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**“GETTING AWAY”: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE SPRING BREAK
EXPERIENCE**

A Thesis in

Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management

by

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ABSTRACT

Spring Break, a yearly week-long North American college vacation period, is one of the most popular holiday activities amongst college students, with 2.4 million spring breakers reported in 2005. Thanks to the media and the marketing efforts of a number of companies that quickly tapped into the Spring Break market, Spring Break is now firmly entrenched in the imagery of both college students and the public at large as a “Spring Bacchanal”.

Missing from the literature are studies that allow spring breakers to describe the Spring Break experience in their own words, their reasons for going and the meaning that such experience has for them. In an effort to bridge this gap in the literature, and to further existing knowledge of Spring Break, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon, by seeking answers to the following questions: “Why do college students go on Spring Break?” and “How do spring breakers perceive the Spring Break experience?”

Fourteen undergraduate students from a large Mid-Atlantic North American University, who were going on their first Spring Break experience, were selected via random purposeful sampling, and interviewed before and after Spring Break. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the resulting transcripts were analyzed using the software program NVivo[®] version 7.0 until a clear picture of the spring breakers’ experiences emerged.

The results revealed a stark contrast between the participants’ perceptions of what Spring Break is and the reality of their own Spring Break experiences. Participants’

perceptions of Spring Break, in consonance with the media-propagated image of this phenomenon, were defined by words such as “drinking”, “crazy”, “girls”, “beach”, “bikinis”, and “party”. The majority of the participants’ own Spring Break experiences, however, had little in common with this stereotype. The “typical” Spring Break for these participants, revolved around rest, relaxation and escape from school’s responsibilities.

Challenging both commonly held beliefs and existing scholarly research on Spring Break, it is proposed that Spring Break should not be easily equated with a “Spring Bacchanal”. It is likely that the media (of which MTV is a prime example), along with the marketing efforts of a number of corporations, have combined to create a distorted image of a fake rite of passage, complete with its own history and tradition(s), through a process similar to what is deemed the “invention of tradition”. It is further proposed that, rather than regarding Spring Break as an excuse to drink, have unprotected sex, etc., without restrictions, college students merely see Spring Break as the continuation of practices that they already engage in during the rest of the year, lending support to the notion of a tourism-leisure behavioural continuum. Implications for leisure research and future directions for scholarly work are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The Spring Break phenomenon (Delaney, 1997; Josiam, Clements & Hobson, 1994) and its connection to college students' risky behaviors has been established by recent research (Apostolopoulos, Sönmez & Yu, 2002; Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich & Smeaton, 1998; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold & Mewhinney, 1998; Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, Yu & Sasidharan, 2001; Smeaton, Josiam & Dietrich, 1998, Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, Yu, Yang, Mattila, & Yu, 2006). This body of literature claims that, during Spring Break, social norms are temporarily discarded in an atmosphere of hedonism and momentary suspension of personal and social norms (Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998). Male and female spring breakers alike perceive that their actions, since taking place away from their usual environment where they are subject to social norms and sanctions, will bring little or no consequence (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998). Thomas (2005) concludes that "holidays are a 'liminoid' period in which norms of behavior are temporarily abandoned" (p. 571). Other authors (e.g. Josiam et al., 1998) have classified Spring Break as a "rite of passage", i.e. a ritualized transition from either a social group, status or life stage to another (Van Gennep, 1961). Nevertheless, scant empirical evidence, conducted mostly from a quantitative perspective, supports these

claims (e.g. Josiam et al., 1998). Our understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon remains, therefore, limited.

Past research on Spring Break has been conducted largely from a quantitative perspective (e.g. Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, Yu & Sasidharan, 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998). We know *how* spring breakers behave (that is, where do they go on Spring Break, how many alcoholic drinks they consume, how many sexual partners they have, and so on), but we are yet to discover *why* they do it. Missing from the literature are studies that allow spring breakers to speak for themselves, describing the Spring Break experience in their own words, their reasons for going and the meaning that such experience has for them. To date, reasons for participating in, and the meaning of, the Spring Break experience for its participants are not known. The voice of spring breakers remains, therefore, unheard.

Apostolopoulos et al. (2002) also acknowledge that there is a severe dire need for qualitative data in order to further our so far incipient knowledge of Spring Break. A qualitative approach will “generate data rich in detail and imbedded in context” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 127), going beyond the analyses that have been done thus far. Thus the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon, by seeking answers to the following question: “Why do college students go on Spring Break?” Additionally, this study also asked: “How do spring breakers perceive the Spring Break experience?” By adopting a qualitative approach this study attempted to, by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted before and after Spring Break, give a voice to spring breakers, in an effort to decipher its meaning for those who participate in it and thus contribute to existing research.

Literature Review

Ritual and Its Meaning in Modern Societies

“**ritual** - the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. Ritual is a specific, observable mode of behavior exhibited by all known societies. It is thus possible to view ritual as a way of defining or describing humans” (Penner, 2006)

At first glance, it would be logical to assume that ritual’s importance and prevalence in modern societies has diminished (Grimes, 2002). With the advent of industrialization, capitalism, and globalization, there would appear to be less need, and indeed less time, for ritual. Drawing on Max Weber’s (2001 [1905]) disenchantment with modern society, modern sociological theory sees no place in today’s inherently rational society for myth and ritual (Gusfield & Mechalowicz, 1984). In support of this thesis, some scholars went as far as to argue that “for moderns ritual is useless” (Sullivan, 1976, cited in Furman, 1981, p. 228). Zoja (1989) bemoaned the “gradual dissolution” of the “institution of initiation” caused by “our own modern Western civilization” (p. 1). Yet one has but to look around to find evidence of how ritual permeates many aspects of our lives. Wearing a tie, shaking hands, watching the Superbowl on television, shopping for groceries, or attending mass for a deceased friend, can all be considered examples of rituals that occur in modern societies (e.g. Douglas, 1982; Goffman, 1967; Parkin, 2001). We may no longer send our noble young men on “Grand Tours” of Europe (Withey, 1997), but we still allow them a “Gap Year” (Braid, 2004), before sending them to University.

Nevertheless, as Foley (2006) well argues, capitalism has brought about changes to ritual in modern societies, making it notoriously distinct from ritual in traditional societies:

“In traditional societies the ritual expression of culture was rooted in a relatively stable, local cultural worldview, and this sacred knowledge was passed down through ritual specialists. In advanced capitalist societies, extralocal economic forces of commercialism and political forces of governmentality articulate with the local, traditional production of cultural forms and ritual practices(....)In a capitalist society virtually any everyday cultural practice can take on a heightened, commodified, dramaturgical, and performative character.” (p. 2).

Perhaps the most dramatic change has occurred in regard to space and time, crucial dimensions of ritual (Gusfield & Michalowicz, 1984; Penner, 2006; Rappaport, 1992), and scarce commodities in modern societies. Compression of these two dimensions has firmly pushed ritual beyond the sacred sphere or even provided arguments for the sacred/profane Durkheimian dichotomy to be altogether abandoned (Leach, 1968). Indeed, in Western, modern societies, ritual has moved from the collective to the individual level (Grimes, 2002); from being compulsory to being optional, from the liminal to the liminoid (Turner, 1982), thus increasing its pervasiveness but limiting its effectiveness as an overarching tool for communal bonding (Zoja, 1989).

Despite these changes, however, ritual is not only still massively influential in people's lives in modern societies (Grimes, 2002; King, 1997), but also fulfils many of its original functions, in a number of areas of modern life (e.g. Furman, 1981).

Ritual and Social Order

One of ritual's primary functions, that of creating and/or maintaining social order (Mauss, 2000), still prevails in modern society. For instance, when one enters a room, if one is not at all destitute of social skills, one should smile and greet those who are in the room, in an order such as to make evident their social status and relative importance. Similarly, when someone offers us a gift, it is polite to say "thank you". One may open it then, or not, depending on one's culture (e.g. Takada & Lampkin, 1997), but one will in all likelihood feel bound to reciprocate (Godelier, 1998; Mauss, 2000). These "rules of conduct", to which members of a society abide under penalty of sanction, are not followed because they are "pleasant, cheap, or effective, but because it is suitable or just" (Goffman, 1967, p. 48). In other words, one does not follow them for one self, but in relation to one's peers, seeking to maintain social order and avoid conflict. Goffman (1967) deemed these highly ritualized rules of conduct, which have meaning not in themselves, but in what they represent, "ceremonial" or ritual rules (p. 53). Abundant examples of ritual rules can be found in our daily actions, demeanor, clothing, and language (Goffman, 1967).

Ritual is also a very useful tool to establish, maintain and/or increase political power (Kertzer, 1988). Bennett (1980) argued that given the lack of formal political ideologies in the U.S., rituals play a decisive role in contemporary American politics. Ritual is influential not only in shaping policy-making processes, but also in the forming of public opinion (Bennett, 1980). This author further argued that, in the U.S., elections and rituals are one and the same (1980). Goodsell (1989) posited that public

administration can be considered as a type of secular ritual, and identified three types of administrative ritual: explicit rites (“ceremonies and regularized events”), formalistic processes (“budgeting and auditing”), and expressive programs (e.g. “anti-drug campaigns and rural free delivery”) (p. 161).

