnoy wrote in a company blog post that Barstool Sports "...want somebody who knows what we're all about. IE – smokes, parties, sports and anything else that a typical Stoolie needs to know about on campus. Funny, controversial, whatever..." (Portnoy, 2017). These campus viceroy profiles are public and can be viewed by anyone, creating a virtual network that provides "...a flexible means for creating diffusion structures to serve given purposes, expanding their membership, [and] extending them geographically..." (Bandura, 2002, p. 149). In hiring campus viceroys, Portnoy seeks students who know the Barstool Sports culture and are willing to capture it in action on their college campuses. Campus viceroys work to serve this purpose and expand the network of those who follow the account, including current members of campus, alumni, students from other campuses, and even prospective high school students exploring future college options.

Through the campus viceroy program, Barstool's preference for risky behaviors continue to be modeled. In this way, Barstool creates an online "community" for its users by intentionally growing its entertainment platform (van Dijck, 2009, p.45). Though communities are usually thought of as in-person groups, digital media conceptualizes communities more broadly, and Barstool Sports provides an online space for people from across the world to interact with those who share the same entertainment interests. As a result, the risky behaviors displayed on these platforms could lead to an expanded online community due to the large viewership on the Instagram accounts; but that online community could also merit unwanted online attention,

presenting its own possibilities for further risk, especially for someone who possibly did not consent to a video or photo being sent in to a Barstool account (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2007; Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007).

Another potential risk arising from Barstool's viceroy model is the possible online harassment those featured on the accounts may receive from followers of the content, such as negative comments left on the featured post. And, if what is being performed in the video or photo is against campus policies at the university the individual in the post attends, it could lead to issues with their institution and not just their online persona. Though most of 5thYear's captions do not contain the account name of the person(s) featured in the video, more often than not, a quick scroll through the comments makes it easy to identify who is featured in the post. Especially for a person who did not consent to being featured on the account, any possibility of anonymity is lost, and although the person featured in the video can work to get the video taken down if they wish, the damage of thousands of consumers already viewing the content and fellow social networks "outing" the person in the video may have already occurred.

Social influence does not end with just the people one knows, it has the potential to affect people an individual has not even met (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Christakis & Fowler (2009) identified what they termed hyper dyadic spread within social networks, or "... the tendency of effects to spread from person to person to person, beyond an individual's direct social ties" (p. 22). This suggests that social network effects, models, and norms can travel extensively through the network far beyond an individual's direct social ties. In this way, the network does have a life of its own. Social networks develop properties and functions that are not controlled by those within them, nor are they even perceived as specific properties and functions of the network (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). The "tailoring" of various behaviors, actions, and values developed

through these Barstool accounts occurs through a game of imitation. Countless videos posted on these accounts seem to all look the same or have similar outcomes, but where these properties and functions are normalized is not as clear, nor is the coordination of it very controlled. Hyper dyadic spreads make it difficult to know where the behavior, action, etc. originated because it is spread through so many people and thus, so many social ties (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). But because of its popularity through countless social networks, it is consistently imitated, viewed as positive, and then normalized.

Even so, evidence indicates that the strongest network ties carry the greatest influence for whether or not an individual adopts new behaviors (Weimann, 1980). Nevertheless, an individual's larger online community still plays a role in new behaviors they may adopt. Weimann (1980) suggests a division of labor that exists between a person's weak ties and strong ties. Weak ties refer to a person's acquaintances; those one does not consider to be the closest members of their social network. Strong ties, conversely, refers to those in a social network that an individual considers a close friend. Hence, the concepts of strong and weak ties; there is a stronger relationship with strong ties, and a weaker relationship with weak ties. (Granovetter, 1983). The weak ties provide the bridge over which the new modeling strategy becomes apparent to one's social group, but the true decision making of whether to adopt this new model is mainly influenced by the strong ties in one's closest social network.

This can create a process of continually perpetuating the behavior portrayed in Barstool Instagram videos because of the possible influence one's social network has on whether or not to adopt new models of behavior. This may not necessarily mean adopting the behaviors being portrayed but could at the very least influence others to take part in passive viewership of the content. Bandura (2002, p. 148) also notes that "...although they share a common bond to the

media source, most members of an electronic community may never see each other...” and yet, they are still connected. Others on campus may see a video posted from their institution and feel as though they “know” a member of their college community without ever interacting with or seeing them in person. Because humans are affected by “...our embeddedness in social networks and influenced by others who are closely or distantly tied to us, we necessarily lose some power over our own decisions” (Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. xii). This is not to say that all human agency is lost, nor is it to say that this power is always a negative force. Christakis & Fowler (2009) point out that although this loss of control could provoke fairly strong reactions from people who discover that even strangers can influence their behaviors, the “flip side” of this realization is that a person’s individual influence can move beyond personal limitations. Whether that is with good intention or bad is up to the individual, just as how a consumer decides to engage with Barstool’s content in a positive or negative way is up to each individual who decides to consume it.

Though strong ties are most influential with regards to behavior change, Barstool’s Instagram following creates a unique online community for its consumers that perpetuates risky and dangerous behaviors by providing a space where those actions are normalized, accepted, and even encouraged. As a result, not only college students but also high school students can become a part of Barstool’s “membership,” influencing potential incoming students and their perceptions of college norms even before stepping foot on campus. Stampler (2015) interviewed prospective college students, and several students acknowledged that they used Instagram to view current students’ profiles in order to better understand the campus culture, especially if they were unable to physically visit the campus. Joly (2016) found that this helps prospective students to see what life is really like at the institution as well as the activities students tend to take part in (Joly,

2016). This “real and raw” example of what the college is actually like can sometimes lead to prospective students viewing current students’ profiles that include pictures or videos that feature risky behaviors like partying and binge drinking (Stampler, 2015).

As a result, Barstool Sports can give prospective students a warped perception of college life. If these prospective students use Barstool accounts to find the “best” school with the most entertaining videos, they may go on to perpetuate the modeling seen in Barstool, potentially creating more content for the company once they enroll at any given university. Thus, the concept of what is considered “cool” for each institution continues on a never-ending loop of destructive actions. Lack of moral reasoning is prevalent in this decisioning making, even when those featured in these videos and posts do not mirror these dangerous morals in their daily lives. This is where moral and selective disengagement can be seen occurring, and further influences students’ decision making of whether or not to engage in risky behaviors.

Moral/Selective Disengagement.

Moral and selective disengagement are not actions that happen instantaneously. Moral disengagement is change in morals that gradually occurs, and people may not even fully recognize the changes they are undergoing (Bandura, 1991b). As Bandura (1991b, p. 93) explains, “... after their discomfort and self-reproof have been diminished through repeated performances, the level of reprehensibility progressively increases until eventually acts originally regarded as abhorrent can be performed without much distress.” In short, moral disengagement occurs when an individual works through their initial discomfort with a certain performance until they reach the place where their behavior is no longer regarded as wrong or unjust and gives them no signs of distress. Selective disengagement, on the other hand, occurs when people who

would otherwise behave in ethical ways instead perpetuate transgressions in isolated areas of their lives (Bandura, 1999; Zimbardo, 1995).

Moral and selective disengagement occur with an initial lack in moral judgement (Bandura, 1991a). Moral judgement relates to the rightness or wrongness of conduct that an individual evaluates when exercising moral agency against their own personal standards, situational circumstances, and self-sanctions (Bandura, 1991b). Moral development occurs in tandem with moral judgement. As defined by Patton and colleagues (2016, p. 336), moral development focuses on the process through which college students "...develop more complex principles and ways of reasoning about what is right, just, and caring." Moral judgment is exercised when students choose whether or not to follow the modeling of college life that Barstool presents on its Instagram accounts. This can be seen through the example of the student vandalism at Bridgewater State University where some students stressed that their fellow students should have acted more respectfully and that "...the actions of a few do not speak for the entire student body" (Shepard, 2018).

Both moral judgment and development look within the self and one's self-regulatory mechanisms (Bandura, 1991a). But moral standards do not function as internal regulators of conduct (Bandura, 2001), meaning that although an individual may face inhumane conduct, they may not necessarily follow their moral standards and act against this conduct, warping whether moral development or regression are present (Bandura, 2001). Through the Bridgewater State example, it is clear that some students reacted to the events with their moral standards in mind, while others chose to disengage from these standards. As a Bridgewater State student noted, there may not have been the initial intention for events to escalate to what ended up being full-blown vandalism (Shepard, 2018). This shows that though students may have gone into the

celebratory event with their moral agency intact, selective disengagement moved them to commit transgressions they would not normally have done given different situational constraints.

SCT says that modeling influences can serve diverse functions. Consumers can be motivated to enact future behaviors consuming these modeled influences. These different functions can motivate, inhibit, socially prompt, arouse emotions, and shape values and conceptions of reality (Bandura, 2002). With the environment surrounding these events at Bridgewater State University being welcomed with cheers and people pulling out their phones to record the events, students responsible for this act can gain inflated and unstably high sense of self-esteem. As a result, students with excessively high self-esteem brought on by the reinforcement of others refuse to accept or are unable to believe that they will suffer negative consequences or that they are actually responsible for the potential harmful outcomes that may affect themselves or others due to their behavior (Rivers et al., 2013).

For example, one 5thYear Instagram post depicts a student drinking a full bottle of rum in a matter of a few seconds. At the end of the video, the camera zooms in on another student looking astonished, mouth open wide in shock over the other student's action. The accompanying caption reads, "This is what happens when you mix midterms and thirsty Thursday together" (5thyear, 2018e). Through this example, these potential injurious effects of binge drinking are minimized through the diffusion of risk perception. Displacement of responsibility is also present through the caption. It is not the student's fault that they are drinking this way; if only it were not the stressful season of midterm exams in combination with "Thirsty Thursday," behaviors of this nature would perhaps not occur.

It is impossible to make an accurate assumption of this student's moral judgment through this brief video, but an assumption is present, nonetheless, as moral and selective disengagement

take place. Although this student could have a perfect grade point average and be positively involved in campus activities, he can still disengage from these moral standards when exposed to the modeling presented by Barstool's Instagram accounts. Through selective disengagement of moral agency, this example shows a possible "transgression" that may go against the other spheres of this student's regular life. With his engagement in clear alcohol "misuse," or consuming alcohol in a way likely to produce negative consequence (Novik & Boekeloo, 2013), a transgression takes place.

Because college students can view this media through Instagram, the mediated screen also allows individuals to further disengage by potentially choosing to ignore bad behavior – whether it be their own or others' (Chan, 2006). This disengagement allows the consumer to feel very little responsibility in the act as merely one of many viewers of the content. But they are, in some way, responsible, no matter what behavior is happening. If what is being viewed on the Instagram account challenges a consumer's morals, then a problem exists nevertheless because no movement to change the content is occurring. A model is continuing to be accepted as others adopt the media by engaging with it further through following, liking, commenting and sharing the account's content with others. A model can be seen through Barstool that sends a message to their audience that although consumers may not participate in the risky behaviors, they can still be a part of the "in" group by commenting on, liking, and sharing the content.

The Digital Bystander.

When one convinces themselves that certain ethical standards in a given situation or particular context do not apply, moral disengagement occurs to justify the actions being performed by an individual (Bandura, 1999). It is promoted by diffused and displaced responsibility (and in some cases, risk) where people view themselves far more as instruments

(or bystanders to the act) rather than active agents in their moral judgment (Bandura, 1990). Modeling strategies seen through Barstool's Instagram accounts present harmful conduct as being both personally and socially acceptable (Bandura, 2001). Barstool cognitively restructures the dangerous conduct seen in their Instagram videos by accompanying the videos with witty captions that distract or justify the behavior being portrayed, thus presenting the videos as satire.

Moral disengagement occurs here because the change in morality is gradual. Though a new consumer of Barstool's content may find the captions and videos problematic, as they continue to engage with the content, moral disengagement becomes normalized, unnoticeable, and no longer distressing. For example, Pornari, Chrysoula, and Wood (2010) note that when it comes to students in secondary schools who participate in cyber-bullying, the anonymity, distance from the victim, and the consequences of the act likely cause the cyber bullies to experience fewer negative feelings towards their actions and suffer deficits in empathy with the victim. Being behind a screen is a safer place, and it makes the gradualness of moral disengagement easier. Similar to that of cyber-bullying, the anonymity of being simply a consumer rather than a participant in the actions seen in the postings on Barstool's Instagram accounts provides consumers with a place where they can be a bystander while not actually witnessing the act in person. Therefore, there is no action that needs to take place other than being a passive viewer through a phone screen. This means that the online space provides consumers with a sense of validation that they are not wrong for merely engaging with the content for entertainment purposes, absolving them of any potential guilt regarding their participation in the problems that exist within the posts.

The same can be said for those who record videos or take photos of students without their consent with the goal of sending the content to Barstool. Because submitting the content happens

through an online space, there is distance that the one sending in the content can have from the one featured in the content, while still being able to reap the rewards of having a submission featured. Thus, there is minimal responsibility the recorder has to take on, and in some cases, no consequences either.

Following the collection of the research provided in my literature focusing on SCT including modeling, social networks, and moral/selective disengagement, as well as the impact of the digital bystander promoting further risk in these Instagram accounts, I pose the following research question:

RQ1: How does Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college-student-produced videos model destructive and risky behaviors?

Barstool Sports' Media Influence on College Students' Risk and Decision Making

The new model of those performing destructive and risky behaviors in the college setting promoted by Barstool creates a dangerous and easily accessible “in” group to adopt and belong. Through their social media presence, consumers can follow more than 700 Barstool-associated social media accounts (Everett, 2018). Barstool Sports prides itself on satire and coverage of a variety of topics across multiple media platforms, from sports and athletes as well as reviews regarding the best pizza, current events, and popular culture (Spargo, 2016; Burns, 2017). Fans range in age but stand by the company and their branding with an audience viewership age range that predominately includes 18- to 49-year-olds (Everett, 2018). Though not much audience demographic knowledge is made public by Barstool, those featured on Barstool's Instagram accounts are usually younger adults. A quick social media search of #SaturdaysAreForTheBoys – a well-known hashtag founded by a Barstool employee – illuminates “...various shenanigans,

beer chugging, and alcohol-induced tomfoolery...” by those who mark the hashtag in their postings, some as young as middle-school-aged students (alcohol excluded) (Burns, 2017).

Informally scrolling through the “following” list on Barstool’s 5thYear account (content and accounts that the 5thYear page follows/consumes) reveals almost 300 accounts devoted to specific colleges across the country (5thyear, 2018a). Students attending colleges with a Barstool-affiliated Instagram account take part in submitting short video clips regularly of themselves and other students doing wild, crude, and oftentimes dangerous acts on or around their campus.

As previously mentioned, for students who send in submissions and consent to videos and photos being filmed of them, to be featured on Barstool is a great honor, as it can result in instant, albeit short-lived, fame. A large aspect of this media outlet is that much if not all of the content posted and shared by these Barstool accounts comes from the audience members (the followers) themselves. With Barstool’s continuous, growing popularity as well as the immense following that the 5thYear Instagram account has, Barstool holds the standard of “popularity” and “clout” among college students (Kang, 2017). The personal Instagram accounts for each school are followed by thousands of students who attend. Hillsdale College, a school of approximately 1500, for example, had 1400 followers on its Barstool-affiliated account before it existed for even one full year (Schuster, 2018). So one can imagine, to be featured on the main college account, 5thYear would mean to be seen, liked, and shared with millions.

Social media also has the ability to provide a space where users can portray various versions of themselves online to these groups of friends/followers who view their content (Greenwood, 2013). These various versions of oneself can portray dangerous, risky, and even offensive behaviors, especially when featured on 5thYear’s account. One video on the account

shows a young male student throwing an empty handle at the side of a residence hall only to accidentally smash a nearby window. The accompanying caption reads, “No security deposit is safe with Brad around” (5thyear, 2018d). Another shows a banner hanging over a fraternity house on Ohio University’s campus, stating, “We can’t stick our fist in ur personality.” The accompanying caption on the Instagram post reads, “This year is going to be something special @barstooloh” (5thyear, 2018c). The 5thYear Instagram account, college-affiliated accounts, and the main Barstool Sports Instagram page provide a space where risky behavior is not only encouraged, but glamorized as being the experience of the normal, everyday, college student.

Though the college-affiliated accounts are tailored to each college’s campus environment and culture, 5thYear provides consumers with “...the best college content from across the nation, DAILY...” (Stone, 2017). Many of these short videos leave the viewer wondering about the final outcome for the students featured. Have they been seriously injured? Did they face repercussions from their university? Were they hospitalized due to their binge drinking? Though the students featured in the videos know the outcome, the outside viewers may never discover the end result. This can lead to dangerous risk taking for little gain and more possible conduct issues for those associated with or featured in the videos.

Risk and Decision Making.

Through the examples from Barstool’s 5thYear Instagram account, it is clear that many videos exist with students performing risky behaviors in order to be featured on social media. Much of the research surrounding risk communication and social media studies how these certain social networking sites utilize the media to communicate risk to their viewing audience. Lin and Spence (2018) note that with the rise of social media, the way people communicate and process information has been altered within many contexts, which could either “...facilitate or

thwart the public's risk resilience and information processing" (p. 462). Through the modeling Barstool has created through their Instagram accounts, the information processing of risk is largely missing. When these accounts post students doing these risky behaviors, the captions accompanying the videos promote satire that serves to comfort the audience and guide the consumer away from noticing an issue involving risk and potentially dangerous outcomes.

What can be seen to some extent are consumers of Barstool's Instagram content using some warranting theory that accompanies risk communication. Walther and Parks (2002) explain that individuals tend to value information that is perceived to be immune to its sources' manipulation. Students follow these accounts because of the "realness" of the videos they see. They could see posts featuring their friends, those they may not know but are recorded on a part of campus they are familiar with or while wearing memorabilia from the certain institution, or themselves for that matter. In cyberspace, Walther and Parks (2002) explain, this is not an easy feat as the connection between self and the self-presentation seen online becomes altered.