In Michel Foucault’s (1979) view, rituals such as a coronation or a public execution have far less to do with re-establishing an order that has been disrupted, than with the public display of an immense and overwhelming power (Foucault, 1979). He argued that a “public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested” (p. 47). The ritual that surrounds the use of the electric chair as a means of capital punishment (e.g. McGarrah, 1999), serves as a contemporary example of the elaborate rituals of torture and public punishment that Foucault (1979) describes.

Another example can be found in Durrenberger and Erem’s (2002) study of unionized American health care workers. These authors discovered how the handling of disputes between patients, staff, and administrators at a large hospital was a “ritual dance of power as intricate as any of the maneuvers of Kachin chieftains” (p. 425). Through ritual, they argued, each faction (managers, doctors, staff, union officials) tried to best the other, in a quest for more power, or at least better treatment, as in the case of the health workers. In the end, Durrenberger and Erem (2002) argued, in the case of that particular setting (a large metropolitan hospital), ritual also served as a mirror of “how inequalities are perpetuated and challenged” (p. 428).

Finally, Kertzer (1988) sustained that political rituals fulfill another very important function in modern society: they essentialize and simplify world events, thus

allowing us to understand them “for we live in a world that must be drastically simplified if it is to be understood at all” (p. 2).

Ritual and Life Transitions

Rituals that signal transitions from one stage of life to another, i.e. “rites of passage” (Van Gennep, 1960) are still very much present in the daily life of modern societies (Grimes, 2003). Events such as births, deaths, anniversaries, promotions, graduations and the like (King, 1997), are heavily clad in ritualized practices and beliefs (Mahdi, Foster & Little, 1994). Yet the function of such rites, maybe even their meaning, has changed (Foley, 2005). Recent research on ritual seems to suggest that post-modern society’s current infatuation with the media and its endorsement of individualism, has profoundly altered these types of ritual (e.g. Bell, 1997; Foley, 2005; Grimes, 2002). Coming of age rites, for instance, i.e. rites that grant passage from adolescence into womanhood or manhood (Van Gennep, 1960), have lost much of their effectiveness and pervasiveness in Western societies (Foley, 2005; Grimes, 2002; King, 1997). According to Grimes (2002), they are barely recognizable as ritual:

“Although in the West there is passage into adulthood, there are few, if any, explicit, effective rites of passage to demarcate them(....)initiation into adulthood is experienced as a vague and uncertain process, not well focused by an identifiable rite of passage” (p. 94).

It also appears that, in modern society, acquisition and consumption of an increasing number of particular goods (e.g. wristwatch, mobile phone, automobile, house,

aesthetic plastic surgery) is necessary for the successful transition from one life stage to another (Lincoln, 1977; Schouten, 1991).

Ritual and Consumer Behavior

The symbolic importance of goods in modern society has been well-established by research (e.g. Carrier, 1990; Douglas, 1982; Veblen, 1994 [1899]). Yet the connection between consumer behavior and ritual only recently has been made (Rook, 1985). Indeed, how could consumption, the cornerstone of modern, capitalist societies (Linder, 1970), be able to escape the pervasiveness of ritual? Not only is the act in itself of acquiring, consuming and displaying goods profoundly ritualized (e.g. Wright & Snow, 1980, cited in Rook, 1985), but typical places of consumption, such as shopping malls, cafes, bars, fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, and the like, also provide an ideal arena for the enactment of ritual (e.g. Cheang, 2002; Kottak, 1978; Oldenburg, 1999). Shopping, the quintessential post-modern experience, is a highly ritualized behavior (Zukin, 2004).

Conspicuous consumption, i.e. consumption done not to satisfy one's needs, but to display one's wealth and/or social status, was described in great detail in Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1994). If a product is difficult to obtain, expensive and/or requires considerable skill or knowledge to be enjoyed or consumed, it is judged to confer a higher status to those who have it (Veblen, 1994).

Modern Ritual and Leisure

Research has consistently shown that leisure is a prevailing social phenomenon in modern day society (e.g. Dumazedier, 1967; Kelly, 1999; Larrabee & Meyersohn, 1958; Linder, 1970; Parker, 1979). Leisure is a “social institution” (Cheek & Burch, 1976; Parker, 1979), as important as law, religion or work (Cheek & Burch, 1976). Given ritual’s prevalence (e.g. Furman, 1981; Grimes, 2002; King, 1997), it is thus surprising that ritual and leisure are yet to be discussed together in a conceptual manner, as two equally important facets of modern life (Moore, 1980; Rojek 2000). Some research, however, has found elements of ritualistic behavior in particular types of leisure, such as travel and tourism (e.g. Etzioni, 2000; Graburn, 1989, 2001; Hummon, 1988; Lett, 1983), the Cajun Mardi Gras (e.g. Ancelet, 2001; Sexton, 2001; Ware, 2001), or the Daytona Bike Week (Pratt, 2002).

Using surplus theory as a starting point, Rojek (2000) argued that leisure fulfils the same role in contemporary society that belonged to ritual in traditional society. According to this theory, an excess, or surplus of the energy and resources necessary for production always remain unused (Rojek, 2000). Traditional and modern societies have, so Rojek (2000) posited, distinct ways of dealing with this surplus:

“In traditional societies the question of how to handle surplus energy is bracketed as a metaphysical matter. It is up to the Gods to decide how the surplus will be absorbed. The highly ritualized character of group life can be interpreted as a method of diverting the surplus to solidify the group. In secularized, individualized society a different set of problems is posed. Surplus energy is

diverted and absorbed in ways which benefit the fragmented, differentiated character of life.” (p. 2).

Rojek’s (2000) thesis echoes Durkheim’s (2001) dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, which has been applied elsewhere to develop a typology of tourists (Wickens, 2002). It also bears striking resemblance to Turner’s (1982, 1989) distinction between liminal and liminoid. For Turner (1982), ritual is liminal (compulsory), whereas leisure is liminoid (voluntary), and thus more prevalent in modern, per opposed to traditional, societies. Rojek (2000) went on to say that leisure’s predominance in today’s society does not imply that modern society is devoid of ritual. He argued that leisure is to be regarded as a “performance activity”, i.e. one of the many ways that modern society uses to deal with the excess energy that it inevitably produces (Rojek, 2000). This notion of “surplus energy”, however, has suffered heavy criticism (Durrenberger, personal communication, March 19, 2008), most notably from anthropologists (e.g. Sahlins, 1972).

Pratt’s (2002) findings concerning the Bike Week in Daytona Beach, Florida, provided some evidence for Rojek’s (2000) theory. Classifying Bike Week as a ritual of reversal, i.e. a festival, Pratt (2002) described Bike Week as “decadent” and “nihilistic”, and suggested that it represented a successful form of dealing with the increasing pressures of modern life, particularly for middle-aged men.

Travel and tourism provide another way of temporarily escaping what Pratt (2002) called “the burden of modern life” (p. 1). For charter yacht tourists cruising the British Virgin Islands, vacations are most definitely a “liminoid” (Turner, 1982) period when nearly everything is possible, and the restrictions of society do not apply (Lett,

1983). Lett (1983) identified five different liminoid qualities in charter yacht tourism, namely transition; homogeneity, equality, and the absence of status distinctions; *communitas* (see Turner, 1982, 1989, 1990); anonymity and uniform dress; and sexual excess, and concluded by saying that charter yacht tourism allowed for “the licensed suspension of everyday norms”, which in turn acted as “a necessary kind of catharsis for the tourists themselves” (p. 54).

Attempting to lay the foundations for a theory of holidays, Etzioni (2000) equated these with ritual and posited that holidays are not only a powerful metaphor of society itself, but that they are also agents of socialization and social solidarity. Holidays, Etzioni (2000) posited, “both reflect a society’s attributes and serve to modify these attributes” (p. 44). He further argued that different types of holidays corresponded to different social functions, and that holidays need not be public in order to be effective in their integrative role (Etzioni, 2000). Debating on the privatization of both holidays and ritual, brought about by individualism, this author hypothesized that “societal changes drive holiday changes”, rather than the other way around (Etzioni, 2000, p. 53).

Other authors (e.g. Graburn 1977, 2001; Moore, 1986; Selänniemi, 2001), borrowing heavily from the work of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1982, 1990), claimed that certain types of leisure, such as play (Moore, 1986), or tourism (Graburn, 1977, 2001), have a structure similar to that of rites of passage. In his study of Walt Disney World, Moore (1986) proposed that this famous amusement park is in its form similar to a pilgrimage centre. Analyzing the constituting elements of a pilgrimage centre and Walt Disney World, and comparing a trip to the latter to the *hadj*, the Muslim ritual pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims must undertake at least once in their lifetime

(Shariati, n.d.), Moore (1986) found many similarities between the two. That is not to say, however, that behavior within the bounds of Walt Disney World is of a religious nature (Moore, 1986). “The behavior within Walt Disney World”, he argued, “is *not*(...)religious or necessarily even explicitly ritual. That behavior is organized, routinized play.” (p. 207). Nevertheless, Moore (1986) concluded that Walt Disney World “is a bounded liminal place that one visits on a playful meta-pilgrimage” (p. 216). His final reflections on modern society and its need for ritual, of which pilgrimage is a form, lend support to Rojek’s (2000) thesis on the place of leisure in a secular society, and echo Zoja’s (1989) concerns on the ineffectiveness of modern day rituals:

“pilgrimage is probably the ritual form most susceptible to appropriation by commercial, secular interests, as being the most diffuse, and hence the most purveyable. Likewise, the form is particularly apt for a society such as ours, in which transition and hence crises are constant. The causes of current transitions, however, are secular, technological and commercial, and at Walt Disney World the symbolic experiences that tide people through them have the same qualities.” (Moore, 1986, p. 216).