Having the identifier of someone a student knows or someone that is a friend of a friend can help to make the accounts legitimate and further condone the behaviors in the videos as that of typical college students. However, the degree of warranting the consumer willing to attribute to the online presentation being viewed is completely up to viewer (Walther & Parks, 2002). Perhaps there is a level of suspicion that can arise where a consumer may feel as though they are being deceived by a video. An example of this can be seen from a video posted on Barstool Sport's Instagram page of a man drinking more than a liter of vodka (barstoolsports, 2018). In the video, the viewer can see the man cracking the seal of the bottle, but at one point in the video, the bottle is removed from the shot as the man takes a bite out of a banana. It is then brought back in view once the man begins drinking the entire bottle. Many viewers commented

on the video, assessing it to be fake due to the bottle being removed from the shot and suggesting that the bottle might actually be filled with water rather than vodka (barstoolsports, 2018).

Although many of the behaviors featured on these accounts are accepted at face value, consumers still take notice of videos or pictures that are too far out of their range of believability. Nonetheless, with much of the content on these Instagram pages featuring destructive or risky behaviors – no matter how “real” or “unreal” they are – they still present a risk that holds no moral or ethical backing.

As is evident, the role and use of social media bring along many challenges including ethical issues. Gehner and Oughton (2016) note that there are more generic risks in social media like that of the “consideration of the societal risks and consequences” (p. 188), including there being a risk that the communication/information is misunderstood or misused. Along with this misuse, there is the potential for rumors, ‘trolling’, harassment, etc. that can come with misusing information presented via social media (Gehner & Oughton, 2016). This can affect those featured in these videos posted by Barstool Instagram accounts. Much like that of the example of the female student who just narrowly avoided being hit with a television that was dropped from a fraternity building (Badgerbarstool, 2018), the affects that come with this misuse of the video resulted in the institution having to take conduct action against students who were involved in the incident (Channel 3000, 2018). The university spokesperson Meredith McGlone expressed that student organizations were responsible for maintaining the health and safety of their guests, but it seems that the larger concern at the time was to view the risk of falling televisions in a comedic light, something to joke about, and not be taken all that seriously.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the US Department of Health and Human Services, for example, released a humorous awareness campaign advertisement in

May 2011 about the appropriate measures to take to prepare for a zombie apocalypse. The advertisement, though joking in tone, emphasized that if viewers are prepared for a zombie apocalypse, they should also be prepared for more realistic natural disasters that may take place (Khan, 2011). The campaign grew to be wildly popular, spreading across several social media platforms (Ragan Training, n.d.). Because of the outlandish nature of the advertisement, humor was accepted in the situation and attracted viewers, because the truth of the matter is that fear of a zombie apocalypse for large populations is fictional and merely exists in the shows a person chooses to watch. But whether the advertisement actually made viewers become more prepared for possible, real disasters that could happen was not as clear (Fraustino & Ma, 2015).

The actions broadcasted in 5thYear's Instagram videos do not hold this same artificiality that can bring humor through unrealistic situations – the videos, people, and occurrences being shown *are* real and *do* actually happen. Yet, viewers of the content do not respond by taking measures to behave safely on their campuses. In fact, videos of this nature only seem to catalyze other student viewers to produce more content of the same nature. Those that view these videos or participate in their actions may be unrealistically optimistic in assuming that, even though they are performing these risky acts, there will not be any serious consequences. Several studies (Radcliffe & Klein, 2002; Cho, Lee, & Chung, 2010; Sharot, 2011) show that people's judgements of risk are optimistically biased. That is, those who hold this optimistic bias tend to believe that their own chances of experiencing health and safety problems are less than that of their peers (Weinstein, 1984). There is a level of egocentrism that exists in this risk judgement when individuals believe that their level of risk is less than that of others. It does not always come from a place of legitimate evidence, but a belief that they are less likely to receive consequences in the face of risk due to their own accreditations. They fail to acknowledge or

even ask themselves whether other people may have as many or in some cases more factors than they themselves to make them less susceptible to certain risky instances or experiences (Weinstein, 1984).

With videos of students performing risky acts being submitted constantly to 5thYear, it is clear that little to no accountability is being acknowledged by those who record, participate, and view the posts. Gehner and Oughton (2016) note that accountability within social media outlets “means to anticipate and own the impact of an engagement, and if the impact is negative, to present apologies to social media communities or individual members and to try and fix the problem” (p. 190). What is missing within this is that those who are choosing to produce this content do not see a problem that needs to be fixed, nor does 5thYear feel the need to apologize for broadcasting these behaviors and maintaining them on a constant loop.

This is where selective disengagement takes place. Students posting these videos may know to some extent that the actions they present are negative, but the environment in which it takes place clouds sound reasoning to act morally. Social influences operate in “... selected environments to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect” (Bandura, 2001, p. 10). In short, if a student continues to participate in their college environment using the modelled lens promoted by Barstool Sports, then they will continue to disengage from appropriate moral reasoning in order to perpetuate the values and interests being popularized online. The viewership, likes, and comments on a post from a Barstool account supersedes the need to engage in better moral reasoning and decision making, no matter if a consumer is one that takes part in these risky actions or merely views it happening through the account or on their own college campus.

As a result of the extant literature surrounding SCT in reference specifically to modeling, social networks, and moral/selective disengagement, as well as literature involving risk and Barstool Sports' influence on a younger, college-aged viewing audience, I pose the following research question:

RQ2: How do Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts influence college-aged consumers' perceptions of risk and decision making in the college experience?

Method

Researcher Positionality

I am a White, heterosexual, cisgender female, and I have lived in the northeastern United States for most of my life prior to moving to the mountain region of the United States for my Master's program. Prior to conducting this research study, I was an undergraduate student at a small, private, liberal arts college in Massachusetts which has its own Barstool-affiliated Instagram account. At this university, students engaged with Barstool Sports' media in a variety of ways, such as listening to podcasts, purchasing merchandise, and following Barstool accounts on Instagram and Twitter, to name a few.

I believe that Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts influenced my college career despite the fact that I did not personally follow the accounts until I made the decision to study these accounts further during my Master's program. I have had friends who have been featured on these accounts and even have a friendship with someone from high school who now works specifically with Barstool Sports' campus viceroy program. My experiences with the Instagram accounts, my past research into Barstool Sports' podcasts and their silencing of female voices in the sports industry, as well as the experiences mutual friends have had with their various social media ultimately led to my interest in conducting qualitative research to learn more about how past and present undergraduates perceive Barstool's Instagram content and how it affects their views of risk and decision making. Through conversations with friends and colleagues about their experiences with consuming Barstool Sport's content as well as being a part of the content (whether as someone recording or actively being in the video or photo), I heard stories in which students shared both negative and positive experiences with Barstool's content.

I hope to enter the professional sector of higher education in the realm of student affairs and student life. I feel that students' engagement with social media is an important issue that merits greater research and attention in order for student affairs professionals to better understand the decision-making processes of their students when risk is involved in that decision making. I entered into the original research project in hope of better understanding how students perceived risk when consuming Barstool's content and how it further affected their decision making.

Research Protocol

In order to participate in the study, participants needed to be current undergraduate students at a university in the United States or a recent graduate no more than three years post-graduation. The three-year limit ensured that participants had experience with Barstool's Instagram accounts during their college experience, as the rise in popularity for the accounts has mainly been in the last 5 years. All participants had to have consumed Barstool's Instagram content for at least six months while they attended college, ensuring that Barstool's content was a part of every participants' college experiences. Additionally, all participants had to follow at least two of Barstool Sports-affiliated Instagram accounts, including @barstoolsports, @5thYear, @chicks, or any Barstool accounts affiliated with specific universities (e.g., @zoomass for University of Massachusetts Amherst; @woobarstool for Worcester State University).

Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed ranging in age from 19 to 25 ($M = 22.2$, $SD = 2.04$). 86.67% of participants identified as White, with the remaining 13.33% of participants identifying as Hispanic/Latinx. 66.67% of participants identified as male, and 33.33% of participants identified as female. 20% of participants identified as part of the LGBTQ+

community, while the remaining 80% of participants identified as heterosexual. 40% of participants were currently attending an undergraduate institution and varied in their expected graduation year, while 60% of participants were recent graduates (2016-2018). Participants attended several different universities located in the northeastern as well as the mountain west regions of the United States. The following table gives an overview of each participant’s demographical information along with their pseudonym assigned to them for this study in order to keep anonymity.

Table 1. <i>Participant Background Information</i>		
Participant 1	Ben	Ben identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2017. He is 24 years old and engages with the following Barstool Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @5thyear, and his college’s affiliated Barstool account
Participant 2	Brian	Brian identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private, engineering university in 2016. He is 24 years old and engages with the following Barstool Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @5thyear, and @chicks
Participant 3	Greg	Greg identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2016. He is 25 and consumes the following Barstool Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @5thyear, his college’s affiliated Barstool account, and another Barstool account for a different university he did not attend. He followed @chicks in the past, but no longer follows the account.
Participant 4	Paul	Paul identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2018. He is 22 years old and engages with the following Barstool Instagram accounts: @5thyear, @chicks, and his college’s affiliated Barstool account
Participant 5	James	James identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2016. He is 24 years old and engages with @barstoolsports, @5thyear, and @chicks

Participant 6	Kyle	Kyle identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2017. He is 23 years old and engages with @barstoolsports and @5thyear
Participant 7	Chris	Chris identifies as a straight, White male who anticipates graduating in 2019 from his small, private college. He is 22 and engages with the following Barstool Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @5thyear, and his college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 8	Will	Will identifies as a straight, White male who graduated from a small, private college in 2017. He is 23 years old and engages with @barstoolsports, @5thyear, @chicks, and his college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 9	Katie	Katie is a member of the LGBTQA+ community. She identifies as female and is Hispanic. She graduated in 2017 from a small, private college and is 24 years old. She engages with @5thyear and @chicks Instagram accounts.
Participant 10	Brittany	Brittany is a straight, White female who anticipates graduate in 2019 from her small, private college. She is 22 years old and engages with the following Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @5thyear, @chicks, and her college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 11	Sarah	Sarah is a straight, White female who anticipates graduating in 2021 from her large, public university. She is 19 years old and engages with @barstoolsports, @chicks, and her college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 12	Scott	Scott is a straight, White male who anticipates graduating in 2023 from his large, public university. He is 19 years old and engages with @barstoolsports and his college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 13	David	David is a straight, White male who graduated in 2018 from a small, private college. He is 23 years old and engages with @barstoolsports, @chicks, and his college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 14	Leah	Leah is a Hispanic/Latina female who identifies as bisexual. She is 20 years old and anticipates graduating in 2021 from her large, public university. She engages with @5thyear and her college's affiliated Barstool account
Participant 15	Ellen	Ellen is a White female who identifies as gay. She is 19 years old and anticipates graduating in 2022 from her large, public

university. She engages with the following Instagram accounts: @barstoolsports, @chicks, and her college's affiliated Barstool account.

Interview Procedures

I chose to use qualitative data as to collect rich, insightful, and personal experiences participants have had when consuming different Barstool Instagram accounts. This research method provides “critical intelligence” to the topic at hand, creating a space for moral critiques from participants’ responses (Schwandt, 1996). The use of qualitative research methods also allowed more opportunity for participants to further elaborate on their experiences, as well as provide area for clarification when answering prompted questions. These interviews provided better insight into personal experience with the content, as well as further understanding of the emotional verbal and nonverbal reactions that came with consuming this content on a regular basis (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

Upon obtaining the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants were solicited through a variety of outlets, including email blasts, social media posts, on-campus flyers, in-class announcements, and referral sampling methods, where existing participants were asked to recruit future participants via their close friends or acquaintances that also followed the social media accounts. Interviews were completed across a variety of mediums, including via Google Hangout (a video chatting service), phone call, or through in-person interviews. Interviews ranged from 13:26 to 43:13 minutes in length ($M = 26.30$, $SD = 9.24$). Upon completion of the interview, participants received a \$10 Amazon e-gift card for their participation in the study. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached.

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol that focused on participants' Barstool Sports Instagram consumption habits and risk perceptions. This protocol was used in order to maintain some consistency over certain topics addressed in each interview. This ensured that participants felt free to add any other comments that they felt may be relevant to the discussion at hand. This also provided space for the interviewer to ask additional questions and probe further into certain topics discussed in participant interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The interview protocol was divided into seven main topics: introduction and consumption habits (e.g., "How did you hear about Barstool?" and "Which of the Instagram accounts do you follow (@chicks, @barstoolsports, @5thYear, or a college-affiliated Barstool account?"); perception of the different Barstool Sports media (e.g., "What is your overall perception of each of the accounts you follow?"); personal interaction with the media and possible repercussions faced (e.g., "Have you every submitted a video to Barstool?" and "Did you receive any repercussions from your institution because of the post?"); mutual friends' interactions with the media and possible repercussions faced (e.g. "Has someone you know ever had their submission featured on one of these Instagram accounts?" and "Did they receive any repercussions from their institution because of the post(s)?"); personal consumption habits (e.g. "What are the videos or photos that you usually like or at least view and perceive as entertaining on these accounts consist of?"); influence and impact (e.g. "Do you think that these Instagram accounts have an influence on how students perceive college life?" and "Do you think that these Instagram accounts portray college life accurately?"); and concluding comments (e.g. "What other interactions have you had with this media that we may not have touched upon?"). Participants also were asked to provide demographic information including age, race, gender, sexual

orientation, their affiliated undergraduate institution (either past or present), and their graduation or expected graduation year.

Observational Procedures

In addition to in-depth interviews, participants who completed their research session in-person were invited to participate in an observational research component. The goal of these observations was to see how participants interact with Barstool Instagram accounts through engaging in the content by liking, commenting, or sharing content with friends via Instagram in real time. Participants were audio recorded and asked to scroll through the Instagram feed of one of the Barstool accounts they followed of their own choosing (@chicks, @barstoolsports, @5thyear, or other college-affiliated Barstool accounts). These observations were done for about 10 minutes, and participants were asked to explain each of the videos or photos they were viewing and pay attention to what they were choosing to engage with or not engage with through liking, sharing, or commenting on a post. Four observations were conducted with four different participants (Katie, Leah, Scott, and Ellen).

As they scrolled through one of the Barstool Sports Instagram accounts, participants were asked about the different video or photo content they chose to view; what their reactions were to this content; and what actions they may take after viewing it. They were also asked to articulate why they enjoyed/did not enjoy certain content; what they felt when engaging with this content; why they chose to interact with the posting in this way (liking, only viewing, sharing, commenting, etc.); and if they would normally do anything else when interacting with this content.

Analysis

Once all interviews were completed, I used thematic decomposition analysis as it “...identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorizes language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The goal of this analysis is to help identify key themes throughout each interview and to examine the “...ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (p. 81). These key themes captured important aspects of participants’ responses that relate to the two primary research questions guiding this study. A theoretical approach was taken in order to keep in mind key themes revolving around SCT including moral and ethical disengagement, social networks, and modeling as well as various themes of my research topic including participants’ risk perceptions, consumption habits, decision making, etc.

Once participant interviews and observations were completed, analysis began. To accomplish the first step of thematic analysis (familiarization with the data; Braun & Clarke, 2006), approximately 12 of the completed interviews were transcribed in whole in order to best visualize all potential themes throughout the audio recordings (approximately 100 transcript pages). The interview transcripts were read through several times and coded to pull out generalized features of the data that were of interest to the study. These features were the most basic and refer to “...the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). These included key words or phrases that were used repeatedly across participant interviews, as well as commonly agreed upon ideas and opinions that participants shared. Through the component of meaningful coherence in qualitative data, key words and phrases were organized into the following table (Table 2) in order to better visualize the key themes and simplify the data set (Tracy & Rivera, 2010).

Initial codes were then generated in the second step of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) after color-coding certain sentences, phrases, stories, and narratives throughout interview transcripts that related to one another. Once these initial codes were found through the transcripts, they were clustered into key sentences or phrases that best encompassed the coded data and began to compose the elements of a specific theme in the data set.

Once initial codes were noted, the codes were organized into most relevant codes as well as specific groupings of common themes depending on the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes were combined in order to create and uncover main, overarching themes and possible sub-themes that had arisen from the various interview participants. Most codes were combined with two to three initial codes that were originally uncovered due to underlined quotations in interviews transcripts holding similar phrases and commonalities.

Once main overarching and sub-themes were identified, all collated extracts for each theme were reread to consider whether they appeared to form a coherent pattern with the certain research question it was initially assigned to. In this fourth stage (2006), some themes held data extracts that no longer fit together coherently or were found to fit better elsewhere. Because some themes did not fit together coherently, they were reworked to create a new theme and certain extracts from the data were placed with a different, pre-existing theme(s). Some of these themes began to exist more clearly within the differing research question's themes or the miscellaneous section. Once these themes were reworked accordingly, they were looked at in relation to the entire data set, including the research questions presented for the study as well as the core concepts of the research; including modeling, social networks, moral/selective disengagement, and risk and decision making.

Once a satisfactory thematic mapping of the data had been finalized and had been placed with the most relevant corresponding research question or was defined as being best suited for further exploration in the discussion section, each theme was defined in order to best identify the “essence” of what each theme was about (2006). These themes were reviewed to explore what was captured in relation to the research questions, theory, and concepts being utilized. This was discovered through re-reading the most relevant quotations underlined in the interview transcriptions and having the quotations pulled out of the transcripts and collated together in one document.