Finally, Graburn (1977, 2001) has sought to establish a general theory of tourism as secular ritual. For Graburn (2001) tourism is a “*kind of ritual*” (p. 42), a ritual of reversal (see Pratt, 2002), rooted in the human desire for change from ordinary life. Graburn (2001) classifies tourism as both a calendrical rite (Bell, 1997) and a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960). What is more, this author also argued that tourism and travel, much like pilgrimages, sacrifices, or communion, have important carry over effects in the tourist’s ordinary life, both before and after the tourist experience (Graburn,

2001). This mechanics of before, during and after constitute the central idea around which Graburn (2001) built his model of the ritual of tourism, drawing from Feyerabend's work (Feyerabend, 1997, cited in Graburn, 2001). In Graburn's (2001) structure of the ritual of tourism one easily recognizes Durkheim's (2001) distinction between the sacred and the profane (work is profane; holidays are sacred), Van Gennep's (1960) three-stage model of rites of passage (holidays are a liminal period), and Turner's (1989, 1994) concepts of liminality and *communitas* (Graburn, 2001, p. 45). Graburn's (2001) final argument is that, although there is an underlying, common purpose behind all tourist experiences – the “need for a change” (p. 49), that “does not mean that all tourism experiences are the same way more than all rituals are the same” (p. 48). Rather, tourists seem to knowingly choose which aspects of ritual they want to enact, as to better suit their individual purposes (Graburn, 2001). Graburn (2001) leaves us with one final caveat, that one should not consider tourism as an all-encompassing theory of modern ritual, and he doubts that such a universal theory can be constructed.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), Sigmund Freud stated that in modern society,

“We are threatened with suffering from three directions: *from our own body*, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; *from the external world*, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally *from our relations to other men*.” (p. 26, emphasis added).

Particularly for the latter (interpersonal relationships), ritual has been a universal panacea against suffering (Bell, 1997). The current body of literature on ritual seems to

suggest that, although ritual is still an important part of modern society, its role, meaning and enactment has undergone a profound transformation (e.g. Arnett, 1998; Foley, 2006). Given the scant amount of research conducted in this area, however, we have only begun to probe why and how this has occurred. Research done linking modern ritual and leisure, although even scarcer, has tentatively put forth some possible answers (e.g. Pratt, 2002; Rojek, 2000). Among this specific body of research, there seems to be consensus around the idea that leisure is being consistently used in modern society in order to cope with the ever increasing pressures and demands of modern life (Etzioni, 2000; Graburn, 2001; Lett, 1983). One of the consequences of this new found function of leisure is that (ritualized) leisure activities are becoming increasingly more individualistic, media-driven, nihilistic, and violent (Etzioni, 2000; Pratt, 2002; Rojek, 2000).

The Spring Break Phenomenon

Spring Break, the yearly one to three week-long North American college vacation period (Josiam et al., 1998), has its origins in the College Swim Forum held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1938 (Josiam et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998). Since then, Spring Break has known exponential growth, and is now one of the most popular holiday activities amongst college students, with 2.4 million spring breakers reported in 2005 (Neuharth, 2005), representing a multimillion dollar business (Bosman, 2006). What is more, the Spring Break phenomenon has pervaded American culture, notably through the influence of motion pictures (e.g. Colon, DeMaio, Paley, & Patrick, 2001; Francis, 1998; Pasternak & Levin, 1960; Smilow & Cunningham, 1983). Spring Break, from its humble

beginnings, has endured dramatic change and is now firmly entrenched in the college imaginary (Smeaton et al., 1998).

Josiam et al. (1998) point out that motivations for going on Spring Break have also evolved: “the initial attraction of spring break was about getting away from college and the ‘winter blues’ for a week(...)in more recent times spring break has become known for more extreme behaviour such as binge drinking, drug taking and sexual promiscuity” (p. 502).

Indeed, research shows that college students, while away on Spring Break, engage with more frequency in a number of health-threatening activities, such as risky sexual behavior, excessive alcohol intake, and drug use, than they do during the rest of the year, both on and off-campus (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998). This is consistent with what is known of young people’s motivations and behavior while on holiday (Cooper et al., 1998; Crompton, 1979). A number of studies have shown that this cohort is considerably more prone to such risky behaviors while away on vacation than at home (Bellis, Hale, Bennet, Chaudry & Kilfoyle, 2000; Bellis, Hughes, Thomson & Bennet, 2004; Bloor et al., 1998; Ryan, Robertson, Page & Kearsley, 1996).

Interestingly, no significant differences were found between male and female patterns of behavior involving alcohol consumption, drug use and risky sexual behavior, especially in the case of the latter (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998). Although motivations for sex and risky sexual behavior amongst college students can be regarded as highly individualistic (Cooper et al., 1998), a definite distinction between male and female attitudes towards sexual activity can be made

(Kimmel, 2000; Wilson and Medora, 1990). During Spring Break, however, it appears that typical male/female roles, if not reversed, are at least equalized (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mattila et al., 2001). For instance, Maticka-Tyndale et al. (1998) found that there was “greater similarity in the percentages of men and women who engaged in casual sex than would be expected considering the degree of dissimilarity between men and women on all other variables examined” (p. 262).

Spring breakers’ actions, therefore, seem to contradict their attitudes or planned behavior (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001). Such behaviors bear striking resemblance to certain ritualistic types of behavior, when social norms are halted and gender roles are blurred, such as the Cajun Mardi Gras (Ancelet, 2001; Sexton, 2001; Ware, 2001). We know little, however, about the connections between spring breakers’ behavior and ritual (if any), and how ritual theory may contribute to our understanding of Spring Break.

Spring Break and Situational Disinhibition

The unique character of the Spring Break experience is closely linked to what Eiser and Ford (1995) deemed “situational disinhibition”. These authors found that “seeing oneself as a different kind of person when on holiday, less constrained by normal role demands and interpersonal obligations” (p. 326), or situational disinhibition, is quite often the result of contextual factors, and contributes greatly to the occurrence of risky behaviors while on vacation, particularly of a sexual nature. These findings mirror the results obtained by Bellis et al. (2004), who studied the sexual behavior of young British

adults in Ibiza, Spain. They discovered that 26% of the young Britons who visit Ibiza without a partner eventually have sexual intercourse with more than one partner, whom they've met on the island, and that "on average such individuals accumulate as many new partners in an average 10 day stay as they do over an entire 6 months before their visit [to Ibiza]" (p.46). Consumption of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs were also positively correlated to such behaviors (p. 44, 46).

Apostolopoulos et al. (2002) applied the construct of situational disinhibition while studying HIV-risk behaviors amongst young adults during Spring Break. They argued that "it is the very space of the tourist resort that provides a conducive setting where personal and social codes are suspended, behavioural constraints are removed, inhibitions fade and...travellers take extreme risks" (p. 734). Not surprisingly, these authors found out that Spring Break constitutes such a "conducive setting" (idem). Spring breakers perceive that their actions, since taking place away from their usual environment, where they are subject to social norms and sanctions, will bring little or no consequence at all: "Activities on spring break(...)were described as exceptions to the everyday experience – as outside of usual expectations, standards or norms. Students(...)portrayed an atmosphere in which the usual rules and moral codes did not apply" (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998, p. 262).

An analysis of the modern ritual and leisure literatures reveals that the connections between these two constructs have not yet been firmly established. Furthermore, although its need has been expressed by researchers, few qualitative studies linking these constructs have been done. Past research conducted on Spring Break (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al.,

1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Sönmez et al., 2006) further suggests that ritual theory might be a valid theoretical framework from which to further our knowledge of the Spring Break phenomenon.

Spring Break – a Rite of Passage?

Based almost exclusively on quantitative data, some authors claim that Spring Break constitutes a ritual for college students (Josiam et al., 1994; Josiam et al., 1998; Russell, 2004; Smeaton et al., 1998). With scant empirical evidence to support their claim, Josiam et al. (1998) classify Spring Break as a “rite of passage” (Van Gennep, 1960). Rites of passage are associated with life transitions, much in the way that Van Gennep (1960) defined them (Bell, 1997). Transition from childhood into adolescence, birth, marriage, graduation, and so on, are all examples of these types of ritual (Bell, 1997). Rites of initiation, defined by Eliade (1958) as the “body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated” (p. x) are quintessential rites of passage (Bell, 1997). The Zuñi initiation ceremony (Cushing, 1979), or a fraternity pledge (Rhoads, 1995), are good illustrations of such rites.

Support for this hypothesis can be found in the unwritten rule “nothing that happens here [on Spring Break] is serious, long-lasting, or permanent”, as Matycka-Tyndale et al. (1997, p. 321) and others (e.g. Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006) have discovered. If spring breakers indeed feel somehow compelled to go on Spring Break, or to behave in certain ways in order to “fit in”, as some recent research seems to indicate (American

Medical Association, 2006; Associated Press, 2006; Sönmez et al., 2006), one could perhaps classify Spring Break as a ritual experience, i.e. a rite of passage. Given the current lack of qualitative data on this topic, however, this remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Given that the purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at a complex phenomenon, by inquiring of its participants *why* they go on Spring Break, a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate. Qualitative research possesses a number of “strengths” (Maxwell, 1996), that make it particularly suited for this type of study. First, it is especially effective at understanding the meaning and context of a particular event for participants (Maxwell, 1996). This study sought to present Spring Break as viewed by its participants, and that can only be possible if the meaning spring breakers attribute to the Spring Break experience is comprehended. Second, “qualitative research(...)excels at generating detailed information” (Trochim, 2001, p. 152). Such detailed information is required in order to generate a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the Spring Break phenomenon, as complete and detailed as possible. Third, the type of questions asked, *why* and *how*, as opposed to *how much*-type questions, can better be answered using a qualitative framework (Bernard, 2002). Finally, recent media exposure has equated Spring Break with controversy (e.g. Leinwand, 2003; Williams, 2006), and that too argues against the use of quantitative methodology (Creswell, 2001). Indeed, “qualitative research has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues” (Trochim, 2001, p. 152).

Qualitative research encompasses different “approaches” (Trochim, 2001), or “traditions of inquiry” (Creswell, 1998), that is to say, different “ways[s] of thinking

about conducting qualitative research” (Trochim, 2001, p. 159). Out of the most common five such approaches referred to in the literature – biography, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (e.g. Creswell, 1998; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Trochim, 2001), phenomenology appears to be the one that will yield the best results in this particular case. According to Creswell (1998), a phenomenological study “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or(...) phenomenon” (p. 51). By uncovering the meaning of a certain phenomenon for those who participate in it, phenomenology seeks to present “how the world appears to others” (Creswell, 2001, p. 160). Phenomenology treats subjective phenomena (meanings, experiences) objectively, rendering it possible for those who are ‘outside’ any given phenomenon to understand it from the participants’ perspective (Rogers, 1983).

In the leisure field, phenomenology has been successfully used on a number of studies that have analysed different aspects of the leisure experience (e.g. Howe, 1991; Vingerhoets, Huijgevoort & Van Heck, 2002). Because of the intrinsically subjective and elusive nature of the leisure experience (Godbey, 1994; Lee, Dattilo & Dennis, 1994; Patterson, Watson, Williams & Roggenbuck, 1998; Stewart, 1998), phenomenology is a particularly apt qualitative method of inquiry in leisure research (Howe, 1991). The nature of the leisure experience is such that no two people engaged in the same leisure activity experience it or regard it the same way (e.g. Barnett, 2005; Madrigal, 2003). In the case of Spring Break, and given the current state of research before I undertook this study, I could only speculate that the same would be true of spring breakers (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Maticka-Tyndale et al.,

1998; Mattila et al., 2001). Phenomenology thus appeared as a sound and viable approach to look further into this matter. By conducting in-depth interviews with spring breakers from a Northeastern University, over two distinct periods in time (before and after they go on Spring Break), this study aimed to present Spring Break as it appears to those who participate in it.

Selection of Participants, Data Collection, and Issues of Confidentiality

Participants

A number of studies have contributed to identify the characteristics of the Spring Break population: they are college undergraduate students, predominantly white, aged 18-24 (mean age 20), with a slightly higher percentage of males than females (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001). Based on this literature, and with the specific purposes of this study in mind, a number of distinct sampling techniques and criteria was used to select participants.

Random purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998), was used to obtain as a representative sample of the ‘typical’ Spring Break population as possible, given the obvious time and financial constraints that every researcher must face (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Trochim, 2001). Purposeful, or purposive, sampling is defined as “the use of judgement and a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples by including presumably typical areas or groups in the sample” (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000, p. 179). Random purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was particularly useful in

this case, as it helped to maintain sample credibility given the fact that the accessible population (spring breakers at a large Mid-Atlantic university with over 40,000 in the main campus alone) was far too large (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Trochim, 2001). Nevertheless, for the reasons stated above, the sample used must still be considered a convenience sample, with the consequences that such sampling procedure entails (Trochim, 2001).

Four criteria were considered whilst selecting participants: college year, age, Spring Break experience, and decision to go on Spring Break. Participants were freshmen students from a large Mid-Atlantic university, aged 18-24, with no previous Spring Break experience, that had declared their express intent to go on Spring Break. First, only freshmen were selected, as they were less likely to have been on Spring Break before (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998), and also because it was expected that the intensity of the Spring Break experience would be heightened by the fact that they were, for the first time, in college. This hypothesis is supported by literature connecting college students' risky behaviours and their year in school (Gledhill-Hoyt, Lee, Strote & Wechsler, 2000; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo & Lee, 2000), and existing Spring Break literature (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006). Second, only students aged 18-24 were considered, so as to best mirror the spring breakers' characteristics discussed above. Third, no students with previous Spring Break experience (that is, that have gone on Spring Break previously) were considered for this study. This added richness to the data and eliminated the possibility of confusion between two or more separate Spring Break experiences. Finally, only students that had made the firm decision to go on Spring Break were accepted. Thus I could be assured, as much as possible, that the subjects in this study would indeed go on Spring Break.

Although not a selection criteria *per se*, participants that merely went home for their Spring Break (for part or for the entire duration of their Spring Break vacation), were not excluded from the sampling pool. Not only was this measure useful for comparison purposes, but these participants constituted a “control group” (Trochim, 2001) of sorts (Chick, personal communication, March 19, 2008). Participants were also equally distributed according to gender, so that male and female comparisons could be made (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998). Eight of the participants were females, whereas six were males.

Recruitment of participants was made through advertisements across campus (see Appendix A) and e-mail, in a similar fashion to Maticka-Tyndale et al.’s (1998) Spring Break study. Participants were paid \$25.00 per interview, upon completion of the same, for a total of \$50.00 (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Weiss, 1994). It was made clear to participants that this study involved participation in *two* sets of interviews, and it was expected that the amount involved would be enough to compensate for that factor. After an initial round of previous selection and screening, the first fourteen participants who revealed an interest in participating in this study and met the aforementioned selection criteria were selected, which is adequate for a phenomenological-type study (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998).

The question of sampling procedures in non-parametric (i.e. qualitative) studies and analyses has been of interest to researchers for quite some time (e.g. Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998). Consequently, there is a wide abundance of literature on this topic (e.g. Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Depending on the type of inquiry chosen (ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, etc.), different sampling

procedures are to be followed and consequently, different sample sizes apply (see Creswell, 1998, for a good comparative analysis). However, few of these scholars provide empirical evidence for these sample size guidelines (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2008). Nevertheless, the ultimate goal is to have enough participants that will allow the researcher to reach “data saturation”, i.e. the “point at which no new information or themes emerge in the data” (Schrauf, personal communication, February 4, 2008).

If the researcher has at his or her disposal sufficient funds and time, and no specific number of participants has been required *a priori* of him/her (which seldom happens), the process of reaching data saturation is quite simple. The researcher will begin by conducting 3-5 interviews and then code them. He/she will repeat the process. Then, the researcher counts the number of new codes added by the second set of interviews (e.g. the first set yielded 25 codes, the second 15 new ones, thus making a total of 40). By calculating the frequency of new codes added by the second set, and third, and fourth, etc. (i.e. the percentage of new codes yielded by each successive round of interviews), the researcher will eventually reach a point where the percentage of new codes gained by each new round of interviews is very small (e.g. 5-10%). To use an economic expression, the marginal utility of conducting one more interview will tend towards zero. At this point, the researcher can say, with a certain degree of confidence, that data saturation was achieved (Schrauf, personal communication, February 4, 2008).

Nevertheless, only very rarely will the researcher have the luxury of ample funds and extended periods of time during which to conduct research. Furthermore, when applying for grants, or submitting the study for approval by the university’s Office of Research Protections (IRB), it is more than likely that a specific number of participants to

participate in the study (i.e. the sample size) will be required of the researcher, as was the case of this study. In this case, the researcher must possess (ideally, he or she should already have it) a deep knowledge of similar (nonprobabilistic) studies conducted in his or her field of interest. Based on those studies, the researcher will have more or less a ballpark figure to work with (e.g. a number between 10 and 30 interviews is fairly common in qualitative research). A most helpful article in this regard is Guest et al.'s (2008) experiment with data saturation and variability. They discovered that 92% of their codes came from the first 12 interviews that they conducted, out of a total of 60 interviews conducted across two West-African countries. Thematic prevalence and internal consistency amongst codes were still high within that group. So, our ballpark figure would be 12. Of further interest is the fact that Guest et al. (2008) used samples from two different countries (Ghana and Nigeria). They discovered that 88% of the total codes for both countries resided within the first 12 interviews, and that "adding the Nigerian data to the mix rendered little change to the codebook structure" (Guest et al., 2008, p. 68), further reinforcing the notion that data saturation was achieved by the 12th interview. A careful researcher would increase this number slightly, anticipating events such as participant drop-out, illness, lack of homogeneity in the population, and "unresponsive" participants (Weiss, 1994). Therefore, the sample size used in this study (14) seemed quite appropriate.

Data Collection

Data was collected via face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), individual face-to-face in-depth interviews aim to “foster learning about individual experiences and perspectives on a given set of issues” (p. 314), thus making them the most appropriate type of interviews for this study (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when the researcher seeks information about a given set of topics, but still wants to retain enough freedom to follow interesting leads that may arise during the interview process (Bernard, 2002).