In total, the analysis and coding of the interview transcripts took approximately 20 hours. The following table (Table 2) shows the development of each code into specific themes, with first initial codes, then combinations of two to three codes with additional notes and questions, followed by the finalized themes and its corresponding research question.

Table 2.

Initial and Final Codes for Research Questions 1 and 2

	<u>RQ1 Codes</u>	<u>RQ2 Codes</u>	<u>Unrelated Findings/Miscellaneous</u>
First Round: Initial Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appeal to a younger viewing audience (elementary – high school-aged consumers) - Promoting college environment of always looking to record and perform risky actions - Normalizing imitation of dangerous acts in order to be featured - Representation of small fraction of college life (i.e. “partying” culture) - Showcase drinking culture that influences decision-making, leading to more content produced - Promoting college environment of always looking to record and perform risky actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledgement of risky/destructive behaviors being featured, but continuing to watch content because of entertainment and engagement factors - Being featured on Barstool = clout, pride, popularity, fame - Knowing someone and being on Barstool = Cool - Promotes social networking – both virtually and physically in person with friends and followers of the content - Use of captions/comments to deescalate risky media - Humor found in risky media = entertainment - Personal moral/ethical implications – college’s mission? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barstool creating masculine-focused attraction to media - Media submissions sent without consent from those featured - Sexualization and vulgarity towards women featured on accounts - Online bullying culture
Second Round: Combining Similar Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representation of small fraction of college life (i.e. “partying” culture) AND Appeal to a younger viewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being featured on Barstool = clout, pride, popularity, fame AND Knowing someone and being on Barstool = Cool AND Promotes social networking – both virtually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barstool creating masculine-focused attraction to media AND Sexualization and vulgarity towards women featured on accounts

	<p>audience (elementary – high school-aged consumers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Showcase drinking culture that influences decision-making, leading to more content produced AND Normalizing imitation of dangerous acts in order to be featured - Promoting college environment of always looking to record and perform risky actions AND Media submissions sent without consent from those featured 	<p>and physically in person with friends and followers of the content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Humor found in risky (and “cringy”) media = entertainment – MOST of the time - Acknowledgement of risky/destructive behaviors being featured, but continuing to watch content because of entertainment and engagement factors – issues of dissonance? AND sexualization of women featured on accounts - Use of captions/comments to deescalate risky media – selective disengagement? - Personal moral/ethical implications/selective disengagement from college’s mission and conduct
<p>Third Round: Finalized Themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Glorifying college stereotypes as the “norm” - Imitation and “one upping” to be featured - Surveillance and vigilance in college/Barstool world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barstool for “coolness” factor bringing popularity and social clout - Dissonance from personal morals - A balancing act of “entertaining” risk - Recognition of (unexpected/expected) negatives of Barstool features - Selective disengagement associated to a college’s student expectations

In the last stage of data analysis, the production of a final report with thematic mapping of the data was finalized and disseminated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 3 includes the final name of each theme as well as a defining quote that encompasses the essence of what each theme entails. These definitions were reworked (if necessary) while the Results section of this manuscript was being written.

Table 3.	
<i>Final Themes List for Research Questions 1 and 2</i>	
<u>Research Question 1: How does Barstool’s affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college-student-produced videos model destructive behaviors?</u>	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Exemplar Quote</u>
Glorifying college stereotypes as the “norm”	<i>Like you see, if it’s not on Barstool Sports, it’s me watching Van Wilder growing up, you know what I mean? Or any of those. Like, uh, Animal House, any kind of movies like that, you know what I mean? It’s out there in popular culture that this is kind of what the – this is how things are in college. I think Barstool certainly is a proponent of that mindset because the videos that they are posting are the videos that people want to see [...] It’s out there in popular culture that this is kind of what the – this is how things are in college. – Paul</i>
Imitation and “one upping” to be featured	<i>So, there’s always kids who are trying to one up kids like, “Oh well, you know, your friend punched you in the jaw? Well, I’m going to have my friend brand me.” Like, there’s always kids trying to do more and more stupid stuff in the hopes that it’s going to get picked up by a Barstool-affiliated network. And a lot of these kids are engaging in tasks where they either have the chance of getting injured or they are physically getting injured to end up on these accounts. – Kyle</i>

Surveillance and vigilance in a college/Barstool world	<i>[...] you have to kind of watch yourself in a certain way to make sure that anything you do wouldn't be something that somebody would pull out a phone and take a video of because you never know how it could end up on that account [...] like, when you're out on the weekends, you just want to make sure you're always thinking about [...] the actions that you're doing, I guess. – Brittany</i>
<u>Research Question 2: How do Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts influence college-aged consumers' perceptions of risk and decision making in the college experience?</u>	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Exemplar Quote</u>
Barstool's "coolness" factor bringing popularity and social clout	<i>They were so proud [laughs]. They shared it with everyone. Everyone knew. People were like, running around telling people. It was pretty exciting for us [...] but it was so cool that they got featured, [because] I was pumped that a small school made it, because normally it's just like, the really big state schools. – Katie</i>
Dissonance from personal morals	<i>And I think the Barstool culture, um, [sighs] I was going to say it's probably not their goal to get kids to act like this, but honestly it might be because it gives them more content to produce. Um, [sighs] but I really, I don't see them as [...] the bad guys, which is interesting [laughs] given all that I've said, I think [...] but I still think a lot of the stuff that they do is um, very, very funny and I am not going to stop consuming their content [laughs]. – Paul</i>
A balancing act of "entertaining" risk	<i>[...] have you ever seen a car accident? [...] So, when you see a car accident, like, it's so gruesome, you don't want to watch, but you have to watch... so like, with the girl taking a shot and eating a raw egg [...] it's so gross that you have to watch. – Scott</i>
Recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features	<i>[...] a lot of the comments that were on the post they weren't so happy with, so it was</i>

Selective disengagement associated to a college's student expectations

kind of a pride moment for a second, and then once you start to read the comments, it just becomes kind of like, a negative thing, I guess [...] people commenting on how attractive the girl really was, whether they actually thought that she was attractive or not [...] there were some like, fine comments and then others that were just kind of plain out rude I guess about the appearance of the girl. – Brittany

I think there was an email that went out to the campus that was like, “hey, this isn't cool. Stop [...] embarrassing the college,” but everyone else thought it was hilarious [...] I didn't. I didn't know anyone involved in [the situation that was featured on the account], but I know there have been repercussions of like [the college saying], “you're embarrassing us.” [...] I think school's kind of take it as an offense to end up – especially one as small as [my school] – it's an offense to end up on Barstool or have your students featured [...] nothing good happens on Barstool. – Greg

Results

Research Question 1

Research question 1 (RQ1) sought to examine how Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college student-produced videos and photos model destructive and risky behaviors. Results from the fifteen, in-depth interviews revealed the following themes related to RQ1: *Glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm," imitating and "one upping" to be featured, and surveillance and vigilance in a college/Barstool world.*

Glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm."

All participants agreed that the way Barstool portrayed college life on Instagram was not entirely accurate to what they had experienced/were currently experiencing at their undergraduate institutions. Though many participants acknowledged that what was portrayed on the accounts represented college to some extent, it was clear participants felt as though not all aspects of college were showcased. For example, Katie explained, "[...] I've been to crazy parties where this stuff happens, but those are just a few occasions throughout my college experience." Kyle, also a recent graduate, felt that Barstool's accounts "glorified" common college stereotypes, resulting in skewed perceptions of what college is actually like. He thought this was true especially for prospective high school students who may be looking at Barstool content while deciding on what college to attend in the future:

If you're a high schooler, and you're looking to go to a college, you're definitely [going to] go to Barstool and see posts from colleges there and you're going to say, "Hey, I saw their post about – I'm just going to use the University of Arizona [...] they post a lot from there and it looks like it's fun." [...] So, I think people use Barstool and its apps and its accounts to kind of grade which school is a better school.

Several recent graduate participants had experienced first-hand the impact that these accounts can have outside of the context of college. Ben and Paul are both high school teachers, and both have had conversations with their students about Barstool posts and their content. For example, Ben mentioned feeling the need to address the issues that come with what is posted on the accounts to his students. In particular, he talked about one conversation he had with a student who looked forward to mirroring the risky behaviors portrayed on Barstool's accounts:

I had a high school kid last year, he's like, "I want to [be featured] on Barstool! I want to be a 'Chad!'"² I'm like, "You do not want to be a 'Chad.' No one likes a 'Chad.'" And I went, "And there's probably a lot of good Chad's out there, but don't be a 'Chad' on Barstool. No one likes them." I said, "Why do you think they're on there in the first place?" And [my student] is like, "Cause it's cool!" And I went, "No, because [consumers and Barstool] are laughing at them." He goes, "Oh..." This is a high school senior.

Ben mentioned that the problem exists in students as young as middle school-aged, sharing that his older sister, a sixth-grade teacher, had to bring up the issue of Barstool in her classroom because her students have Instagram accounts. Because of the actions portrayed in the videos and photos, she needed to address their engagement with Barstool Sports, because her students believed they could mimic what they were seeing in the middle school setting. Katie had a very similar experience during her time coaching children ranging from elementary school children through seniors in high school. Because all of her students have Instagram accounts, they, too, follow Barstool's content. Katie stated that, "[...] they perceive college like this big party and they're really looking forward to it and they're like, 13 years old looking at Barstool and they just have like, this expectation of what it's like."

² "Chad" is used on many Barstool Sports posts to refer to a male, undergraduate student holding qualities and performing actions that the company is perceiving as obnoxious, chauvinistic, pompous, destructive, etc.

Having been an avid consumer of Barstool’s content consistently throughout college, Paul sometimes struggled when having conversations with his students about Barstool’s content. Though he found it shocking that his students believed that the content presented on Barstool’s accounts was an accurate portrayal of college life, he could understand this perception and was hesitant to label Barstool Sports as the sole or even main perpetrator in creating this perception:

And at times it’s a little um, [sighs] I wouldn’t say it’s sad because I would be lying to say that I didn’t have some of those same ideas going into college. Like you see, if it’s not on Barstool Sports, it’s me watching *Van Wilder* growing up, you know what I mean? Or any of those. Like, uh, *Animal House*, any kind of movies like that, you know what I mean? It’s out there in popular culture that this is kind of what the – this is how things are in college. I think Barstool certainly is a proponent of that mindset because the videos that they are posting are the videos that people want to see [...] It’s out there in popular culture that this is kind of what the – this is how things are in college.

Though Scott (a first-year student at his university) did not consume Barstool content before entering college, he felt underprepared for what college life would be like. He also agreed that students in high school held an unrealistic image of the typical college lifestyle, and this could lead them to experience academic struggles in the very real college world:

[...] They have the perception that like, college is a huge party and I – I thought that too and I was like, “I can’t wait. It’s going to be really laid back and I get to just drink all the time and like, it’s going to be so chill.” But then when I got here, I was like “Holy shit, like, this is [really] hard. Like, I don’t know what I’m doing.” And like, you really need to [...] focus up. And I like – that just shocked me [because] it’s just this whole persona of like, “Let’s party all the time and go to class,” but that’s about it, like, there’s no extra work.

Scott felt as though college life was presented as being a time for partying and sometimes going to class, but that there was no recognition of anything “extra” (i.e. homework, tests, extracurriculars, etc.). Unlike some of the other participants, Sarah, a first-year student, did not think Barstool’s portrayal of college life was highly inaccurate. She felt that students who

actively participate in a university's stereotypical "party" culture were more likely to find the accounts' portrayals accurate to their lived experiences:

If you're [going] out two or three times a month, then yes. But there are a lot of people who don't. So obviously for that audience, very obviously not. But even if you're going out once or twice or three times a month, like I said, like you're definitely seeing that. And it's definitely a huge part of college life, especially at a state school that isn't particularly focused on academia.

Though Barstool's accounts may be portraying certain aspects of college life accurately according to some participants' experiences, other participants emphasized that college life is oftentimes much more than what Barstool portrays. For example, Paul reiterated that what Barstool showcased is not the day-to-day "positive" aspects of the college lifestyle that most students should strive for during college. What Barstool promotes and glorifies is the party culture that they wish for students to create at their institutions:

Those [attending class, healthy habits] aren't the things that [Barstool Sports is] promoting. They're promoting the Friday, Saturday – *Thursday*, Friday, Saturday nights, and Saturday mornings with tailgates.

As Leah, a second-year student at her undergraduate institution explained, "[college institutions' main websites are] trying to showcase their best, [and] Barstool's trying to showcase their worst..." Participants seemed to feel as though this glorified image of drinking and partying culture, though in existence at most higher education institutions in the United States, did not represent the norm of everyday college life.

Imitating and "one upping" to be featured.

All participants noted that many of the posts on these Barstool accounts tended to look or hold the same outcome: individuals performing risky acts, with the outcome usually being negative. Yet, imitation and re-creation of past videos was very apparent to about 46.67% of participants who acknowledged the many similarities between countless posts on the accounts.

Participants felt that imitation was a large part of Barstool's appeal and a way for others to get featured if they attempted similar stunts that had already been showcased on the accounts. Paul mentioned one particular trend he noticed a lot of throughout the different Barstool accounts and posts he followed:

I mean a lot of the partying stuff [...] it's stuff that people are videotaping, so it is stuff that is happening [in the college environment]. I know that people see those videos and then do those things. You know, jumping on tables had been a huge one. It started with, well it didn't start with anybody, I'm sure people have been jumping on tables for a while, but like, uh, Bills Mafia³ have been jumping on tables, on fire tables. And then college kids started doing it and videotaping themselves. And I mean there were tons and tons of videos, like, for a while there, this was like, their huge thing jumping on tables, which kind of sucked.

Though Paul found these imitations of students jumping into tables as originally being entertaining, soon they became boring as countless videos were being posted consistently to the accounts he followed.

When discussing her experiences coaching younger children, Katie described the conversations she would overhear the children having with one another about their anticipated college lives:

[...] And like I heard them talking about, "I can't wait until I'm in college and I can party, and I'm going to go to bars." And they're talking about like – I heard a kid say he's going to shotgun a beer. And I was like, "What are you talking about? Like you're 14. You're not going to shotgun anything." [...] I feel like people think that it's happening regularly and that they're going to have these crazy experiences every weekend and who knows? Maybe they will, because now they're going to college with that impression so they're going to create it.

Though she found the conversations outlandish, Katie recognized that these comments could soon become actions for her young players. Katie felt that the imitation factor of Barstool's

³ Bills Mafia refers to super-fans of the Buffalo Bills who are known for their devotion to the NFL team and are commonly videotaped jumping into tables at tailgate events

content made it possible for future college students to continue imitating certain risky actions once they entered the college world.

In a different interview, Brittany, a senior at her undergraduate institution, agreed that imitation holds a dangerous future for certain colleges' student culture due to new students prior to entering these schools having already been consuming Barstool's content. They may hold a certain mindset already of what campus culture is like because of videos and/or photos they have consumed that are posted via these Instagram accounts. She noted that many times, Barstool will include the location of certain universities within their posts, creating a false image of what a university may or may not actually be like.

[...] so I think like depending on the place you go to, it could definitely control kind of like, how you act and the culture at that school more depending on like, especially where these videos are taken [...] I'm pretty sure they put locations on a lot of them and like, what school that these things are from.

This added aspect of having location tags accompanying videos of students performing risky actions, Brittany explained in this quote, formulate a certain control over how students may act at that certain school with wanting to imitate in order to fit the mold of what they perceive their college culture to be like. But it is not just the imitation factor that is evident, but students trying to "one up" other posts to do something bigger and, oftentimes, riskier and more dangerous. Kyle expressed how much of a problem this can become, leading to students putting themselves in positions where they could become seriously injured.

So, there's always kids who are trying to one up kids like, "Oh well, you know, your friend punched you in the jaw? Well, I'm going to have my friend brand me." Like, there's always kids trying to do more and more stupid stuff in the hopes that it's going to get picked up by a Barstool-affiliated network. And a lot of these kids are engaging in tasks where they either have the chance of getting injured or they are physically getting injured to end up on these accounts.

Some participants agreed that this imitation and one upping is heavily influenced by the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Participants felt that the presence of drugs and alcohol in many of these videos encouraged others to perform similar actions when they are under the influence. For example, Paul explained that because these risky actions involving drugs and/or alcohol are so prevalent in Barstool's media, the actions not only are ones that others want to imitate, but that they view as normalized. He understood how, from his own actions, there could be influence stemming from the media he consumed on a regular basis:

[...] I did a lot of stupid shit [in college] and a lot of the stuff that I did was stuff that happens on Barstool and stuff that I'm seeing on probably a daily basis [...] and so I could see how that kind of seeps in there a little bit [...] but you know, people do stuff like that on Barstool and like – so you're just – and when you have that [risky] idea, it doesn't seem so crazy to go and do it.

Leah agreed that her engagement with Barstool influenced her own recklessness when it came to partying and drinking. She felt that college was a place where “[...] you're supposed to be able to be reckless and like, have fun and do those things,” but at the same time, she believed she had a good understanding of her own limits when contemplating actions of imitation or one upping. She felt that drinking more alcohol than another person featured in the videos posted to these accounts was a big pull for people to continue to drink in irresponsible ways that could land them in dangerous situations.

One of those things is definitely drinking more. I remember there was a video of three girls who chugged an entire bottle of wine and I was like, “Oh, I could do that,” definitely knowing – I couldn't do that [...] So I mean, going into freshman year, I didn't have any experience with drinking. So, if I saw [those Instagram accounts] and was not the person that I am, if I had a little less experience with like, life, I would probably see that and be like, “Oh, I could do that,” try doing it, and wind up in the hospital.

Many participants felt they had a good grasp on their own limitations when it came to drugs and alcohol consumption. However, they also often seemed to believe that the people

featured in Barstool videos likely did not grasp their limitations and, thus, were more heavily influenced by not just drugs and alcohol but also by the drive to recreate and take risky actions to a further extent. When asked why he believed students featured in these videos/photos on Barstool's accounts were behaving in these ways, Ben stated it was not just the influence of alcohol, but also the influence of Barstool's image of these actions being presented as cool and funny to others that caused them to want to attempt and record themselves performing certain risky acts.

I honestly want to say first off, is they're drunk. Like, that obviously is going to dictate some of their stupid actions. The lower inhibitions, stuff like that – I should say, being drunk, they're going to act like that. But, because of Barstool and the media and their videos and [then] they think it's funny, they think it's cool [to perform these actions].

Though obviously the “lower inhibitions” of being under the influence played a large role in how participants felt these videos and photos came to be, Ben mentioned the important role Barstool's “cool” image plays in students wanting to imitate what they see featured on the accounts. Imitation to live up to the “coolness” of Barstool plays a role in the continuity of risky actions being consistently recreated.

Surveillance and vigilance in a college/Barstool world.

All participants mentioned that weekend nights, partying, and instances where drinking occurs are the peak moments for when college students will be more apt to take out their phones and snap a photo or record a video with the intent to send it to Barstool. However, it became apparent that it was not just the weekends that made for good content for these accounts, but really any time, especially during major social events on campus, like sporting events and during meals in the dining hall. Participants knew where they could get the best content, making the college environment as a whole an opportunity to make it onto a Barstool account through day-

day-day actions and activities. Paul explained that these more social moments and events of the college experience are when students will look to capture content because it is when “cool stuff happens.”

Like, if you're – you're not [going to] see the hockey highlight unless you're at the hockey game, you're not going to see uh, uh, somebody absolutely eat it down the stairs in the dining hall if you're not in the dining hall. You know what I mean? [...] it's just places where people are [...] Class I think breeds a different kind of – a different kind of animal in terms of the videotaping because it's just kind of waiting for something to happen. And I guess you could really go into class with the intent of getting [content to send to Barstool] out of it and probably get something each time, you know what I mean? Because in an hour or two-hour class, like, there's always opportunities for it. I guess it's just those are the places that it happens the most.

With this perspective that any moment in the college environment could be a good time to capture content, Ben expressed the frustration he felt with this new age of recording everyday activities. He explained that recording could happen to anyone in any environment where it would normally not be a place one would think would be good for Barstool content. This environment of everywhere being a place to capture good content made Ben feel that privacy is very much lacking with accounts such as these, and that one's actions are constantly being surveyed in the hopes of capturing viable content to send to these accounts.

[...] could be um, like during lectures if the professor is trying to do something fun or if the professor is trying to do something wacky. Like, I've been on the other end of it [...] But nowadays, [students] all have [phones], [and] they're all going to sit there and record you because they think you're being hilarious, being a fool [...] [and] the gym and – that's the other thing that kills me is how many workout videos are actually posted today, making fun of people working out [...] I don't want to go to the gym anymore! I go to [my work's gym in order to work out].

It seemed that the only way being featured on Barstool could be considered “cool” was if the video was not perceived as embarrassing or shameful to participants. About 80% of participants noted they would not send in a video to Barstool of themselves or others. A few

participants ($n = 5$) also mentioned if they had a video or photo taken of them and sent into Barstool without their knowledge that they would be upset by this. David explained that the videos he liked the least when consuming Barstool involved the videos and photos taken and recorded of someone who was clearly unaware that the video or picture was being taken. He believed it felt less valuable as entertainment and more as an intentional “mockery” of the person featured.

Although I think it’s not wrong for them to be filming them [...] I think it might be a little – I don’t want to call it immoral or unethical, but I think submitting someone else without their actual permission to be posted, um, is a little questionable. Like if I was, you know, like if I was being stupid on a weekend and I found myself being filmed by someone [and it] ended up on Barstool, I would be upset about it. Or even if I was just like doing anything else, even that’s not making a fool of myself [and] was still put on Barstool, I’d be disappointed or upset. So, it isn’t something that I’d want to be featured on, and I can understand why someone else wouldn’t want [to be featured].

James did not care for these types of posts either and felt that posts trying to capture negative aspects of the person featured were not entertaining. He said that he would not place himself in a position to take a video that could cause potential harm or embarrassment to someone else.

[...] they’re more negative and they’re showing someone at their worst [...] [I] would want to step in rather than take a video of someone and try to help [the person in a negative position] out. So [...] just the negative-ness of [some of the posts], and then people [recording] it and trying to get likes for it really is something I don’t like about [the accounts].

Greg also agreed that these were the least entertaining videos and even considered them to be an act of bullying other students. He believed that Barstool’s content could be divided into two categories and environments of videos taken during the daytime and the nighttime, both categories having different meanings. He felt as though the videos taken during the daytime were

videos that were more focused on making fun of other students or people in their regular activities while nighttime videos were dedicated to showing drunken activities from students.

If you had to divvy it up, it would be, if you see a Barstool video during the day time, it's unfortunate because somebody's probably making fun of someone else. Those are the times that you see the videos that are like, "oh look at this weird kid in the library," or "oh, look at this weird kid in the dining hall," or "oh, look at" – like, they're usually making fun of someone if it happens during the daytime. And then I feel like the nighttime is all like the, "hey, look. I'm so cool. Look at me, I'm drinking, and I'm smashing my face against this window [...]"

Leah explained that, because so much of the content from the accounts could be captured in so many common and uncommon places, it could create a "[...] potentially toxic environment for college kids to push themselves further than they should [...]" in terms of making content.

Katie recalled how regular college life did not use to be like this, but with the rise of social media and smart phone usage, recording every action has become the norm. It is no longer enough to be drunk with friends if there is no evidence to show that the moment actually happened. Katie believed that part of the fun now is to record the fun that is happening, and if it makes for good content, then it should be shared with everyone through an online platform like Barstool.

And a lot of times you are hammered drunk, but nowadays people think to record it, where before that was never the first thought. It was just like, "my friend is being a drunk idiot and we're having fun now," but now it's not enough to just have the fun there. You want to show everyone.

She felt similarly to David and Ben when it came to privacy and not wanting to be filmed without her knowledge of it. She said she would be "very mad" if she was that person, and that "[...] sometimes it's not even someone doing anything wrong, but it's just embarrassing." She explained that sometimes it was clear to her with certain videos that the person was unaware they were being filmed and she felt a level of sympathy for them. She talked specifically using female pronouns, saying, "[...] people [might] know her and they recognize her [...] it's never – it's

never fast enough for those types of Instagram pages,” referring to how fast views escalate on Instagram posts.

Brittany explained that because of the environment of college life where students are always thinking to record things happening on campus, it has made her mindful of her own actions when she is out in public, especially on the weekends.

[...] you have to kind of watch yourself in a certain way to make sure that anything you do wouldn't be something that somebody would pull out a phone and take a video of because you never know how it could end up on that account [...] like, when you're out on the weekends, you just want to make sure you're always thinking about [...] the actions that you're doing, I guess.

Scott agreed with this, admitting that he was guilty of making his fair share of mistakes, recognizing that he has done “[...] really stupid stuff,” but that one has to be sure no one is recording them because a “professional persona” is important, even in the college realm, and “[...] you wouldn't want anyone to find [a video or photo of you on Barstool] later, just because that would suck.” He also expressed how he viewed his generation as “[...] a social media consuming generation.” He explained it was simply not enough anymore to just “[...] be in the moment and like, watch something happen. We need it to be recorded.”

Sarah echoed this, feeling as though most if not all college students are trying to get featured on accounts like Barstool's and “[...] so that's why we do pull out our phones when someone's breaking a table.” The new environment of a college campus is one rich with opportunities to gain content and attention through social media by recording just about anything. If the content is featured, then it is part of a worthy college lifestyle. However, at the same time, participants felt that this forced them to remain vigilant of their actions to avoid themselves being featured in a compromising position they did not wish to be showcased in.

Research Question Two

Research question two (RQ2) explored how Barstool’s affiliated Instagram accounts are associated with college-aged consumers’ perceptions of risk and decision making during their college experience. Results revealed the following themes: *Barstool’s “coolness” factor bringing popularity and social clout; dissonance from personal morals; a balancing act of “entertaining” risk; recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features and selective disengagement associated to a college’s student expectations.*

Barstool’s “coolness” factor bringing popularity and social clout.

It was clear through participants responses that the desire to be featured on Barstool accounts stemmed from considering this milestone to be “cool.” 66.67% of participants mentioned that they began following Barstool’s content due to its known connotation of being “cool,” “popular,” and “new,” especially among mutual friends who would talk about the accounts and share posts with them. Scott mentioned that he began following the account because “[...] everyone else follows [...]” and “[...] it’s more of a popular thing.” The accounts had become a point of conversation for many participants with their mutual friends. Paul explained that not following Barstool’s accounts could leave one feeling out of the loop with those in their social groups:

[...] I think it’s a big social thing. It’s just something that a lot of people talk about [and] a lot of people are seeing what the accounts are putting out there. Um, but that’s kind of a, like, you want to see the stuff that people are talking about and you want to see it – not necessarily before people are talking about it, but you want to be on the wave, you know what I mean?

For Will, he was introduced to Barstool as soon as he entered college and was “[...] referred to it by friends [...]” as it was much more popular in the state his college was located in than his home state. Participants, once introduced to Barstool, also used the accounts to connect with friends when they found posts that were relatable to their own experiences or their friends’

interests. When observing Leah's Instagram use, she laughed at certain photos and liked a few posts. When asked why this was the case and what she intended to do with the posts that she liked, she responded:

[...] probably because I want to show it to somebody else [because] I'll go back and say, "Oh, I found this funny thing. Like, let me go find it..." But if I just want to save it for later, [because] I know it's going to pop up in conversation or something, then I'll probably just like it or save it or something like that.

Many participants expressed that consumers of this media view being featured on the accounts as something to be proud of, or as Kyle described it, as a "[...] badge of honor." To even know someone featured in a video or photo also could be viewed as something that was "cool" or a source of pride. Paul mentioned a story of two of his college roommates' friends who were featured in videos from their university's fall festival, which had turned into more of a riot than a festival and was later permanently cancelled as a result of the riotous behavior. Paul explained his personal experience knowing someone featured on Barstool:

But it's like the coolest thing though, because you – it's you, or it's your friend, it's your buddy and it's like all these videos and all this – these hilarious posts that you see that come out of these accounts [...] it's just kind of really cool to be almost involved in one or know people that were involved in one because they're so popular within our uh, demographic.

Popularity was a prevalent reason participants cited for why being featured on one of the accounts was so cool. It seemed there was a level of "fame" participants felt individuals could reach on their campus if they were featured on a Barstool account. Leah even noted that a friend she knew who had a stranger crawl through his apartment window (which later was featured on Barstool) felt a sense of pride that even just his apartment alone was featured.

Katie talked about two of her male friends who had been featured on the main Barstool account for rolling in the mud outside of their campus residence hall. Though they were physically injured from broken glass that was on the ground where they performed the action, the

two were ecstatic that they had been featured on the account, and she shared in their excitement.

Their appearance on Barstool quickly spread across campus and raised their social status:

They were so proud [laughs]. They shared it with everyone. Everyone knew. People were like, running around telling people. It was pretty exciting for us [...] but it was so cool that they got featured, [because] I was pumped that a small school made it, because normally it's just like, the really big state schools.

Sarah also felt that students had a higher chance of being featured on a campus Barstool account if they knew the person in charge of running the account. Since college-affiliated Barstool accounts are run by campus viceroys (who are students currently going to the college of the account they are assigned to operate), having a personal connection with a viceroy can lead to a submission being posted more quickly on the university's Barstool account. She explained how the accounts are actively looking for content, so close friends and friends of friends of hers have been reached out to previously when they have perhaps posted content on their personal social media accounts that would be good submissions for the college Barstool accounts.

[...] knowing that you know someone who runs one of those accounts is really cool, because I can just [direct message] them directly and a lot of times [my submission will] get reposted a lot faster. So, it kind of depends on who you know. And even though they try to keep quiet about who runs those accounts, like, there is definitely a little bit of clout I guess you could say in terms of the ownership with those.

Greg, on the other hand, articulated a contrasting viewpoint, and he stated that being featured on Barstool likely amounted to “[...]when you've hit a low point, probably,” though he also recognized that, for others, a Barstool feature is seen as an accomplishment. He explained how there were many people who he believed based their social lives around the question of “What would somebody on Barstool do?” making their main ambition to be featured on one of the Barstool accounts during their college experience. He struggled to understand this mentality,

noting that people seemed driven by the prospect of being seen by thousands of people and not really by how that might then affect them in the long run socially, physically, or mentally.

I feel like there's this point where if – maybe you've been drinking where you're like, "Well, if I do this, it'll be funny and then maybe I can end up on Barstool," instead of being like, "Well, if I do this, maybe it would be funny, but then I'm just going to get hurt." So I think it does drive people to – the prospect of thousands and thousands of people seeing them on an Instagram account probably drives people to be like, "Oh, maybe I should try and do that," or "Maybe I should drink a little bit more and try and be super funny and end up on the Internet."

Sarah, who revealed she had been featured on a Barstool account in the past, felt shocked and proud to be featured. She elaborated saying that her friend who was also in the featured video with her was “[...] upset that she wasn’t tagged.” She believed that people wished to be featured on Barstool for “clout” and that it was not so much a popularity thing as it was being able to say “[...] I was stupid enough to end up on it,” and felt that it was something “[...] funny because these are our college years.” She explained how certain nights she would go out with her female friends with a shared goal of being featured on a Barstool account.

And I think that’s kind of like, not necessarily the smartest influence, but it’s definitely an influence. Like, you don’t even have to be intoxicated, but just like, we’re going to do something dumb and we’re going to make people pay attention to us. Um, and so there are nights where we do go out with that in mind and I think that’s the biggest influence.

Sometimes, being featured on a Barstool account can bring the featured individuals unwanted attention. As Katie pointed out, “[...] sometimes it’s not even the drunk person who’s doing it, but the friend that sees it as an opportunity for something funny.” So though people under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol may be heavily featured, it is not always they themselves who are performing these actions with the goal to make it onto a Barstool account. Kyle explained an instance where a video was submitted of one of his mutual friends when she were under the influence of alcohol. His friend had fallen down a flight of stairs and was badly

injured with a severe concussion. Someone had recorded a video of her falling, submitted it to Barstool without her permission, and it was later featured.

[...] most of the comments were of people tagging other friends in it saying, “look at this,” because [...] the girl who was in the video was an undergraduate [of their institution], so, many of the comments that I saw were people tagging other people [from the institution] in the post.

The post originally appeared on 5thYear a few years ago and then resurfaced again within the past few months on Barstool’s main Instagram account. Though Kyle’s friend was able to contact 5thYear about the video and have it removed from the account the first time, he knew that the second time the video appeared would cause distress and frustration for his friend. He immediately reached out to her once he saw the video was posted onto Barstool’s main account.

I knew that it would upset her, so the minute I saw [the video posted again], I texted her saying, “Hey, the video’s back on Barstool. I’m just letting you know.” And she texted me back within seconds saying, “Yeah, I’m already on it. I’m literally messaging [the account] right now. Thanks for looking out.”

The attention one gains from being featured on a Barstool account is sometimes seen as a positive for those intending to submit to an account and even some who are featured without consent being given to those recording them, but this is not always the case for those featured without consent. Still, many students submit videos and photos willingly with the hopes of having their submission featured. Sarah mentioned that several of her female friends had submitted to Barstool accounts with pictures of themselves, hoping to be awarded the “Barstool Smoke Show⁴” for the week. She revealed that those of her friends who were featured were “ecstatic” because they would gain about 100 Instagram followers overnight. Not only that, but her female friends would then become more well-known throughout campus, being recognized

⁴ A “Barstool Smoke Show” is a title given to a woman who submits or has pictures submitted of themselves to a Barstool account and is found to hold a certain level of attractiveness and sexiness to the mainly straight cis-gender men engaging with the content.

in the school hallways or at parties as a “Barstool Smoke Show.” She stated that these submissions were also for popularity.

Again, it’s for popularity, especially Smoke Shows. You’re not wearing clothes. So yeah, it’s really just to kind of show off your body. I think it’s vain, but I’m not going to say I wouldn’t send a photo in ever.

Brittany, on the other hand, viewed these posts about female students to be for “[...] some sort of attention[...]” and one that she did not “[...] necessarily desire.” As a whole, she also believed that social media in general, not just these Barstool accounts, had a tendency to cause this need and desire for attention. She did not feel that Barstool’s accounts were the only cause for college-aged students desire for attention in both online and offline spaces.

[...] social media in general, like, makes people crave attention and crave people liking them online and it’s so easy to make this kind of like, different personality or like, different image of yourself online than it is in person. Um, and I feel like people crave being the person that they are when they can make [...] other people see like, a specific way of how they are, if that makes sense.

This “crave” for attention seemed important for Brittany to note when it came to the overall perception of these accounts. She believed that social media had a large effect on college-aged students and that portraying oneself online as the person one wished to be seen as was important. Online spaces, she believed, created a place where consumers could produce an image of themselves that was perhaps different than who they are in real life.

Dissonance from personal morals.

When asked why participants chose to consume Barstool’s Instagram content, many responses were similar. Approximately 80% of participants explained that the content was “dumb,” “stupid,” “crazy,” and/or “silly”, and that they enjoyed it simply because they found it amusing to watch the risky actions in the videos. When asked what they meant by “stupid stuff” and “dumb humor,” participants referred to several different risky actions: riots, fighting, people

falling or jumping off of high places, running into a moving car, jumping off of roofs on dirt bikes, etc. Leah had stated that these "stupid," "crazy," and "dumb" perceptions were, to a degree, gender based, with drunk female students as opposed to drunk male students being portrayed very differently.