Participants were interviewed individually over two different stages: before and after their Spring Break holiday. Having two rounds of interviews has yielded good results in other studies involving young people and their behaviors (Duff, 2005). Although the decision to go on Spring Break is generally made months in advance (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006; Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003), it is not until a few weeks prior to the event itself that a general sense of excitement takes over the (future) spring breakers (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006). On the other hand, Wirtz et al. (2003) have discovered that spring breakers’ overall remembered experiences were more intense 2-4 days after Spring Break, whereas remembered negative experiences were more acute 4 weeks after Spring Break. Based on these findings, and attempting to capture the spring breakers’ experience with as much detail as possible (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995), the first stage of interviews took place two weeks before Spring Break and the second stage one week after the event.

During the first stage, interviews were conducted with the purpose of “breaking the ice” (Bernard, 2002), and inquiring why the participants had decided to go on Spring Break. Establishing rapport with the participants during this first set of interviews was crucial, so that topics of a more sensitive and personal nature could be approached during the second stage of interviews. An interview protocol for this stage of data collection can be found in Appendix B. Duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour (Weiss, 1994). Acknowledging the importance of the setting in conducting qualitative interviews (Elwood & Martin, 2000; Sin, 2003; Weiss, 1994), interviews were conducted in a quiet, convenient, non-threatening, and ‘neutral’ place, in order to minimize its influence over the participants (Weiss, 1994). In this case, due to availability constraints, a number of faculty and graduate offices in the researcher’s department were used.

The second stage of interviews attempted to capture spring breakers’ overall perception of the Spring Break experience. Initial rapport with the participants had been established by then (consonant with existing literature – see Bernard, 2002), which did much to help the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the overall meaning and relevance of the Spring Break experience. The question “Why did you go on Spring Break?”, rephrased in the past tense, was asked again during this stage, in order to gauge the effect of the Spring Break experience on the participants’ initial views (Burawoy, 2003). An interview protocol for this stage of data collection can be found in Appendix C. Duration of the interviews ranged from one to two hours (Weiss, 1994).

During both stages of the interview process interviews were digitally recorded (Bernard, 2002). Notes were also taken throughout the interviews, as “tape is not a substitute for taking notes” (Bernard, 2002, p. 223).

Confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality of personal data were stressed, and all participants, prior to the study and to each interview, were asked to sign an informed consent form, of which each participant was given a copy. A sample copy of such informed consent form can be found in Appendix F. This form complied with guidelines currently in use at this particular university's policies for Research with Human Subjects (Office for Research Protections, 2005). All personal information concerning the participants was known to the researcher alone. It was emphasized that, if at any given time during this study, a participant wished to have any type of information removed from the study, such data would be destroyed. This was made clear at the onset of study, and was stated in the informed consent form as well. Participants were advised, however, not to discuss issues that involved, directly or indirectly, contraventions, misdemeanours or crimes according to U.S. and foreign laws. Data was stored in a fire-proof file cabinet, of which the researcher has the sole key, and all digital information was encrypted. Upon completion of the study (2 years counting from the last date of the final data collection conducted), all personal data will be destroyed. For further information, refer to Appendices D (IRB Spring Break Study Approval Letter) and E (IRB Spring Break Study Proposal).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and personal notes were transcribed verbatim and subsequently coded and analysed using the qualitative research software program NVivo[®], version 7.0 (QSR International, 2007). Along with ATLAS.ti[®] and

Ethnograph[®], NVivo[®] constitutes one of the most well-known and most widely used software tools for qualitative research and analysis (Schrauf, personal communication, February 4, 2008), and has been used successfully in a number of different qualitative studies (Richards, 1999; Welsh, 2002), thus making it particularly suited for the present study.

Although with a theoretical framework in mind, this study allowed for data to emerge during this stage, in the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Thus, in an initial phase, analysis of data involved open coding – “words and phrases that identify and name specific dimensions and categories” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 150). On a regular basis, analytical memos were written on particular topics, or “core themes” that caught the researcher’s eye (Emerson et al., 1995). Data was then recoded, using axial coding, based on these interrelations (Creswell, 1998). Interview transcripts and personal notes were re-analyzed based on these codes, “piecing them together” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 166) and “building a logical chain of evidence” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 260) until a clear and accurate depiction of the Spring Break experience and its meaning for spring breakers emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Data saturation was reached by the 8th interview, which is consistent with existing literature (Guest et al., 2008).

Verification and Validity of Data

Verification of Data

A number of procedures were used in this study in order to verify accuracy of data, confirm evidence, and assure representativeness of findings (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Creswell (1998) recommends “qualitative researchers [to] engage in at least two” out of eight possible verifying procedures (prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, thick description, and external audits) (p. 203). Out of these eight, only three (periodic member checks, prolonged engagement and external audit), due to time and financial constraints, were not used in this study.

First, multiple sources and methods of collecting data were used (Denzin, 1978; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 1965). As was mentioned before, data was collected at two distinct periods, before and after Spring Break. Additionally, comparisons with similar studies were established (e.g. Foster, 1986; Yarnal, 2004), and alternative sources of information (e.g. informal conversations with spring breakers, ethnographies, newspaper articles) were used as comparative evidence to the emergent findings of the present study. Second, the researcher’s advisor, an experienced qualitative researcher who has herself conducted a similar study (Yarnal, 2004), acted as a “peer debriefer” (Creswell, 1998), meeting with the researcher once a week in debriefing sessions. Third, the researcher engaged in negative case analysis, that is to say, he refined “working hypotheses(...)in light of negative or disconfirming evidence” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). In the researcher’s opinion, this ongoing process of “looking for negative

evidence” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 271), done not only by the researcher, but by the peer debriefer as well, only strengthened the study. And finally, the researcher’s biases or preconceived notions about Spring Break were clarified from the onset of the study, and permanent reflection on how the same had affected the processes and outcomes of the research occurred throughout the study (Dupuis, 1999; Naples, 2003).

Validity of Data

At the onset of this study, the researcher positioned himself as a 27 year-old Portuguese, white, single, heterosexual, male, with all that such condition entails (DeVault, 1999; Kimmel, 2000). Cultural, race, gender and sexual orientation dif(pre)ferences no doubt affected the outcome of the study (Naples, 2003). What is more, the researcher also entertained pre-conceived notions about college students in general and Spring Break in particular. It is also possible that the mere presence of the researcher influenced the outcome of the research (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998). If, on one hand, the researcher must abandon the “naïve view” that he is a “mere observer outside and independent of the observed phenomenon” (Emerson, 1987, p. 78), on the other hand he must also try not to purposefully influence either participants or settings, as it would no doubt taint the results of the study. It is hoped that the permanent reflective stance, and a critical and sceptic view of settings, participants, meanings and the researcher himself (Naples, 2003), which the researcher strived towards during this study, only added to the validity of the study.

Personal information was kept to a minimum in the final manuscript, and is mentioned in such a way as to not permit identification of participants. Information given “off the record” was kept as such, unless participants gave their express and written consent that it could be used (Creswell, 1998). Above all, participants were allowed to “tell their story” (Bernard, 2002), without interference or manipulation, and hopefully they will not incur in any harm or injury from doing so.

By using a qualitative approach to take a closer, in-depth look at a pervasive North-American phenomenon, Spring Break (Josiam et al., 1994; Russell, 2004), this study hopes not only to contribute to a better understanding of this experience, but also to unravel its meaning for those who participate in it. By asking “Why do college students go on Spring Break?” a particular theoretical framework was explored, and its validity and applicability within the particular context of Spring Break was examined. Furthermore, by asking “How do spring breakers perceive the Spring Break experience?”, spring breakers were given a voice, which so far had not been done.

Adoption of a phenomenological approach, combined with the use of in-depth interviews resulted, in the researcher’s opinion, in a richness of data difficult to obtain otherwise, thus adding to the existing body of research on Spring Break. The end result, somewhere in-between a “confessional” and an “impressionist” tale (Van Maanen, 1988), hopefully provides audiences with a personalized and reflective account of Spring Break and spring breakers, and of the research process itself, but it should also do more. It should “capture a worldly scene in a special instant or moment in time” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 101), thus giving the reader the impression that she or he was there. It was my

purpose to offer a vivid description of the Spring Break experience, as perceived by those who experienced it. If this did not occur, the blame is entirely mine.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The results revealed a visible contrast between the participants' perceptions of what Spring Break is and the reality of their own Spring Break experiences (see Tables 1 and 2 on pages 46 and 57, respectively). When asked what images sprung to mind upon hearing the words "Spring Break", all participants, without exception, mentioned such things as "drinking", "crazy", "girls", "beach", "bikinis", and "party". Moreover, participants identified the source of this "Spring Break stereotype" as the media, with MTV and its yearly broadcast "MTV Spring Break" playing a predominant role. The majority of participants' own Spring Break experiences, however, had little in common with this stereotype. Only one of the participants experienced what could be described as the 'stereotypical' Spring Break, involving the consumption of large amounts of liquor, and participation in alcohol-laden beach parties involving public contests with a strong emphasis on (female) nudity.

The "typical" Spring Break, as the majority of the participants described it, revolved around rest, relaxation, and escape from school's duties and responsibilities and was also an opportunity to be with family and friends in a stress-free environment, preferably in warm weather. What was surprising was that, upon their return from Spring Break, although their own experiences contradicted the Spring Break stereotype, many participants maintained that the "real" or "typical" Spring Break still corresponds to the image given by MTV.