[...] I think the perceptions of drunk guys versus drunk girls are very different. [Barstool] like[s] to showcase girls being like, on the floor, throwing up, being crazy, stuff like that. And then guys just being stupid [...] I saw somebody tried to snowboard off a roof with no snow, like who would think to do that other than a guy? So yeah, stuff like that; just stupid stuff.

Greg explained that he found the videos entertaining because "[...] they're funny in the most like, primal way. It's like watching America's Funniest Home Videos, but [...] it's college students who are probably black out drunk [...] I always get a good laugh out of someone else's pain, unfortunately." Many participants seemed to feel uncomfortable admitting this reality.

When Scott was asked why he found enjoyment in the videos showcased, he put a hand over his face, laughed, and said, "[...] that kind of stupid stuff where it's just like, it's funny for me, but I bet they're screwed up [...] It's just like everyone has their own humor and I like – wow, that sounds *so* screwed up – I like watching people get hurt." Paul seemed to struggle to admit to how he felt about Barstool's content and why he chose to follow it as well, but gave a firm, honest answer surrounding the culture of Barstool and what he thought about it.

And I think the Barstool culture, um, [sighs] I was going to say it's probably not their goal to get kids to act like this, but honestly it might be because it gives them more content to produce. Um, [sighs] but I really, I don't see them as [...] the bad guys, which is interesting [laughs] given all that I've said, I think [...] but I still think a lot of the stuff that they do is um, very, very funny and I am not going to stop consuming their content [laughs].

Ben also revealed that though he did not condone actions like fighting and rioting, he still found himself watching videos featuring these actions on Barstool. He reflected on how the

accounts grab observers' attention and create posts that people will watch despite the actual content not aligning with their sense of appropriate moral action:

I watch them, right? Like, they're an attention grabber. They make you want to sit and watch, but then I sit there and go, "well that was stupid," and then you just keep going [laughs]. But you sat and watched it! You gave them the view! Even though you thought it was stupid, you still sat and watched it!

A few male participants ($n = 3$) noted that part of the allure of Barstool's content was also their showcasing of attractive females on the accounts. Paul feared he would sound like an "asshole" when speaking about "Barstool Smoke Shows," but voiced his opinion by saying:

I think the stuff that [Barstools] post[s] with the women, uh, it really goes against a lot of what [...] women are trying to do right now; which is kind of rise up and empower themselves and [...] be equals. And I think that kind of, um, it doesn't [sighs] I don't know that it doesn't fly with it because I'm sure some of the girls that are on [the accounts as a Smoke Show] are very happy that they're on it, and like, feel that it is empowering and all that other stuff [...] but I'm sure for some of them, it isn't. Um, and that's kind of what the issue is, I guess [...] But I still look at the pictures [laughs].

Brian also explained why he enjoyed aspects of Barstool's content that included females. He mentioned that he enjoyed listening to female-led podcasts on Barstool because it provided "[...] a woman's output, which is different from normal Barstool," but that male-led podcasts provided a "bro attitude" which he liked to have occasionally. He also explained that a large reason as to why he followed the Barstool Instagram accounts that he did was "[...] part of it is a reminder when they have like, new content out and then part of it's, you know, um, you know, some of the – I mean, all of the women are attractive at the same time. So, you know, that's always a perk [laughs]."

Scott seemed to struggle with the appeal female students had to send in their photos to "Barstool Smoke Shows." He understood that "[...] attention is awesome," but felt strongly that female students showing their bodies "[...] shouldn't be an attention getter."

I don't know. I'm an inner dad, and I'm like, "why would you ever put that on like, a million-follower account?" [...] because they have to physically send those [photos] in, which I just think is kind of weird because I'm like, why would you want like, your major, your name, everything about you on there? So that future employers are like, "wow?" [...] I just think it's weird.

Nevertheless, he still admitted that he does view the posts that feature "Smoke Shows" on his college campus's Barstool account, and throughout his observational component, these were photos he clicked on consistently.

A balancing act of "entertaining" risk.

About 46.67% of participants also revealed that they liked a certain level of risk in the videos, and when videos or photos surpassed that, they enjoyed the content less. Brittany explained that she liked most of the content because it made her laugh, but not all of the content on the accounts always did. "I think some of them are a little bit like, too inappropriate or a little too risky, I guess." She further elaborated on what videos she usually did not like, which included those that featured people who were under the influence and were performing dangerous acts.

[...] just like really weird drunk incidences that it's like, dangerous [...] some people get joy or entertainment out of like, seeing crazy things that drunk people do, but I don't necessarily.

Will noted that the videos he did not enjoy were any videos that involved "[...] physical harm to people [...]" He had explained:

I have a very, very weak tolerance for like, somebody [being featured] if they're breaking a bone or anything like that. So, it just like, [freaks] me out, and it's just not something I like to see.

I had expanded and agreed with Will's point by mentioning to him a video I had recently viewed on one of the accounts that involved two male students arm wrestling which resulted in the audience seeing one of the students visibly break a bone in his arm. Will had cut off my

thought, showing that he, too had seen the video. He responded saying, “[...] yeah, and it snapped his arm [makes gagging noise] Nope.”

Leah expressed how many of the videos were “cringy.” Although she found the videos of people falling to be funny, she mentioned during her observational component that she needed to have the visual of seeing the person get up afterwards. Having had the personal experience of witnessing a person jump from a third story balcony and end up in a coma, Leah needed to have the confirmation that the person was okay in the video in order to feel comfortable laughing at it:

I look at these and I’m like, they have to be okay in order for me to like, laugh at it or [...] find it entertaining. Because if it just cuts out and he’s still on the ground not moving, then I’m like, “I don’t know what happened.” I have to figure out what’s going on because that guy who fell I found out is like, still in a coma. So, it’s just scary, things like that.

Scott felt as though these cringy videos were ones where it felt impossible to look away from the video. During his observational component, he viewed a video of a female student taking a shot of alcohol and immediately drinking an egg yolk afterwards. He was clearly disgusted by the act, but still laughed at it. When I asked him why he chose to view the video and why he still gained some level of enjoyment out of it, he responded:

[...] have you ever seen a car accident? [...] So, when you see a car accident, like, it’s so gruesome, you don’t want to watch, but you *have* to watch [...] so like, with the girl taking a shot and eating a raw egg [...] it’s so gross that you have to watch.

Many seemed to acknowledge that the videos and photos featured on these accounts could be problematic or “cringy,” but it did not prevent them from continuing to consume the content. When asked if they would ever consider submitting a video, about 80% of participants were quick to answer no. When asked why, Brittany, for example, replied:

I feel like I don’t need to like, share crazy things that like my friends and I do, if we do. You know what I mean? [laughs] I guess like, I’ll let other people do that

and [laughs] get like, laughs from what other people do, but I don't feel the need to necessarily share my own stuff.

Recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features.

In Chris's interview, he acknowledged that the actions portrayed in posts on Barstool's accounts seemed to idolize destructive behaviors. He felt that in some cases, this perception did not tell the whole story and could lead to consumers not understanding the inherent negatives that could be possible with being featured on one of the accounts. The expected outcomes of being featured (popularity, coolness), could sometimes lead to unexpected outcomes (facing conduct issues with a student's institution).

I don't know, I guess you could find like, some of the posts to be funny, but for the most part it just kind of encourages destructive behavior. It really idolizes it. It's like, "oh you're going to make Barstool, you're going to make 5thYear," like it's something to be proud about when in reality, some of those people are facing – like, they could get in trouble and face some sort of conduct violation for the things that they do in videos [Barstool features].

Sarah, having been featured on Barstool accounts in the past, also had several friends who had been featured as well. She noted one example of a friend who had submitted a video of himself throwing up in a residence hall on campus that had been recorded by a friend. She claimed that it was "[...] so stupid that they had to share it with the world [...]" but that the video resulted in the student facing repercussions from their resident director. Scott also mentioned a mutual friend who came to regret being featured on Barstool for a similar drinking incident. His friend had contacted the Barstool account to have it removed because he feared how the video would look and that he and the person featured in the video would get into trouble.

Participants shared more consistently negative experiences friends of theirs had with posts featured on these accounts than positive ones. The initial decision to submit the video or photo seemed at first to be a good idea, but the outcome usually resulted in fewer positive

outcomes than first expected. Brittany and Sarah both elaborated on the negative side that can come with female students being featured as “Barstool Smoke Shows.” Brittany had a few friends who had been featured at one point as their campus’s “Smoke Show,” and who came to find that the response was not always what they expected it to be.

[...] a lot of the comments that were on the post they weren’t so happy with, so it was kind of a pride moment for a second, and then once you start to read the comments, it just becomes kind of like, a negative thing, I guess [...] like people commenting on how attractive the girl really was, whether they actually thought that she was attractive or not [...] there were some like, fine comments and then others that were just kind of plain out rude I guess about the appearance of the girl.

Sarah also noted that her friends experienced a similar negative aspect to being one of the “Smoke Shows,” but that they had decided not to respond to any of the negative comments because “[...] you can’t fight fire with fire.”

Selective disengagement associated to a college’s student expectations.

Participants acknowledged that the posts themselves selectively disengaged students from the core values or mission that their college had of how students are expected to act and portray the college they represent both in online and offline settings. Ben explained that the captions Barstool included on their posts were to blame for normalizing the risky actions being featured. He found this behavior particularly problematic with his high school students who then began to normalize the actions being portrayed because of the witty captions that accompanied them:

It is their captions that they post with the videos that make it seem like it’s okay to do what they’re doing. It’s not so much the video because anyone with common sense – And it’s the fights that if you were to literally take that video and just show someone and be like, “is this okay, like, is this smart to do, like running from the cops after you’ve just like, fought them and run in a drunken tirade?” They’re going to say, “no, that’s not okay!” But they sit and watch it and then their comments are the ones who [...] make it seem like it’s okay. They make it seem like it’s funny.

The videos also do not usually tell the full story of the actions and aftermath that occur for those featured in them, either. During her in-person observations, Leah found herself making assumptions about many of the posts she was engaging with. She talked about one video she had seen recently of a male student drinking three Four Lokos⁵ in succession and how “[...] that would probably kill me! That’s so bad. I saw the few seconds after he did it and he stumbled back, and I was like [...] he probably went to the hospital that night.”

Participants acknowledged that there were problematic actions taking place in the videos and photos they were engaging with. Comments and captions seemed to be a key way to normalize the selective disengagement process for consumers in Ben’s perspective. While participants all did cite enjoyment from engaging in Barstool’s content, almost half ($n = 6$) acknowledged the ethical murkiness present when videos and photos of individuals were sent to Barstool accounts without the featured person’s consent. Though no participants had personally experienced this, Scott and Kyle both knew of friends or fellow students who had been victims of videos submitted to Barstool without their permission. Scott’s friend had thought that the video being featured on Barstool’s account was funny at first, but as the reality of the situation set in, his friend found the feature concerning. Both the student featured in the video and the friend who had recorded and submitted it became nervous that they could face repercussions from their university because the video had been recorded in an alcohol-free residence hall and involved drinking.

[...] they got really concerned because they were like, “they can see my face,” like, “my friend might get kicked out of school.” You know, um, they know that like, social media has some consequences that if like, you know, future employers look at their Instagram or anything that has their face in it [...] I was like, “okay, you’re kind of like, an idiot,” like, that’s not really – like, one: you don’t have that

⁵ Four Loko is a type of alcoholic energy drink that contains 12 percent alcohol by volume as opposed to a typical beer which contains about 4.5 percent. The single drink has as much alcohol as about 5 to 6 beers and is popular among college students (Owens, 2010)

person's permission, so like, you can't actually send that video anywhere because he's intoxicated, and that's never good. And then like, two: I was like, "you're on social media, like, that's not ever smart to have like, your face."

Scott felt that this was common with students who found themselves featured on a Barstool account. He felt the initial reaction was usually one of excitement and pride, but as reality set in, students became more aware of and concerned about the potential negative consequences.

Though Scott's friends did not experience any severe repercussions for the video, Kyle explained how one video featured on his college's Barstool-affiliated account resulted in an entire student-residential townhouse being given a conduct hearing⁶. The video, taken by a resident of the townhouse and featuring a male and female student engaging in sexual activity in one of the townhouse bathroom stalls, was submitted to the college's Barstool account without the knowledge of either party featured in the recording.

You could obviously see they were engaging in sex in a bathroom stall, but all you could see were their feet. And one of the them, the girl I assumed, was wearing pink Nikes [...] someone submitted the video who lived in that area [and] Barstool picked it up and put it on their main page. It got up to, I want to say 30 plus thousand views, lots of comments [...] all members living in that townhouse where the bathroom was had a disciplinary hearing and I can't recall what actual discipline they received, but just in my conversations [I had with other students] there was a small threat of expulsion from the college.

Katie, who also attended the same institution as Kyle recalled this same incident and had further noted that though the students in the video were never identified, she "[...] had a few friends who had the same sneakers and they just never wore them again because they didn't want anyone to think it was them [in the video] [laughs]." Student leaders also acknowledged the need

⁶ A student conduct hearing refers to a board usually comprised of students, faculty, and staff who have displayed a commitment to upholding the community standards set forth by the specific institution's mission and Code of Student Conduct. They ensure that students and/or student organizations who are facing conduct issues are given the opportunity to have their cases heard by a representative body of the institution before final disciplinary decisions are made (see https://www.umass.edu/dean_students/conduct/hearing-board for university example).

to be especially careful when it came to these Instagram accounts, as mentioned by Brittany through one example she gave of a video that ended up on a Barstool account that was never supposed to leave a text message group between residential assistants and directors.

[...] I know that there was something posted on the [specific institution's] Barstool [account] and I think it was [...] actually submitted to a residence life staff member [...] [the video] was part of just like, not [an] investigation, but there was [a piece of furniture] missing from a room or something [...] it was just a funny video in general [...] but it wasn't meant to leave [the residence life group message it was shared in] and then it ended up getting posted to this Barstool [account] and so somebody faced [a] conduct hearing about it because it wasn't supposed to be shown to anyone else, let alone beyond to this public Instagram account.

Though she was unsure if the video was submitted by a member of residence life staff or a mutual friend, she did know it resulted in whoever submitted the video facing a student conduct hearing. Though the video was submitted out of humor, it resulted in a breach in privacy by campus residence life staff, and further harmed this student's standing at the college.

Ellen noted that her college campus's sororities would sometimes leave a specific emoji on posts that featured members of their sorority to alert those featured in the video that they should have the content removed because it did not represent the sorority in a positive light.

I know that sometimes sorority girls get their videos or their pictures posted [on Barstool accounts] and then their chapters [will] post their like, secret thing [...] it's like a flower or something on that post, which means they have to get it taken down if possible because – I don't know, there's some weird thing about sororities and probably fraternities too that they don't want a lot of [...] bad stuff about them coming out.

Greg pointed out that college campuses are aware that these pages exist, and that a few times during his college experience, he received emails from his college to the campus-wide community that postings the school discovered on Barstool's accounts were embarrassing to the institution.

I think there was an email that went out to the campus that was like, “hey, this isn’t cool. Stop [...] embarrassing the college,” but everyone else thought it was hilarious [...] I didn’t. I didn’t know anyone involved in [the situation that was featured on the account], but I know there have been repercussions of like [the college saying], “you’re embarrassing us.” [...] I think schools kind of take it as an offense to end up – especially one as small as [my school] – it’s an offense to end up on Barstool or have your students featured [...] nothing good happens on Barstool.

For his college – and for many other colleges, he believed – having a video or photo of his institution or a student at his institution featured on the account was offensive and in cases of risky decision making, reason for disciplinary action.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which Barstool Sports' college life Instagram accounts (@barstoolsports, @5thYear, @chicks, and any college-affiliated Barstool accounts) illuminated relationships between students' perceptions of risk when engaging with social media and their decision-making around risky behaviors and engagement with Barstool accounts. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; SCT) provided an excellent theoretical framework for analyzing this data through its focus on the different ways that media influences people's actions and behaviors in the real world.

Many of the themes emerging from RQ1 and RQ2 interconnected in multiple ways. RQ1 looked to explore how Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college student-produced videos and photos model destructive and risky behaviors. Three, key themes were found relating to RQ1: *Glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm", imitation and "one upping" to be featured, and surveillance and vigilance in a college/Barstool world.* RQ2 looked to explore how Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts are associated with college-aged consumers' perceptions of risk and decision making in the college experience. Five, key themes emerged relating to RQ2: *Barstool's "coolness" factor bringing popularity and social clout; dissonance from personal morals; a balancing act of "entertaining" risk; recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features and selective disengagement associated to a college's student expectations.*

Modeling

Modeling, in relation to SCT, refers to the values, ideas, and styles of conduct that are presented worldwide through different technologies (Bandura, 2002). Though participants did

not believe that Barstool was solely responsible for the modeling, imitation, and re-creation of risky actions and decision making in undergraduate institutions, they admitted to it playing some form of a role like that of college stereotype-based movies.

In this realm, modeling was very apparent in the *imitation and “one upping” to be featured* theme. Participants found it apparent that there was a “one upping” mentality for students featured in these videos that imitated certain actions. Students would tend to take the actions portrayed a step further, adding to more risk thus modeling a guideline that the way a student is most likely to be featured is by imitating similar acts and adding more risk to them. They also noted how social media in general is alluring to college-aged students as a way to portray oneself as someone “different” or “better” in an online space.