Thus the answer given by the participants to the question: “Why did you go on Spring Break?” had little in common with the “Spring Break stereotype” discussed above and challenged both commonly held beliefs and extant literature on Spring Break.

Data was grouped in two sets of three categories, or tree nodes, each, which were in turn directly related to the main issues discussed by the participants (their perceptions of the Spring Break phenomenon, experiences whilst on Spring Break, reasons for going, and so forth – see Figure 1 below).

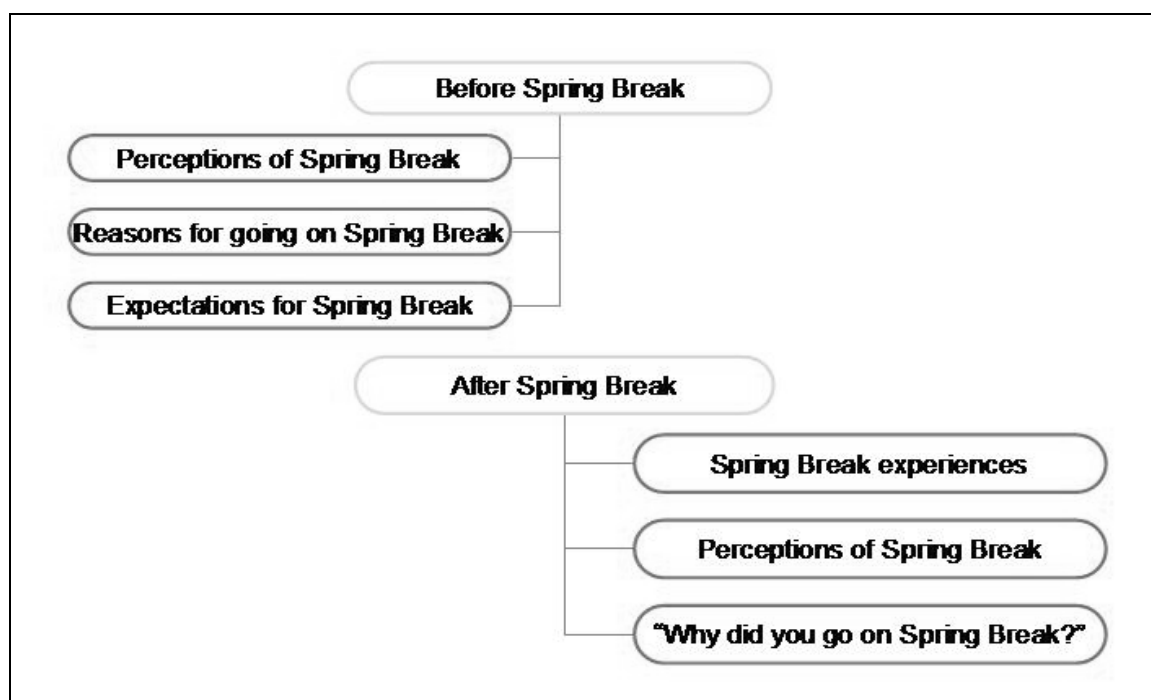


Figure 1: Spring Break Domains of Inquiry

The first set of data is related to participants’ answers before the Spring Break experience took place, and includes: 1) the participants’ overall perception of the Spring Break phenomenon; 2) their reasons for going on Spring Break; and 3) their expectations

for this upcoming event. The second set of data pertains to their answers upon return from their respective Spring Break trips, and contains: 1) an account of their most memorable Spring Break experiences; 2) the participants' perceptions of Spring Break, mediated by their own experiences, and 3) their answers to the question "Why did you go on Spring Break?" These categories and associated domains of inquiry (Guest et al., 2006) are discussed in detail in the following pages.

Before Spring Break – "We're just excited to go"

The overall feeling amongst spring breakers a few weeks before the event was one of excitement. Participants were excited to leave school, work and responsibilities, cold weather, unpleasant roommates and demanding teachers, and were looking forward to a much anticipated and much needed break and a chance to reunite with family and friends. Participants also mentioned the buzz of excitement that precedes Spring Break, making it the main topic of conversation for the participants and their friends, as another contributing factor in their decision to go on Spring Break. This atmosphere of excitement and anticipation contributes to persuade students that going on Spring Break will not only be fun, but what you're supposed to do once you are in college. As one participant put it, it's "the thing to do".

We're just excited to go, excited to get away (Michelle, 18).

Because you know, it's Spring Break, I've looked forward to it, I guess they[my friends]'ve looked forward to it, all, all semester long (Sean, 18).

People are excited to do fun things...because it's exciting to leave this place and go someplace new, like Washington DC, and it's exciting to meet your parents, to meet your friends...like, the last time I saw my parents was Winter Break...so I'm excited to see them (Lisa, 18).

And basically people are just very excited, they can't wait. That's why basically, if I would be going on my ideal holiday(...)obviously I would be talking about it all the time (Sharon, 19).

It's more exciting to go (laughter). Staying at home is like, I don't know(...) [going on Spring Break] it's more like a party week, to get away from up here, and do something exciting (Jennifer, 18).

I don't know, I guess I thought it was the thing to do (laughter) (...)I guess I'd just been hearing people's plans and completely assumed that everyone left for Spring Break (Karen, 19).

Perceptions of Spring Break (before Spring Break) – “A nice break from everyday life”.

Like the name indicates, Spring Break is a break. A break from cold weather, a break from school, structure, and work. For all participants, Spring Break equates mostly with escape and relaxation. For them Spring Break is

A nice break from everyday life, especially now being up here in college, it's kinda (sic) like a break from class work, as opposed to high school, where it's like, okay, you get to finish that term paper that you have due when you come back, so, I'm definitely in the break idea in college about leaving high school (Anna, 18).

The *image* that participants have of Spring Break, however, is quite different. When asked “When you think about Spring Break, what comes to your mind?” the most common answers (93%; n=13) were in consonance with the “Spring Break stereotype”: “booze”, “beaches”, “parties”, (going) “crazy”, and “girls”.

When I think about it, I always think about having a lot of fun, not being supervised at all, going crazy (Jennifer, 18).

I guess(...)I think about MTV Spring Break, there's like a bunch of people on the beach, and stuff like that (Michelle, 18).

Because when you think of Spring Break, I always have these pictures of MTV since when I was little, you'd see all the crazy people out there in their bikinis in their beach parties (Anna, 18).

I have no idea. I think it's... if you ask any of my friends, why are you going? Girls and booze, number one reason (John, 18).

As I mentioned above, it is interesting to note that participants identify the origin of such Spring Break images as the media, especially MTV. Male participants (43%; n=6) in particular stressed the appeal and the impact of MTV Spring Break on their image of, and decision to go on, Spring Break.

MTV has a Spring Break where they party the whole time on the beach and that's all, you don't see anyone standing around, that's all, they're drinking, getting crazy(...)you see Spring Break on MTV, you see the girls going crazy, the guys like "Yeah!" (Sean, 18).

Hmmm, I don't know, I don't [know] why ever since I was young I get that feeling that it's important to go, like at least one time, I don't know why, I think it's just, it could be when I was in high school or whatever, MTV always has the Spring Break coverage from Cancun or whatever, so I think that gives you like, an outlook on it, or something, and you wanna (sic) go experience that kinda (sic) stuff first hand, rather than watching from however far away (John, 18).

This does not necessarily mean that students view this image as desirable, or even as a correct depiction of what actually occurs during Spring Break. Indeed, some

participants (36%; n=5) reacted negatively towards it, and made a point of stating that their own Spring Break would be the opposite of this image.

Well, when I was in high school, I was brainwashed by MTV, so I think the typical thought was “*Oh my gosh we gotta (sic) go party put on our little bikini and go to Cancun*”, which is not a place I would ever go to. But people have this perception of party, party [with] lots of people, that’s not my idea of Spring Break, which is why I think that I might be farther than the average(...)for me(...)I would prefer to be low key, and I think the average perception is go with friends and get away from parental control and party, which is what I originally would have said(...)because of watching all that Spring Break MTV junk (laughter) (Karen, 19).

Reasons for going on Spring Break - “I thought it was mandatory to leave”.

Answers to the question “Why are you going on Spring Break?” were quite straightforward. Participants are going on Spring Break because they have to, or rather, because the alternative (not going and staying on campus) is either that more unpleasant or non-existent. Participants’ views on the lack of pleasurable alternatives to Spring Break were epitomized by the following quote:

I don’t think there would really be much to do(...) [here] over Spring Break(...) that kind of, it puts a lot of people in a bind, I think because if you don’t really know a lot of people who have off campus housing and you can’t afford to fly back to wherever you’re from(...) I don’t know about, I mean, I didn’t really look into it, but I haven’t heard about anything. It just says the dorms are closed, you have to leave(...) Um... I wasn’t going to do anything and then, I don’t know, I was thinking about it and, I mean, a lot of my friends are going to be doing stuff and I just didn’t really want to sit at home and lay around all week, and, I mean, the opportunity kind of presented itself, so I mean, why not? (Robert, 18).

For those who live in dorms, for instance (which constituted the majority of participants – 71%; n=10), they simply must leave, as the dorms are closed and the RA's (Resident Assistants) are gone. Thus students are left with the options of going home (which some do, and still consider it as “going on Spring Break”), finding alternative accommodation on campus or at a nearby friend's house, or going on Spring Break.