Participants found that Barstool’s model of imitating and recreating risky behaviors and actions were consistent through the countless examples of videos and photos posted every day on the Barstool accounts they chose to follow. Because these photos and videos were constantly featured, it opened the door for more of the same submissions to be attempted by consumers of the content. When referring to students being filmed jumping onto tables to break them, Paul revealed how there were hundreds of videos relating to this one act, showing that the modeled action of jumping through tables became a norm to be imitated. Students would “one up” this action by having the tables lit on fire. These actions were glorified on Barstool’s accounts and led to the heavily prevalent theme: *Barstool’s “coolness” factor bringing popularity and social clout*, leading to participants feeling that the college environment had turned into one where opportunity to capture content for a Barstool submission was always present in students’ minds, and therefore something most all students could be affected by whether as an active performer or innocent bystander.

The importance of vigilance.

Though being featured on Barstool was associated with “coolness” and popularity, participants acknowledged that this popularity was something that not all sought out and led to a need to be vigilant of one’s actions at all times. The college environment for participants had become one that was far more digital, with students constantly looking to “capture good content” in the hopes of it being shared on a Barstool account. The theme *surveillance and vigilance in a college/Barstool world* provided an interesting contradiction of Barstool’s appeal to participants.

Marx (2016, p. 23) explained that “surveillance implies an *agent* who *accesses* personal data,” whereas privacy “involves a *subject* who can *restrict* access to personal data through related means.” Humphreys (2011) suggests that though the two terms look to control one’s personal data, surveillance entails “power of influence over others” (p. 576), meaning, “... that an individual remains largely unaware of the monitoring and use of such information” (Duffy & Chan, 2019, p. 122). Participants explained a need to be vigilant of their actions, no matter the time during a typical college day, so as to take back a level of privacy they felt was lost from other students’ constant surveillance to capture good content for Barstool’s accounts.

Participants mentioned countless times during a normal college day where students may pull out their phones to capture Barstool content: sporting events, the dining hall, the gym, the library, parties on the weekends, tailgates, and even in the classroom. Ben noted not wanting to go to a public gym anymore because he feared that he would end up recorded during his work out. David and Katie both expressed that they would be upset if they found out someone had recorded a video of them and sent it into Barstool. So, although participants found entertainment in engaging with the content via an online platform, they did not wish to be a part of the entertainment in any other way than as a consumer.

Most participants believed an individual is responsible for presenting themselves in a college environment in a manner that helps them best avoid falling victim to recordings or pictures, but also aligns with a college's expectations of students, relating to the theme, *selective disengagement associated to a college's student expectations*. This aspect is one that is learned by many in the system of higher education in regard to maintaining an appropriate *social media self* (Lincoln & Robards, 2017). Young adults are encouraged to “clean up” their online profiles by educators through courses specializing in personal branding (Lincoln & Robards, 2017; Gershon, 2017). This is to maintain an ideal digital footprint that is “positive and consistent” to future employers and those who may be viewing their online personas (Cohen, 2015; Duffy & Chan, 2019). This “positive and consistent” digital footprint is important to avoid real-life consequences. Failure to follow these expectations in online portals could lead to a fallout with potential job opportunities or student conduct issues in the future would then affect a student's education and career goals.

The example Kyle gave of his friend who suffered a severe head injury from a fall that was recorded by a bystander to the event and then was featured on a Barstool account shows this need for students to maintain a clean social media self. Though she was able to have her video taken down by messaging the account, she still found it come up several months later posted yet again. Duffy & Chan (2019) conducted research that revealed that the “contemporary hidden curriculum of surveillance” instructs users on how they *should* organize digital traces in order to conform to the importance of a professional persona both on and offline, not by *how much* or *what kinds*. It is a constant labor. Duffy & Chan (2019) further explain:

[...] we are prodded to carefully craft and maintain a self for public consumption—a production that entails incessant invisible labor: cultivating social relationships as “followers,” “friends,” and “connections,” producing and

sharing online content, and curating a consistent digital persona that will withstand public scrutiny.

Because the video resurfaced again, Kyle's friend will now have to consistently pay attention to these accounts to make sure her digital persona is not threatened or further tainted. This is where the consequences of not being vigilant of one's actions lead to negative and harmful consequences to a person's online (and offline) persona. The post will not only follow Kyle's friend, but now holds a leverage of power over her. Because viewership on the accounts is constant, those few minutes of the video being posted led to viewership from thousands of consumers despite her best efforts.

This tension between the desire to participate in Barstool's media content coupled with the growing need for vigilance for their own behavior so as to exert some level of control over their social media representation created a contradiction to the previous theme surrounding the perceived popularity and social clout that were associated with being featured or knowing someone featured on a Barstool account. There seemed to be a level of "coolness" that came with certain posts while others were viewed as less "cool." Videos or photos that participants perceived as being embarrassing or shameful that appeared on the sites largely consisted of ones that involved individuals featured who had not consented to being on the accounts. Videos or photos that resulted in individuals facing conduct issues usually were not perceived as "cool" either to participants. Videos or photos that participants perceived as causing no harm to the institution they may be associated with or the people featured in the video were mainly considered acceptable and "cool" for participants. For all participants, their level for "cool" or "uncool" posts differed, showing that the actions modeled in the accounts are not necessarily presented in one way that is perceived the same by all who engage with it.

For Kyle's friend, obviously being featured on the Barstool account in this way was upsetting to her, but if it was perhaps not her featured in the video and someone else, it is probable that she perhaps would still not find the content entertaining if it did not meet her preferred balance of entertaining riskiness, but would also lead to her not taking the time to reach out to the account to have the video removed. Because the post would be causing no personal harm to her, the risk of the video still may not be perceived as "cool," but is not so uncool that it should be removed completely. When the post is perceived as presenting its own threat of risk and harm to the one consuming it, this is where participants most prevalently addressed actions being taken to solve the issue and viewing the post as no longer cool. Scott elaborated on the experience his mutual friends had about a risky video involving underage drinking in a residence hall that showed one of their faces. Though the post has initially seemed cool at the time, when the threat of harm to those featured became more apparent, the "coolness" factor seemed to disintegrate, pushing Scott's friends to have the post removed from the account.

Participants seemed to mainly view videos portraying risky acts as a problem for those featured to handle on their own. Scott felt that his friends were solely responsible for fixing their perceived mistake of sending in the video of underage drinking in the residence halls on campus because they had personally sent the video in to one of the accounts. He believed that all students should hold a level of responsibility to maintain a clean online persona through college so as to appeal to future employers.

In another sense, posts that involved a friend that participants felt was being taken advantage of and was not at fault while in an intoxicated or otherwise unaware state were individuals participants believe did not deserve to deal with the effects of a tainted online persona. This was where action was most likely to take place for participants to have content

removed because of the immoral nature of the act of it being posted in the first place. Ben also seemed to find a balance with consuming this content while also understanding its inherent negatives by addressing the problems with his students relating to the theme of the *balancing act of “entertaining” risk*. By talking about certain videos with his students that presented risky actions with humorous undertones, he was able to illuminate a better understanding to this younger audience about the wrongness and “uncool” nature the videos/photos actually depicted.

Digital bystander.

Yet, other participants felt that videos or photos could sometimes be unwarranted when an individual is not doing anything to promote a moment for good content to be captured. Places like the gym, library, and classroom (especially in the position as the teacher) were viewed as places where content could be recorded, but should not be, as participants believed these environments were where those taking pictures/videos were looking to more “make fun” of someone for their own gain. Participants saw a clear issue with this mindset students could have. On the extreme end, Greg viewed these acts as a type of bullying. Previously, Barstool has been criticized for creating an online environment and culture that makes cyberbullying and harassment not only acceptable but a form of entertainment (Silverman, 2018). This *sociable cyberbully* is an individual who cyberbullies for the fun of it and to entertain their social networks (e.g. other consumers of Barstool’s content) while not seriously considering the victim’s feelings (Kyriacou, 2015). Cyberbullies of this nature often described their motives for cyberbullying as something to do “for fun” and because they were “... bored and were entertaining themselves” (Smith et al., 2008, p. 380). Because these Barstool posts could be defined as acts of cyberbullying yet are viewed as entertaining by those who engage with them, those who submit the content are nourished by the “overwhelming satisfaction” that their

submission is being viewed thousands of times and outperforming (in some cases) other popular videos/photos on the account (Menesini, Nocentini, & Camodeca, 2013; Smith et al., 2008).

Thus, moral disengagement is evident here, and leads to the normalized and continued behavior of this nature (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016).

It seemed that the norms of what is acceptable to submit to these Instagram accounts differed for participants, reiterating that norms do play a role, especially in the context of social media use. Though users may approach Barstool's accounts with different motivations or needs, they are affected by how others behave and their perceptions of what other users expect of them in this social sharing (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009). But, again, Barstool is not entirely to blame in this situation. Social media and the internet as a whole create a space where any user can be anyone they want to be online, whether that be kind or unkind is up to their moral agency and the choices they make situationally in their online worlds. This promotion of bullying on the accounts presents yet another modeled belief of what Barstool's online culture is defined in. One's online persona can completely morally disengage even if they present themselves in a very different way in offline spaces.

Still, like Scott's friends, not all students recording these videos/photos and submitting them to Barstool are doing so with the intent of placing their peers who are featured in the posts in danger of being disciplined. Dijck (2009) notes that "labour volunteered to UGC (user-generated content) sites is thus not conceived of as work, but fun or play" (p. 51). Not only do users who share this content receive little to no ownership of it, they also see it more so as a fun engagement in the content and a way to not only further entertain themselves, but those who also find enjoyment in consuming the account's content. Certainly, the end result for the digital bystander/consumer of the content will be enjoyment, but the aftermath for the producer and

members featured in the video may not be so fun. To submit a video or photo comes with its own level of risk no matter what the post contains; whether it be physical injury from capturing the video/photo, or the risk of negative attention through comments and tags on the post. It is that balance of entertaining risk that is hard to pinpoint for each and every consumer *and* producer of content. Outcomes like this are apparent time and time again through countless examples provided by participants and what has been seen in media outlets, but those who are performing the acts and submitting the content may not realize the impact it is actually making on their own moral reasoning and development.

Though many participants found nonconsensual posts being featured and accepted unethical, this aspect of the accounts did not stop them from continuing to consume the content. Though participants felt sympathy for those featured on the accounts who were clearly unaware that they were being featured, Kyle was the only participant who took on the role of an active digital bystander in times where they knew the person featured in the video/photo and were aware that they had not consented to having the video/photo taken of them. So, although participants acknowledged a clear issue with these types of posts, they still did not move to do much about them other than not find enjoyment in them, leading participants to selectively disengage from their own morals while engaging with Barstool's content.

Tailored content creates influence.

Nevertheless, participants did not find themselves to be heavily influenced by the content on the Instagram accounts, which in and of itself could relate to a certain level of cognitive dissonance. Though participants perhaps did not engage in such behaviors as the ones featured on the accounts, they still consistently consumed the content when scrolling through their Instagram accounts. This, itself, creates a certain level of influence as participants have made the

conscious effort to continue to engage with the accounts despite the fact that they felt the accounts had little to no influence on them or their college experiences. This could be due to emerging adults' need to socially engage not only in person, but in online spaces. Kim, Wang, & Oh (2016)'s research on college students and digital media use demonstrated that students who feel a need to belong will be more apt to use social media and smartphones to communicate with others, and this digital media use then consequently facilitates their social engagement activities.

The "tailored communication" that Barstool's Instagram accounts provide for their consumers influences participants even simply by creating a memorable image (Kramer et al., 2014). This "tailored communication" refers to content that has more relevance to the consumer, making it more memorable, and, thus, more effective at achieving influence (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014; Binns, 2014). Participants found content memorable through reflecting back on past videos or photos they remembered consuming or posts they remembered affecting their college institutions, whether positively or negatively. The media also created an influence on participants who noted its influence on their interpersonal relationships when they would share content with friends that they thought was funny or talking about posts in their friend groups (Bandura, 2002). Leah talked about sharing certain posts with friends later on when they would be face-to-face, and Paul described posts on Barstool accounts being a topic of conversation on his college campus and within his friend group.

Although participants felt there was no influence or only a small amount of influence that Barstool's accounts had on their college experiences, participants being able to pinpoint specific examples from these accounts that were memorable and/or impacted their specific college campuses shows that there is an influence that is present. This could have resulted too from how friends and friends of friends perceived certain posts to be in terms of entertainment. If a

participant's friend's friend for example found a certain Barstool post funny, then that participant may then find the post also funny, even if it is perceived as a riskier video. Christakis and Fowler (2009) found that when studying health effects for example, "if your friend's friend's friend stopped smoking, you stopped smoking... if your friend's friend's friend became happy, you became happy" (p. xi).

This means that there is a certain level of agency that participants nevertheless have lost, but it is not necessarily negative, as Christakis and Fowler (2009) present through these health effects examples. The way these risky acts are portrayed on these accounts could have an entirely different influence that could result in consumers actually *not* imitating those actions so that a consumer is influenced to *not* make the same decision-making and reflect on their own limitations. A person then loses power over their own decision-making involving risk due to their own personal limitations. Leah mentioned this when referring to certain videos she had watched where she understood she could not drink the amount of alcohol those featured were consuming because the amount was out of her drinking limitations. She understood that the end result would be negative and even dangerous for her, so to attempt the act was not worth the risk.

Still, in the same realm, this influence can also be more on the negative side. Participants could become desensitized to the influence Barstool has on them simply because the "coolness" factor that is prevalent within their friend group and their friend's friend group and so on accepts the model of "coolness" to be the right and accepted model. This public mediated source also extends college campus's networks as well, even though it is unintended. Because this modeled version of college life is produced onto a public account, colleges can gain weaker ties of potential high school students looking to attend their university along with their current students who are both consuming and producing content on these Barstool accounts. This can then lead to

theme of *selective disengagement associated to a college's student expectations* prominent in years of college classes yet to come.

Influence on a younger age group.

Participants also expressed a clear influence that existed with a younger generation not yet in the college environment. For Ben, Katie, and Paul who shared their experiences of their own students they worked with who engage with Barstool content, it is clear that because elementary to high school students have yet to experience the college environment, Barstool promotes an unrealistic model to them that glorifies images of students' drinking, partying, and taking part in risky actions. This then relates to the theme of *glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm."* These young consumers view these models of college life actions as normal, which then encourage them to adopt these behaviors once they enter college (Bandura, 2002).

In addition, Kyle, Katie, and Brittany believed that younger, prospective students used Instagram accounts like that of Barstool's to help them in making their college choice based off of what school seemed the "coolest" from posts on these accounts. Kyle believed that Barstool was changing the way students made their college decision as they would research colleges with Barstool-affiliated accounts and see what the modeled "daily college life" looked like at each institution. As Stampler (2015) found, this is in fact the case. Media and popular culture play a critical role in enabling consumers to imagine a society and culture that may not be entirely accurate (Anderson, 2006). And with accounts like Barstool, the "real and raw" that potential new students may find could lead to dangerous perceptions of what they *think* a college will be like as opposed to what it *actually* is like.

Though 3 participants mentioned how they, too had unrealistic expectations of college life because of movies and television shows they watched prior to attending, Barstool creates a

very different image than these examples. Barstool differs from these movies and television shows because the videos and photos featured on the accounts are not merely actors playing a role. These actions portrayed on the accounts do in fact happen. As Paul explained in his interview, those who are recording these videos and featured in them *are* college students, proving that these risky instances do actually happen on college campuses even if it may not be as frequently as it is modeled to seem like on Barstool's accounts. Barstool is showcasing *real* college students doing real *and* dangerous actions. It is available on a public social media where anyone can view it with access to a smart phone or computer.

Social Networks

Many participants mentioned that the influence that Barstool had on their college experience mainly focused on the social aspect. This came through especially in *Barstool's "coolness" factor bringing popularity and social clout*. Participants agreed that students looked to submit to Barstool for the possible popularity and attention that could come from their peers if they were able to be featured, but they also found the topic of Barstool coming up in their everyday college lives as well through conversations with friends. To see fellow members of their interpersonal network adopting the accounts as part of their regular consumption habits pushed them to want to be a part of it also and follow the accounts (Bandura, 2002). In observational components Leah and Scott both liked or physically sent photos or videos to their friends to share with them in the moment or later on in person. Katie acknowledged that she had sent her boyfriend content through the accounts several times. To follow Barstool meant to be "in the know" to a certain extent for participants who chose to follow the accounts. To not be following the accounts meant to not be "in the know" and in a sense, to not be cool.

To be on Barstool is a way to connect with peers and can relate to the concept of *FOMO*, or fear of missing out. FOMO can be defined as "... pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FOMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing" (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841). Paul expressed the importance of being on "the wave" of events and instances people would be talking about on campus, and in order to do this, he needed to be following the Barstool accounts.

Kyle and Katie had noted that when videos were featured on a Barstool account from their small private institution, it was something that most everyone on campus knew about and viewed as being a big deal. So, although the members of their campus community may not all know each other, they are able to "... share a common bond to the media source" (Bandura, 2002, p. 148). Barstool's accounts, especially ones focused on specific campuses allow students to be a part of every "cool" or out of the ordinary event that happens on campus, even if they are not physically there to experience it in person. In this way, they meet their desired need of being "continually connected with what others are doing" because the accounts provide them relief from any FOMO they may feel.

Campus viceroys also supply college students with a personal connection to someone who holds more control over content at a specific institution. Sarah found that campus viceroys served an important purpose of expanding the membership of being a consumer (Bandura, 2002). Campus viceroys provided a stronger tie to the accounts in order to have content a student submits featured faster than it would be featured if the account was run by someone not located at the specific campus. Campus viceroys can be seen as a stronger tie to the Barstool network as they carry the most influence over what is featured on the college accounts and what is not,

creating a certain model of behavior that is accepted, celebrated, and featured most frequently (Weimann, 1980).

Especially when it came to examples participants gave of content submitted to accounts that were not consensually recorded videos, hyper dyadic spreads were incredibly apparent (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Hyper dyadic spread within social networks refers to "... the tendency of effects to spread from person to person to person, beyond an individual's direct social ties" (Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 22). In Kyle and Katie's example involving two students engaging in sexual intercourse in a residence hall bathroom on their campus, they both remembered that the video included one of the individuals wearing pink sneakers. Katie had elaborated that this caused many of her friends to throw away their sneakers that looked similar to the ones in the video due to fear that they would be mistaken for the person featured since there were no faces shown in the post. Though this was not intended to be a property of the network, Katie and Kyle's campus community was still affected, and it resulted in female students specifically losing a level of "power over their own decisions" and feeling the need to rid themselves of an object that had become a model of stigmatization on their campus (Christakis & Fowler, 2009).

Stigma, as a powerful social label that radically changes the way one is perceived by others (Goffman, 1963) holds great influence when it is present in communities like that of a college campus. The pink sneakers were stigmatized on Katie and Kyle's campus because of their connotation to the video posted on the Barstool account. To continue to keep pink sneakers that looked similarly to the ones the female student featured in the video wore meant to be part of the "out" group, or the persons who were associated with the shameful and embarrassing act featured on Barstool's account (Goffman, 1963). With the female population especially having

societal expectations of sex that are incredibly complicated, female students on Katie and Kyle's campus owning and wearing these shoes could appear, in a sense, less sexually appealing to men. If the female students who owned these shoes wished to remain sexually appealing, the fear of stigmatization held a strong enough power over their decision making, forcing there to be no other choice but to dispose of the shoes immediately. Through this example, one can see how social network effects, models, and norms travel extensively through the network far beyond just the direct social ties of those in the video and those who were recording it (Christakis & Fowler, 2009).

Selective Disengagement

Several themes (*dissonance from personal morals, a balancing act of "entertaining" risk, recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features, and selective disengagement associated to a college's student expectations*) all related to the concepts of selective disengagement as well as moral disengagement. Selective disengagement refers to the occurrence of people – who would otherwise behave in ethical ways – instead, perpetuating transgressions in isolated areas of their lives. This could be seen most prevalently through examples participants gave about their friends who had been featured on a Barstool account and had come to regret their decision to submit the video/photo. Participants' friends were experiencing an initial lack in moral judgment when they voluntarily submitted a video/photo in for content for the Barstool accounts (Bandura, 1991a). SCT says that consumers can be motivated to enact future behaviors when consuming these modeled influences which is to say that those participants' friends may have been motivated by the modeled influences of Barstool's media to submit their own content that they felt aligned with the modeled behaviors showcased. Thus, these friends felt as though they were performing a "transgression" through selective

disengagement that was separate from their actual moral reasoning (Novik & Borkeloo, 2013). It no longer was something fun, but something that presented possible risks with conduct at their institution.

Even still, Sarah admitted that the social clout had an effect on how she went about her college life and that her feature on Barstool was something she found exciting and did not regret. Her “transgression” was not something she found morally wrong but something to be proud of. Providing entertainment to others through the post she was featured in was something she gained enjoyment from and had interest in accomplishing again. She noted how there were points during weekend nights where she and her friends would go out with the goal of seeking the attention of others in hopes of making it onto a Barstool account.

Unlike instances where selective disengagement manifested in a student regretting a voluntary submission featuring the student him/herself, students who submitted videos of unaware, nonconsenting third parties experienced selective disengagement in a different way. A moral and ethical dilemma existed here for participants. Those recording these videos and taking these photos have adopted a new digital taste that recognition can come from not even being featured in a video but being the one to provide the content and entertainment (Shao, 2009). Submitting content to one of the accounts is something that is portrayed as being “socially worthy” (Bandura, 2001). Because certain actions are being portrayed as “socially worthy” on these Barstool accounts, a person recording someone else, even if they did not consent to it, views this action as being socially acceptable because they are providing entertainment for a larger audience whom they know will enjoy it (Bandura, 2001). As Scott mentioned with his friends’ example, a video can start off being in good fun, but it has the potential to cause more harm than it is worth in the long run depending on its contents. Selective disengagement clouds

the judgement of those sending in and being featured in videos voluntarily. Though some who are featured may not regret sending in content, others may come to find that their selective disengagement was a mistake they wish to take back.

Cognitive dissonance.

Along the same lines of selective disengagement, cognitive dissonance is also heavily apparent, helping those sending in content as well as those consuming content to find justification for their actions whether large or small. Cognitive dissonance refers to behaviors an individual performs that do not align with the values they normally possess in their everyday life (Festinger, 1962). Similar to selective disengagement, cognitive dissonance refers to an inherent difference that exists in the behaviors or actions that an individual performs in certain situations or contexts. To an extent, all consumers and all participants in this study take part in some level of selective disengagement when they find entertainment and enjoyment from certain questionable posts, whether it be female students featured on “Barstool Smoke Shows,” watching videos of fighting, or not reporting videos where the person featured was clearly not in a state of mind to consent to being recorded. They make sense of this action through their cognitive dissonance, encompassing the theme, *dissonance from personal morals*.

Several participants mentioned how, although some videos featured on the accounts did not align with what they valued or viewed as morally just, they still found themselves watching the content. These accounts become a place where consumers who do not perform the acts featured in the Instagram accounts can still have their experience of selective disengagement by simply consuming the content and even finding a level of enjoyment from it. As Bandura (2002) notes, “By blaming others or circumstances, not only are one’s own actions excusable, but one can also even feel self-righteous in the process” (p. 136). In the situation of participants

consuming this content, while not actually performing any of the actions portrayed in the videos and photos, participants can feel this level of self-righteousness by acknowledging the risks associated with the posts while simultaneously excusing their own actions of consuming this objectionable content.

Similarly, participants expressed instances of cognitive dissonance for those featured in videos and believed it was usually due to the individual(s) being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Judgement of risk for those featured in posts seemed to hold optimistic bias in the eyes of participants who were consuming the content. Though the thought that they may be injured could have possibly crossed their mind when engaging in these activities, participants felt that drug and alcohol influence caused those featured and submitting content to assume that even though they were performing risky acts, they did not believe in the moment that there would be any serious consequences that would come with the aftermath (Lee & Chung, 2010; Sharot, 2011). Greg had explained how this mindset worked where if a student has been drinking, the thought of the risky action being funny and resulting with them ending up on Barstool was probably more apparent in their mind than the thought that the outcome could be more negative (i.e. getting hurt, getting into trouble with the institution, etc.). Because Barstool's risky content has been modeled in a way for it to seem funny rather than harmful, Ben attested that this model and a student's drunkenness at the time of the action taking place can lead to performing these risky actions and seeing no negatives resulting from it.

Barstool “bro culture.”

The same can be said for male participants who acknowledged that they found enjoyment from content that showcased attractive female students on the Instagram accounts they followed through “Barstool Smoke Shows.” Scott, Katie, Paul, and Brittany all felt that “Barstool Smoke

Shows” were problematic to an extent, and that although female students who submitted to the accounts held their own agency in that decision making, they felt that the need for attention and the popularity factor of a Barstool feature still prevailed to a certain extent. Female participants were the only ones to acknowledge the content as both problematic *and also* content they chose not to consume. The only times female participants noted engaging with a “Barstool Smoke Shows” post was if a mutual friend was featured in it.

Though there was clear enjoyment that male participants received from engaging with this content, they experienced cognitive dissonance by viewing the content as a call for attention from the female students who submitted the photos. They are then ignoring the inherent problem that exists with the modeled perceptions of females on the accounts to begin with that lead to these types of submissions being celebrated and featured. A sexism existed here, and there is clearly an influence of hegemonic masculinity that does not just affect female consumers, but male consumers as well, presenting a “bro culture” that appears solely to the cis-gender male eye.

Still, there was a struggle that existed for participants with this “bro culture” model within Barstool’s media. Paul, as a straight male, clearly struggled with his values when it came to consuming content on “Barstool Smoke Shows.” For Paul, selective disengagement occurred here for him by enjoying the pictures of scantily clad female students showcased on the accounts even though he recognized the issues that surrounded “Barstool Smoke Shows” as a whole when it came to female empowerment and equal rights. There was cognitive dissonance in the sense that despite Paul having the understanding that “Barstool Smoke Shows” was a problematic aspect of Barstool’s accounts to enjoy, it was also not going to stop him from continuing to engage with these posts in the future.

Still the participants, especially the female participants, seemed to battle with this concept of agency and were not quite sure to what level these “Smoke Show” posts provided a female consumer/producer of content with liberation of her own agency to showcase her body and how much was just about female students seeking attention from an account with a highly male-dominated following. Participants seemed to feel as though female students submitting photos of themselves was an act of self-sexualization, or intentionally engaging in an action or certain activities for the express reason of appearing as more sexually appealing (Smolak, Murnen, & Myers, 2014). Sexualization theorists predicted (Lamb, 2010, 2010b; Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Peterson, 2010) that females make a greater effort than males to be sexy through their behaviors, and this can clearly be seen through Barstool Sport’s “Smoke Shows.” There is no equivalent on Barstool’s Instagram accounts for a “Smoke Show” of sorts featuring men. This aspect shows that Barstool’s content, when relating to posts like that of “Smoke Shows,” are more focused on appealing to this straight cis-male audience than other audiences that may be consuming the same content.

Because of these findings, it is possible there is a relationship between what female consumers are choosing to submit to these accounts and the heteronormative masculinity and “bro culture” that exists within Barstool to appeal to the straight, cis-male eye. The report of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2010) argues that “... girls and women are exposed to messages that influence and even pressure them to adopt a heteronormative ‘sexy’ persona, that is, to self-sexualize (looking ‘sexy’) rather than develop an agentic (being sexual) sexuality” (Smolak et al., 2014, p. 379). Through this argument, it is clear why participants, especially female participants struggled to determine if female students submitting their pictures for “Barstool Smoke Shows” were doing so out of their

own agency or for the attention of male students who follow the content on these accounts. This heteronormative “sexy” persona can make it difficult for even those personally sending in the pictures to understand whether they are doing so to self-sexualize or to develop their own agency.

Meghan Mahoney, the director of programs at the Northeastern University Sport and Society Center believes that the framing of the extremism as a form of entertainment through these accounts, especially in regard to the sexualization of female students on the site, “...desensitizes people to what is wrong in society...” and that she “... would argue that most men in their daily lives would not find the sort of things promoted on Barstool Sports to be acceptable” (Baker, 2011). Not only this, but Barstool has been referred to several times as being a misogynistic media platform, with Jemele Hill, a female sports journalist explaining that it is a space where Barstool and its consumers “... are allowed to be insulting to women, to people of color, to all the ‘others’” largely without consequences.

The selective disengagement straight, cis-gendered males perform by engaging with the content sexualizing females on these accounts may not necessarily align with their everyday morality, but cognitive dissonance of accepting this aspect of Barstool to be part of their “by the common man, for the common man” (Kang, 2017) culture not only becomes a dangerous thought process, but in some ways could even be considered not just selectively disengaging, but morally disengaging. This “desensitization” occurs for those who continuously consume this content, leaving murkiness for whether “Barstool Smoke Shows” is an action of agency for female students or once again placing females in general into a heteronormative box of “appropriate” femininity.

Because of the way females are modeled to be perceived on Barstool's accounts, one could argue that female students may be submitting to Barstool's accounts for either male attention *or* their own agency, but female students may also be submitting for *both* of these reasons. In either situation, it is clear that females are expected to be attentive to their appearances, not only in the real world but in online spaces such as Barstool, while males do not perceive a need to be attentive to their own attractiveness on a daily basis in the real world, and certainly not through Barstool's Instagram accounts (Smolak et al., 2014). This perpetuation of a "bro culture" acceptance through Barstool Sports further models a sports culture especially where females are consistently meant to be sexualized and act with a certain standard femininity that is mainly a silent actor while males are meant to be the typical masculine consumers who enjoy females being sexualized in content. The content is thus controlled to meet these heteronormative standards of what is considered "good content" and what is not.

Consumer as Producer

As previously discussed through participants' examples of *surveillance and vigilance in a Barstool/college world*, Barstool, like many social media outlets, has created a space where consumers can engage with content not just through likes, comments, and sharing, but through actually producing the content themselves and submitting it to these accounts. Bruns (2007) coined the term "produsage" to define the user-led content creation that now dominates many forms of social media. Social network sites like Instagram provide a network where "the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge" (Bruns, 2007). This creates a new hybrid of thought towards social networking sites as both a place for consumers to use the media (liking,

viewing, sharing with friends, etc.) as well as produce the content that exists within it (sending in submissions, recording videos of friends, etc.).

Dijk (2009) states that “even if content is said to be ‘user generated’ that does not mean that users have full control over what is produced and how it gets displayed” (p. 51). This is to say that although a site or account may be made up of just user generated content, that content is not completely controlled by those who film, share, and submit it. This leads to a fuzzy boundary of who exactly owns this content. If a Barstool consumer submits a video or photo to the site, do they still own this content? Barstool provides an answer to this question. On Barstool’s site under User Submissions, the company lays out what exactly happens in terms of who now “owns” this content that is submitted by Barstool fans and followers.⁷

In summation, the statement notes that any submission that a user posts, no matter if they follow Barstool’s content or not, no longer has complete ownership of the content if they use accompanying hashtags that are “Barstool brand.” The company can also use the caption the submitter may have used on their own post and can use the submitter’s Instagram name or other identifying information available to them on the posting if they choose to. The videos can be edited in any way the company wishes, relating back to the theme, *recognition of unexpected/expected negatives of Barstool features* as yet another unexpected negative that comes with submitting content. Though Barstool notes that no minors can be featured in the submission, this is difficult to police given that it is impossible to distinguish an individual’s age from a simple Instagram post. These user submission guidelines show the reality of what Barstool is: a multimedia conglomerate that has its hands in multiple social media sources through their own accounts as well as within the content produced by their consumers’ in

⁷ Full User Submissions guidelines available in Appendix A.

relation to their brand. Consumers receive no compensation from their submissions, and many content providers do not realize that, through a simple post of their college experience with a Barstool hashtag, they are contributing to company profits.

User agreements probably are not the first thing on a student's mind when submitting to Barstool, and this was clear when it came to examples that participants gave of their friends who had either submitted content themselves or been featured in submitted content. This then makes a submission, though seemingly harmless at first, to be in and of itself a risky action. Consumers and those featured in these videos actually hold very little power over what happens once these videos are posted and seen by Barstool. The idea that the person who submitted this video owns any part of it once it is in the hands of Barstool becomes tricky.

Theoretical Implications

This research provides theoretical implications for how a new generation views risk and decision making having grown up only in a world with internet access and social media. Though some participants were still within the age range of being *digital natives*, most participants were past this age and had grown up with internet access for most if not all of their lives.

Within SCT, this study promotes a new implication in regard to moral/selective disengagement with the role of a digital bystander. Both physically and through a screen, participants who record or merely view actions of risk through this media are committing at least some form of moral/selective disengagement. With Barstool creating a model of risky actions and decision making as something to strive towards, individuals no longer experience risky acts just in the moment, but repeatedly with recording devices and photos.

Because social networks are so expansive, these photos and videos could be posted onto Barstool's accounts for no more than an hour and receive thousands of views from not just an

individuals' close ties, but weak ties they may not even know. The public nature of these profiles serves as its own risk, as those who may not have consented to a video being recorded of them may find themselves posted on one of these accounts only after thousands of consumers have already viewed the content. Those holding the role of the digital bystander selectively disengage by not only making no action to report the nonconsensual video or photo, but also taking a further unethical action by laughing at the video, liking it, or sharing it with mutual friends.

With videos being taken of unaware students during the school week or professors while they are teaching in the classroom, students are selectively disengaging and, to an extent, morally disengaging by thinking solely of the possibility to capture “good content” instead of reflecting on the decision they are making to record someone who did not give them permission to do so. These posts, especially those containing professors at an institution can not only affect someone professionally, but emotionally as well.

Practical Implications

Student affairs professionals can take away from this research the awareness they must have for not just these accounts, but their students who consume them. Middle and high school teachers should even consider talking with their students early into the school year about Instagram accounts such as these and social media in general that students are perhaps consuming so that they understand that these representations of college life do not represent *everything* that college life is. Having an open dialogue with young consumers and asking what they think about the content can provide a space where educators can explain the dangers that come with not only consuming this content but attempting to mimic the behaviors being shown. Educators can then explain further why taking different actions is important in students' future college careers and will lead to successful outcomes instead of negatives ones.

It is also important to keep in mind that employees of Barstool Sports play an active role in controlling what content is featured on accounts such as these. Student Affairs professionals should make apparent to college students what Barstool's main goal is in creating a space where college students can play both roles of consumer and producer: To make money off of popular social media content and advertising. Both Student Affairs professionals as well as college students should hold this awareness that social media sites like that of Instagram are commercial platforms that companies can use to leverage their products, events, content, etc. in order to build an effective brand name. Barstool is no stranger to this approach, as they own approximately 700 social media accounts and produce 200-250 pieces of content per day (Heitner, 2018). This is, in part, thanks to the labor of those who consume their content. Thus, the accounts entertain, while also profiting off of free and welcomed labor of those who follow the accounts, resulting in these consumers/producers to participate in leveraging Barstool's commercial appeal and profit value.

Well-known Barstool founder Dave Portnoy (President of Barstool Sports) leads this charge towards profit, many times sending Barstool followers and fans (known as "stoolies") to transform "... their collective rage at a perceived enemy into content" (Silverman, 2018). A level of blame thus lies with those who are in charge of these media sources, like Portnoy, who promotes this "extremism" Mahoney had spoken about not only in regard to perceptions of female consumers, but also cyberbullying and civil engagement in online spaces. Student Affairs professionals should be aware of this implication, making themselves familiar with this media source and its contents and have the understanding that as much as students are responsible for the way they present themselves online, those who create these platforms, promote this content, and profit off this behavior also hold a level of blame.