Well, first of all I can't stay because I live in a dorm(...)Second reason, all my friends are going home, so I'll be very lonely (laughter)(...) And I know that everybody goes home, and you need a break(...)from the place, and from the environment (Sharon, 19).

Honestly, I thought it was mandatory to leave, at first. I just read a couple (sic) weeks ago(...)that you can't stay on campus over Spring Break(...)They close the residence halls down. Yeah, but I guess one stays open, a couple stay open, you can actually get housing over Spring Break (Sean, 18).

I assumed people would leave for the week. I don't know actually anybody that is staying here. I do live in a dorm, so I do know that you're not allowed to live there, and so that was, “*Wow, you have to leave*” (Karen, 19).

Expectations for Spring Break – “We wanna get away from college”.

Before leaving for Spring Break, participants were looking forward to warm weather, relaxing, not doing any (school) work of any kind and, above all, forgetting about campus, classes and homework. Participants mentioned the toll that the overall campus atmosphere, where homework, books, duties and responsibilities are always looming on the horizon, was taking on them.

It's like, it kinda (sic) builds off(...)that environment, all that school stuff, it's kinda (sic) like always on your mind, and you just [want to] completely get away from it, [so that] you don't have to always be thinking about it, [and] you can enjoy yourself more(...)Your books are always sitting in front of you, it's like, everything, "*Uuffff!* *Get a break from this!*" (Jennifer, 18).

And I know that everybody goes home, and you need a break(...)from the place, and from the environment (Sharon, 19).

[My expectations for Spring Break are] just having a really good time with my friends, getting away from here, from home and just have fun, before I have to start working (John, 18).

Participants also expected to hang out with their friends, and, if they're going home for Spring Break, catch up with their families and friends from home.

We wanna (sic) get away from the formal like aspect of college where you're in, you're out, you talk for five minutes and you're done. Well, we wanna (sic) hang out. We wanna (sic) be on(...)level where you're not constrained by homework and teachers and tests (Karen, 19).

I don't know. I know I want to see my family, at least meet some of them, ahmm, trying to get a tan (laughter), maybe... (John, 18).

[I want to] relax. I wanna (sic) spend time with my friends from high school, my mom, and I have a sister who's five years old, I wanna (sic) do stuff with her (Sharon, 19).

For those who are going to a new destination (85%; n=12), their expectations revolve around going out (at night), seeing new places and meeting new people, drinking (a major expectation for those who are underage), partying, and having a lot of fun.

I'm looking forward to going out and finding pretty cool places to hang out at night, like, I don't know what's going to be around, but hopefully

some clubs or something. And then, just relax during the day, my roommate and I hope to meet like, pretty cool, anyone who's down there, just cool people that are on Spring Break (Jennifer, 18).

[My friends want to] get as many girls as they can! (laughter) (John, 18).

I mean(...)...one of the kids [who lives] down there, it's his 21st birthday when I'm down there so, we'll probably have a party with that, and I don't know, go out, meet some people, party a little bit, see what happens (Robert, 18).

Just basically go out, have a good time, camp, and cook our own food, and go out to the bars most of the nights, and [go out to] the clubs and just, you know, have a good time (Scott, 21).

I will be in Washington DC, working in a hotel, and I hope I'll be able to party at night(...)*so(...)*I expect to have a really great time. Forget about(...) [school] and just relax(...)*I will have a lot of fun!* (Lisa, 18).

Participants also mentioned that they are eager to engage in their favourite recreation activities (e.g. scuba diving, sleeping, golfing, reading, shopping, etc.), for which they feel they lack the time to participate in during the semester.

[I'm] just looking forward to get away, having a good time, I want to do a lot of scuba diving, I'm a big time scuba diver, been diving everywhere around the world. Ahmm, just want to see a lot of different things I've never seen before (William, 25).

[I want to go] surfing, and partying, and [I want to play] golf (Robert, 18).

I wanna (sic) go shopping (laughter) I don't shop at college(...)*I really just want to sleep in the mornings, without no one telling me to get up and go to a lecture in five minutes and it's a 20' walk away* (Karen, 19).

Some participants (14%; n=2) mentioned how previous experiences, particularly those in high school, affected their expectations for Spring Break.

I have high expectations, just because when we graduated from high school we went on our senior trip and it was the greatest trip of my life and we had a great time down there, and I hope to have the same again(...). Well [on the high school senior trip we] woke up late, went to the beach, got as many people from the beach as we could and started partying (John, 18).

The only senior interviewed for this study (Mike), viewed Spring Break as his “last hurrah”, a final opportunity for “living it up” before entering the world of adulthood, work and responsibility.

One last hurrah, as everyone likes to say, like my best friend likes to say(...) “You know what? This is our last Spring Break as college kids.” He always uses that, I feel that people use that a lot in life(...). There’s always a reason for it, for living it up. And I respect people that can do it a lot and still maintain responsibility... and it is the last Spring Break for me(...). It’s not like once I graduate from college I’m gonna (sic) stop partying, I’m still gonna (sic) have some fun, I’m still gonna (sic) be twenty-one, twenty-two, but you start to rethink things more, or maybe this isn’t where I should be right now, you start to look ahead more (Mike, 21).

Finally, all participants stressed the idea of *not* having any plans (or very loose ones at that), but rather to “see what happens”.

I wanna (sic) relax, shop, not worry [about school](...) I don’t really wanna (sic) have a planned agenda (...) I just wanna (sic) go with(...) [the flow] (Donna, 19).

I mean, I definitely want to surf a lot and...one of the kids down there, it’s his 21st birthday when I’m down there so, we’ll probably have a party with that, and I don’t know, go out, meet some people, party a little bit, see what happens (Robert, 18).

That's one of the points about Spring Break that's so great – everything should be spontaneous, like, I think that's a big part of it(...)The best things happen when you don't even expect [them] (Mike, 21).

After Spring Break – “I can't wait to see pictures and hear stories”

Upon their return from Spring Break, spring breakers seemed eager to tell me what had happened to them during Spring Break. Indeed, a number of participants (43%; n=6) mentioned that the sharing of their Spring Break “stories” with others (e.g. family, friends, roommates) is part of the whole Spring Break experience.

They are all like, I can't wait to see pictures and hear stories. I'm laughing and I tell my family that “*Yeah, I made it home safe*” (Anna, 18).

I think that's what everyone wants to get out of Spring Break. They want to come back and [let others] know that you had a good time and a good break(...) [Having such nice memories] will make me want to go on another Spring Break (Jennifer, 18).

I think a lot of people go on Spring Break just because it's the thing to do. It's Spring Break. We have to go someplace. So you don't come, and, “*Oh, what did you do for your Spring Break?*” “*Oh, I stayed here*”. That kind of sucks. They want that story. They want to have people come back and say, “*Hey, what did you do for Spring Break?*” “*Oh, we went to...*”, and they want to make it like maybe as extravagant as possible (William, 25).

Spring Break experiences – “It was a pretty relaxed atmosphere”.

With one exception (one participant went skiing during Spring Break) all spring breakers went somewhere warmer for their Spring Break. The vast majority headed south, towards the beaches and warmer climates of the East Coast of the United States. Participants travelled to destinations such as St. Augustine, Miami, Orlando, and Daytona

Beach in Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Other destinations included Washington, DC; Avalon, New Jersey; and Hunter Mountain, Pennsylvania (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' Spring Break Destinations

name ^[1]	age	gender	academic status	Spring Break destination
Anna	18	female	freshman	Peru
Donna	19	female	freshman	Avalon, NJ
Jennifer	18	female	freshman	Orlando, FL
John	18	male	freshman	Miami, FL
Karen	19	female	freshman	Virginia & West Virginia
Lisa	18	female	freshman	Washington, DC
Mary	18	female	freshman	Hunter Mountain, PA
Michelle	18	female	freshman	St. Augustine, FL
Mike	21	male	senior	Las Vegas, NV
Robert	18	male	freshman	St. Augustine, FL
Scott	21	male	freshman	Daytona Beach, FL
Sean	18	male	freshman	Myrtle Beach, SC
Sharon	19	female	freshman	Philadelphia, PA
William	25	male	freshman	Florida & Mexico (cruise)

^[1] To protect participants' identity and ensure confidentiality, all names have been changed

Two participants (14%) worked during their Spring Break; one participant (7%) went on a cruise to Southern Florida and Mexico, and another (7%) went on a school extended field trip to Peru.

Well, we went to St. Augustine which is near Jacksonville, Florida for the first weekend I was there. While we were there, we kind of walked around the city and went to the beach the next day. Then, after that I went to

Tallahassee and stayed at Florida State. While I was there I went to a couple of classes and just hung out. I went to the mall. I went to a Florida State basketball game (Michelle, 18).

I went to St. Augustine, Florida. Stayed at my friend's apartment, who goes to Flagler College down there. And basically, surfed a lot, went out at night, went to the bars, which, they're real lax with ID's down there, so I used my friend's who's Puerto Rican and pretty dark. I used his ID and got into all the bars, so, that was interesting. First time I ever went to a bar(...)That was fun. We had good waves. It's just a good area down there (Robert, 18).

[During Spring Break] I worked a few shifts at my job at Ann Taylor Loft(...)I forgot how much effort it took out of me. It wasn't unexpected it was just maybe I shouldn't have worked. I sort of needed the pay check anyway so it was a give or take and I had to take it (Karen, 19).