Martin, Wang, Petty, Wang, and Wilkins (2018) state that students as early as middle school should be learning about the public and permanent nature of the internet. Students need to be learning not only how to protect their own privacy, but how to respect others' privacy as well. Martin and colleagues (2018, p. 215) note that "... guiding students to self-reflect before they self-reveal is a fundamental technique to assist them with consciously managing how they decide to present themselves online." Middle and high school students should be required to learn how to be civil and ethical social media consumers and producers, and they should learn to recognize and understand the difference between what entertaining content looks like and what hurtful or dangerous content looks like (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018). This could be done through a partially face-to-face as well as online course that provides scenarios for students and prompts them with how they would choose to respond to each scenario in an ethical way, both as a digital bystander and a physically in the moment bystander. Kyriacou & Zuin (2016) offer the idea of creating school environments where discussions about cyberbullying can also take place. They note that this environment can be created in the classroom through:

[...] open discussion with pupils about why cyberbullying has increased and why it should be dealt with. This may include understanding the motives for cyberbullying, why it causes so much distress to victims, and why victims find it hard to seek help from others. A discussion of the reasons why posting degrading comments and images on social networks is antisocial behaviour, can provide a platform to discuss why pupils should refrain from sharing such material with each other.

Because college students are still in an important developmental stage during emerging adulthood, student affairs professionals should consider updating first year students' mandatory bystander trainings to also include ethics surrounding one who could be a digital bystander and the influence alcohol can play in this role. This could also be done through first year students' classes if this class is a requirement at the institution they are attending. Students should learn to

recognize that recording videos, sending in photos, and revealing someone's identity through a comment on an Instagram post are all forms of cyber bullying that cause an increase in moral disengagement towards understanding how their actions affect fellow peers' emotions and feelings (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016).

If students are to face conduct issues relating to submissions featured on Barstool accounts or any posts located on social media in general, repercussions should focus on helping students to understand the impact social networks, popularity, and selective disengagement have on their risk decision making. This may include conducting face-to-face encounters between those who recorded a video or took a photo and those featured in the video/photo during a conduct hearing, for example if both parties are willing to participate in the exercise. By promoting these encounters and having them mediated by student affairs professionals, there could be an enhancement in the student being held responsible for the act's self-criticism as well as their moral engagement by being able to listen to how their actions affected the student(s) (or teacher(s)) they perhaps did not receive consent from to record (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016).

Limitations

Though this study presents interesting exploratory information regarding the literature and theory explored in the literature review around Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts, it has several limitations. This first limitation involved participant recruitment and retention. The original intent of the study was to complete several interviews and then to hold two focus groups with questions focusing more specifically on the social aspect and moral issues surrounding consumption of Barstool's accounts. However, difficulties around participant recruitment meant that focus groups were not possible. In the future, data collection should be extended to provide more time for collecting a larger number of participants, both current undergraduates and recent graduates. More participants should be found that are local so as to be better available for focus groups. Future researchers should reach out to more university professors in order to talk with students within the classroom to gain a larger participant pool. They should also utilize college-affiliated Barstool Instagram accounts by messaging several accounts to advertise future studies which will reach an undergraduate audience who regularly consume Barstool content.

Location of participants did play a factor, and although recent graduates who performed remote interviews still provided rich, insightful data, having fewer participants who were still attending their undergraduate institution could also be considered a limitation. Many participants who had already graduated from their institutions, though they all still followed Barstool's content, felt as though because they were no longer college students, to perform risky actions like those featured on Barstool's accounts would show levels of "immaturity," and were actions better suited to be performed by college students who had not yet entered the job world. They also seemed to struggle to remember if there were instances of certain videos or photos that were

specific to their own institution, thus lacking in examples of possible Barstool conduct instances that may have happened through their college careers and on their own campuses. Because of the lack of participants from the undergraduate institution I was located at, this resulted in fewer in-person interviews, fewer current undergraduate participants, and fewer observational components.

The participant pool, as whole, also lacked in diversity. More than half (66.7%) of participants identified as straight, white males. Though this did provide an accurate insight into who the main viewing audience is for Barstool consumers, the participant pool did not provide as strong of a female voice, a voice for participants of color, and/or a voice for those identifying as LGBTQA+. Because the data uncovered a clear impact that participants felt this media was making on a younger age group of middle to high school students, it was a limitation to not have the voice of students in this age group as part of the sample in order to more accurately confirm this was in fact the case. Future research should include a participant pool of middle and high school students who have consumed or currently consume Barstool's content to better understand their perceptions of what they expect college life to be like when they enter this realm in the future.

Because of the participant pool being that of mainly straight, white cis-males, my own positionality as a straight, white cis-female created its own limitation. Through many interviews it was clear that when the topic of female features on Barstool's accounts, especially those who were being featured as "Smoke Shows" was talked about, many male participants seemed to show a level of discomfort with speaking on this topic. A few participants, like Paul for example, outright acknowledged that they felt they were painting themselves in a bad light when it came to their consumption habits of this content when it involved female students. Unfortunately, there

was no way for me as the researcher to keep my own identity private. But if this were possible, it may have led male participants to be more honest with their answers to certain questions. Being a graduate student at the university I was located at could at points be a positive, while also being a negative when talking with undergraduate students. Some participants knew me via other graduate teaching assistants in the Communication Studies Department, and thus may have viewed me more as an authority figure than a fellow peer and consumer of Barstool content.

Future Directions

There are several new and important directions that this research should take. It will be important in future research to take on a more critical approach to not only show how Barstool promotes a culture to college-aged students of risky decision-making, but also how they present male and female students within their videos. Participants acknowledged that male and female students seemed to be presented in very different ways, namely, that the way they were presented aligned closely with gendered stereotypes in regard to femininity and masculinity.

Future directions in research may include looking at videos posted on these varying accounts using a critical lens and contrasting how videos showcasing female students differed from videos which showcased male students. This future research could continue to uncover how Barstool particularly showcases college students from a gendered perspective, and whether that perspective models and promotes toxic versions of masculinity and femininity.

Future research should also include samples consisting of middle and high school-aged students who also consume Barstool's Instagram content. This research should include similar questions to those that were asked in this study but focus on these participants' overall perceptions of what they concluded college life to be like after consuming Barstool's content.

Though it would be difficult, compiling participants who had experienced conduct issues surrounding certain posts they had submitted or had been submitted by friends of theirs to these accounts would provide rich, insightful data surrounding students' decision making processes when it comes to actually submitting content to Barstool accounts once a video is recorded or a picture is taken. This research would help to further understand how college students are

perceiving both risk in the actions performed in the content they submit, but also in the act and decision making of submitting to a public profile.

Conclusion

Social media was and still is an important way that students stay connected with one another, whether that impact is negative or positive is not always clear and can be greatly influenced by the content they consume. Social media also has the ability to provide a space where users can portray various versions of themselves online to social networks (i.e. friends/followers) who view their content (Greenwood, 2013). These various versions of oneself can portray dangerous, risky, and even offensive behaviors. Barstool Sports' college life Instagram accounts provide an excellent context to examine how college students are perceiving risk in their college lives. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; SCT) provided the most useful lens regarding how and why students perform risky actions because it stresses the important role mass media plays in influencing human thought, affect, and action (Bandura, 2002).

Research question 1 (RQ1) sought to examine how Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts showcasing college student-produced videos and photos model destructive and risky behaviors. Results from the fifteen, in-depth interviews revealed three, key themes: *Glorifying college stereotypes as the "norm", imitation and "one upping" to be featured, and college life as opportunity for Barstool content causes a need to be vigilant of one's actions.* Research question two (RQ2) explored how Barstool's affiliated Instagram accounts are associated with college-aged consumers' perceptions of risk and decision making during their college experience. Results revealed the following five, key themes: *Being featured on Barstool and consuming Barstool for "coolness," popularity, and social clout; dissonance from personal morals; cringy and risky images provide entertainment, but to a certain extent; recognition of the unexpected*

(and sometimes expected) negatives of Barstool features and a student's selective disengagement and its association to a college's mission and conduct expectation.

These themes revealed several interesting insights into how Barstool's Instagram accounts are associated with college students' risk perceptions, but also how college students are engaging with the content posted on these accounts. The main findings surrounded the existence of Barstool's influence on a younger age group, a relationship between cyber-bullying and moral disengagement, and a relationship between selective disengagement and cognitive dissonance especially for straight cis-men.

Several participants believed that these accounts influenced a younger age group and saw first-hand how the accounts have impacted students they teach and coach who follow these accounts and are in the elementary to high school-aged category. They believed that this modeled perception of what college life is like that can be seen on Barstool's accounts glorified images of party culture on college campuses, presenting a warped perception of what normal college life consists of. They felt that these models of risky college life actions being normalized would possibly then encourage elementary to high school-aged students to adopt these behaviors they are engaging with through the content once they enter the college world (Bandura, 2002).

Moral disengagement felt evident in examples where individuals were recording other without being given consent and could be viewed as acts of cyberbullying. Cyberbullies in these situations more likely did not see the error in their transgression because of the positive outcome they would receive of thousands viewing, liking, or sharing their content when it was featured on a Barstool account. This then caused an ethical dilemma for participants of seeing the act as being morally wrong, but also still engaging in the content featured on the account that they knew was of someone who had not consented to being recording or photographed. This selective

disengagement performed by the consumer was further problematic when they would engage with this problematic content by laughing at videos, liking, or sharing them with mutual friends.

Barstool's culture of "by the common man, for the common man" also sets a precedent for the type of content one can expect to be seen featured on these Instagram accounts. Barstool's continuous sexualizing of female media consumers/producers on their media outlets proved to be a large way that many male participants experienced selective disengagement when engaging with this media. Though male participants would sometimes acknowledge the issues surrounding posts like "Barstool Smoke Shows," this was more an act of cognitive dissonance as they still continued to consume the content despite acknowledging its problematic nature. I argue that this act of cognitive dissonance is one of the more dangerous, as it has the potential to turn into moral disengagement. This "bro culture" of Barstool Sports further models a sports culture especially where females are consistently meant to be sexualized and act with a certain standard of femininity while males are meant to be the typical masculine consumers who enjoy consuming content that features females dressed provocatively. The content is controlled to meet these heteronormative standards and modeled as "good content" as well as presents a certain level of attractiveness in females featured as being the "acceptable" model of what an attractive/alluring females should look like.

Because the concepts of surveillance and vigilance were apparent in these findings, I find it is important that how to be an ethical and civil social consumer and producer should be introduced into middle and high school curriculums. But college students are still in an important developmental stage during emerging adulthood as well. Because of this, they are still learning and will at times make mistakes. Those mistakes can exist in online spaces like on a Barstool Instagram account. Because of this, student affairs professionals should raise this awareness as

soon as college students arrive onto campus for the very first time. Students should be learning how to recognize that recording videos, sending in photos, and revealing someone's identity through a comment on an Instagram post are all forms of cyber bullying that cause an increase in moral disengagement towards understanding how their actions affect fellow peers' emotions and feelings (Kyriacou & Zuin, 2016).

One of the main goals of a college campus should be to provide a safe space for students so that they are able to be themselves. In the age of social media, one can feel they are constantly being observed. To build a more social-media-conscious college community will be imperative as more and more social media-raised students enter onto campuses for the first time. Learning and development happens both online and offline, and though media communities like Barstool will always exist and persist, college campuses can make changes to curriculum to help their students see what risks exist within this entertainment and in all online spaces.

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Appendices

Appendix A

By posting and uploading User Submissions that you have tagged with #VivaLaStool or other Barstool brand hashtags, you grant to Barstool Sports Inc its third-party service providers who provide content management services, and its retail partners (collectively, the “Licensed Parties”) the perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free, fully-paid, non-exclusive transferable right to use your Barstool Sports tagged User Submission in any manner to be determined in the Licensed Parties’ sole discretion, including but not limited to on their webpages, social media pages operated by Barstool Sports and in other marketing, promotional and advertising initiatives, in any media now or hereafter known. Barstool Sports may use, display, reproduce, distribute, transmit, create derivative works from, combine with other materials, alter and/or edit your User Submissions in any manner in its sole discretion, with no obligation to you whatsoever. You grant the Licensed Parties the right to use your username, real name, image, likeness, caption, location or other identifying information in connection with any use of your User Submissions. You hereby represent and warrant that (i) you own all rights in and to your User Submissions, (ii) you have permission from all person(s) appearing in your User Submissions to grant the rights granted herein, (iii) you are not a minor, and (iv) the Licensed Parties’ use of your User Submission as described herein will not violate the rights of any third party or any law (Barstool Sports, 2018).

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

A verbal consent script was read to each participant prior to the start of questions in the interview. It read as follows:

In conversational style, ...

Hello, my name is Jenna Coviello and I am a graduate student from Colorado State University in the Communication Studies department. I am conducting a research study examining how college students and recent college graduates engage with various Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts, including @chicks, @barstoolsports, @5thyear and any college-affiliated Barstool account. I am hoping to better understand people's perceptions of risk when engaging with these videos and how it affects future decision making. The title of my project is "Barstool Consequences: College Students' Risk Perceptions When Interacting with Barstool Sports' Modeling of the College Experience Through Instagram." The Principal Investigator is Meara Faw from the Communication Studies Department and I am the Co-Principal Investigator. This project has received funding from the Department of Communication Studies at Colorado State University.

I would like you to answer a few questions about how you use Barstool Sports' Instagram accounts and allow me to observe you interacting with this media. The interview portion of the study will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Would you like to participate?

If yes: Proceed.

If no: Thank you for your time.

We will not collect your name or personally identifiable information. We are collecting your name and email address, but at the end of data collection, all names will be removed from the data so that no one will be able to link you to your data you provide. When we report and share the data with others, we will use pseudonyms. There are no known direct benefits to you, but we hope to gain more knowledge on why participants choose to follow these Instagram accounts as well as the possible affect these accounts have on one's risk perceptions and decision making. The risks of participating in this research include possible discomfort in responding to some of the questions. By participating in this interview, you will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon e-gift card. This will be delivered by email. Your email address will only be used to deliver the study compensation and will be destroyed once the gift card has been delivered.

If you have questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. My contact information as well is Jenna.Coviello@colostate.edu and the Principle Investigator's contact information is Meara.Faw@colostate.edu.

Interview Questions

1. How did you hear about Barstool?
2. Which of the Instagram accounts do you follow (@chicks, @barstoolsports, @5thYear, or a college-affiliated Barstool account?)
3. Is there any other media from Barstool Sports that you consume?
 - a. Why do you choose to consume these medias?
4. What is your overall perception of each of the accounts you follow?
 - a. What do you like about them?
 - b. Why do you choose to follow them?

5. Have you ever submitted a video or photo to Barstool?
 - a. If yes...
 - i. What did the video consist of, what was the photo of?
 - ii. Why did you choose to submit this?
 - iii. Was the submission featured on any of Barstool's Instagram accounts?
 - iv. What was your reaction to seeing it featured?
 - v. Did you read through any of the comments or pay attention to how many likes it received?
 1. What did some of them say?
 2. What was your reaction to these comments?
 - vi. Did you receive any repercussions from your institution because of the post?
 - b. If no...
 - i. Would you ever consider submitting a video?
 - ii. Why?
6. Has someone you know ever has their submission featured on one of these Instagram accounts?
 - a. If yes...
 - i. What did the video consist of, what was the photo of?
 - ii. Why did they choose to submit this?
 - iii. Was the submission featured on any of Barstool's Instagram accounts?
 - iv. What was their reaction to seeing it featured? What was your reaction?

- v. Did you or the person who submitted the video/photo read through any of the comments or pay attention to how many likes it received?
 - 1. What did some of them say?
 - 2. What was the reaction from you or the person who submitted the post?
 - vi. Did they receive any repercussions from their institution because of the post?
7. Even if you have not known the person who has submitted content to a Barstool Instagram account, have you heard of any instances where students from your campus have faced conduct issues surrounding videos submitted to these accounts?
- a. Can you give me an overview of what happened?
8. From your experience, at what points in everyday college life do you think people are more likely to pull out their phones and record a video or take a picture with the intent of sending it to a Barstool account?
9. What are the videos or photos that you usually like or at least view and perceive as entertaining on these accounts consist of?
- a. Why do you like these posts?
10. What are the videos or photos that you usually do not like or at least view and perceive as not entertaining on these accounts consist of?
- a. Why don't you like these posts?
11. How has Barstool influenced your college experience if at all? (This can be through interpersonal relationships, submitting videos/photos, or seeing people you know featured on the accounts)

12. Do you think that these Instagram accounts have an influence on how students perceive college life?
 - a. Why?
13. Do you think that these Instagram accounts portray college life accurately?
 - a. Why?
14. Why do you think students featured in these videos and photos are behaving in these ways?
15. What other interactions have you had with this media that we may have not touched upon?

Observation Questions

We will now move into the observational component of this study. For this observation, I will ask you to open your Instagram to the Barstool account of your choice. I want you to scroll through the feed as you normally would but take note of your behavior when scrolling through the account. Take note of videos/pictures you choose to watch/view, videos/pictures you scroll past without watching/viewing, videos/pictures you might like, or videos/pictures you may comment on or share with friends.

1. What did the videos or pictures consist of that you took the time to view?
 - a. Why did you choose to view these videos/pictures?
3. What did the videos/pictures consist of that you did not take the time to view?
 - a. Why did you choose to not view these videos/pictures?
5. Did you like, comment, or share any of the videos/pictures you viewed?
 - a. What did they consist of?
 - b. Why did you choose to do this action?

c. Why did you choose NOT to do this action?

9. Did any of the videos/pictures make you feel uncomfortable?

a. Why?