We went on a cruise. We went to Playa Del Carmen and we went to Key West. And at Key West, we went snorkeling on a catamaran, like a booze cruise type of thing. And we went on Duvall Street, drank a mojito, and my girlfriend got key lime pie on a stick (William, 25).

I travelled down to Peru and we did environmental research and then we also went to some of the touristy spots down there like Tosca and Machu Pichu (Anna, 18).

Some participants (29%; n=4) went home to see their families for a brief period before joining their friends on Spring Break. Most participants (71%; n=10) drove to their Spring Break destination, making a road trip out of it, with (lack of) money being the deciding factor in their choice of transportation.

First of all I went back home, stayed there and visited my parents for three days, and then I left to Washington, D.C. and I have been there for five days, and then I came back to(...) [campus] on Saturday (Lisa, 18).

I guess it's a little different because when you go away on a road trip, before you're always used to being with your family. [With] your parents being there. So, it's kind of different to go away on a trip, almost like a

vacation, and be on your own. I'm on my own here, living, but then I go on vacation by myself, and just [my] friends (Sean, 18).

Getting there, it took about fourteen and a half hours, because we drove(...).It's actually cheaper to drive and it was kind of a last minute thing. Not last minute, but we couldn't really get a good deal on tickets. I think they were like \$270.00 or \$280.00. For two people that's almost \$600.00 and we(...)[didn't] spend that much on gas (Robert, 18).

Money was a recurrent theme in the participants' responses. Most participants (85%; n=12) shared the view that the amount of money at their disposal (even with some monetary help from their families, when available) was insufficient to thoroughly enjoy Spring Break. Furthermore, some participants (35%; n=5) stressed that their financial situation heavily conditioned not only their choice of destination, but their overall enjoyment of the experience.

It was like, we'd get up in the mornings, and like, "*I'm hungry*". We'd go out there and say, "*Where are we going to eat?*". You got Quizno's for \$10.00 and McDonalds for \$2.00. I'd say, "*All right, I can use that \$8 for gambling*". It was just a lot of trying to find the right clubs, and trying to keep a good buzz going and get a good tan (Mike, 21).

We kind of messed up because they had this thing where you pay twenty-five bucks and for the week you get [in] free into the bars. And we were planning on doing that, but we didn't realize that you had to buy this thing. So, we didn't get that(...).we didn't do it because we didn't realize it. It was free admission between seven and nine, and(...).so we'd show up at these bars at ten to nine and they'd be, like, "*No, you need the bracelet*". I was, like, "*You're kidding me*". So, we ended up paying so much in covers. So, that was one of the downfalls of the week, because we didn't know about that. Just found out afterwards. After it wasn't a deal anymore (Scott, 21).

I think something that definitely has something to do with it [Spring Break] is the ability to take(...).opportunities, like especially cost-wise and, I mean, some of my friends' parents aren't exactly supportive with spending more money, because if you're paying for tuition...(Anna, 18).

Money is a huge factor. If I don't have any money to do the things I want to do...(....)The alcohol was very, very, very expensive(....)My girlfriend had a Piña Colada and I had a Captain and Coke, and it cost us \$18.95 (William, 25).

If I had the money I would go [somewhere else]. I probably would have still gone to the beach or something because that's not even that expensive. I wouldn't have gone with the same people, though (Jennifer, 18).

Most of the participants (79%; n=11) mentioned that rest and relaxation, without the pressure of school or work, was a great part of their Spring Break experience. A typical Spring Break day usually entailed sleeping in, having a frugal meal, going to the beach/pool in the early afternoon, hanging out, and going out to eat dinner before going to a bar and/or nightclub.

Well, we woke up probably around noon(....)And we usually—the hotel had a café in there, so we usually got coffee or bagels they had. And then we'd go on the beach, but not for that long, like I said. And then we'd come back and usually just watch TV, take a nap. Every day we took a nap. And got ready, took a shower and all that stuff, and then went out to eat, and then after that we went to some parties (Donna, 19).

Well, we didn't go to bed until at least 6:00a.m. every morning, 5:00a.m.-6:00a.m. So, we woke up around 2:00p.m., I'd say. Then we went to the beach and hung out or whatever. Then we just went out to different places in Miami and then somehow we got into this bar. I don't even know how we got in. The bouncer let us in and we went there for a couple of nights. Basically we repeated the whole process over again (John, 18).

The Spring Break atmosphere, as the participants described it, was a relaxed one. With some occasional periods of “craziness”, participants reported an easygoing and

relaxing atmosphere, which in no way undermined their overall enjoyment of the Spring Break experience.

It was easygoing(...)it was more relaxing because you know that everyone else is on Spring Break too(...)It seemed happier and relaxed(...)It was all pretty, warm weather sounding. You know what I mean?(...)When you are walking down the road, you hear all of this music coming out of places(...)Yeah. Getting you in the mood to go to the pool and go to the beach (Jennifer, 18).

You could tell everybody was there for Spring Break or some stuff, like we were the spring breakers, but it was fun. Yeah, a lot of drunk girls, a lot of people dancing on the bars and drinking and going crazy and stuff. I'm 25 years old, so I'm not going to go crazy or anything like that. Me and my girlfriend just sat at a table and kind of watched everybody (William, 25)

It was relaxing at times, and then it was kind of crazy. Everyone was like telling stories of school and laughing. We watched that movie *Borat*, so that was really funny. It was just very relaxing and like chill(...)You're in a different environment. You're with your friends, and you also have the ideal image of Spring Break. Like having a great time, because it's your one week out of an entire semester to be who you are, do whatever you want with no obligations (Mary, 18).

It was relaxing, you know. It wasn't like I really planned, like I said before, the whole crazy(...)I mean, I don't know if it was just later. Like I said, a lot of my friends had Spring Break earlier, so. But there wasn't too much craziness. It was just relaxing. It was fun to be there(...)But, it was a pretty relaxed atmosphere, I guess(...)We went to the beach and there was a lot of people just laying out. Just taking a break from everything, I guess. There was some drinking, but we didn't really see a lot of it, at least on the beach. It wasn't like I talked before about the crazy parties and everything. It wasn't really like that at all. Just everything was just, laying around, swimming, coming in, laying [around] some more (Sean, 18).

As I mentioned previously, only one participant (Scott) experienced the “typical Spring Break”:

Typical day in Daytona was, we'd get up around nine, make breakfast. We made cocoa and then we had Bailey's for it. Cocoa and Bailey's, which was amazing. Then we'd get around to make (sic) breakfast. We made eggs and pancakes and all that kind of stuff. Then we would go – you can drive on the beach there, which was nice(...)And we'd go to the beach and we'd park on the beach, sit out for a while. And there was this hotel, it was the Spring Break place to be. They had a wet t-shirt contest, a bikini contest, beer chugging contest, belly flop contest, all that stuff(...)It was crazy. Everyone was crazy. Everyone was drinking, and a lot of people getting arrested(...)for drinking on the beach. They were cracking down on that. I mean, everywhere you'd go someone was getting arrested and they were dumping their alcohol out(...)The beach itself was just covered in cops. You couldn't get away from them. It was ridiculous. But it was a crazy party atmosphere, especially at the Desert Inn. The Desert Inn was crazy. I ended up winning a beer chugging contest(...)it was exciting. You had to spin around ten times and chug a beer through a straw without using your hands. That was really neat. And the Desert Inn was really cool. It really had that party atmosphere. It was a neat experience. That was the Spring Break experience that I wanted to go see and experience (Scott, 21).

With one exception, all spring breakers drank alcohol whilst on Spring Break, regardless of their age, and one of them admitted using drugs (cannabis). Going out for dinner, to a bar, or to a nightclub, were considered highlights of their Spring Break experience. The younger participants in particular all reported going out, drinking and getting drunk as Spring Break events.

I went out at night to one club where—it was actually really weird. They let girls in who were eighteen and only guys who were twenty-one and above (...)twenty-one is the drinking age so, I would think that—I don't

know it's kind of corrupt but, I guess what they are thinking is the guys will all buy the girls drinks not like the younger guys (Jennifer, 18).

The clubs and stuff were cool but, I'm not really into dancing. We are not 21 so we obviously can't go into every single bar, so that part was a lot different because unless you are in a different country, you can't drink. So, we basically just drank in the condo and what not and then went out. It wasn't like we were drinking and everything while we were at the clubs and all that. So, I think that was a little different (John, 18).

Then we went back to my friend's dad's house and we ate at this Mexican restaurant. It was a real, real little place, and it was themed to look like you were actually eating in Mexico, and it looked like a really crappy place, but it was really good food, and we had Margaritas (Scott, 21).

Just surfing, eating, sleeping, drinking at night, pretty much. A lot of weed down there(...)they smoke a lot of weed(...)It might just be that college, that area. But, I don't know, I don't smoke too much weed, but those kids were just at it(...)It was just, like, all right (laughter)(...)It just kind of sucks, because when you smoke that much weed it gets to the point where you just don't want to do anything, and then, I mean, I was just kind of, like, "*All right, let's go do something besides...*" (Robert, 18).

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that for one senior that participated in this study (Mike), when asked about drinking (in excess) during his Spring Break trip (which he freely admitted to – "I was really drunk"), stated that such extremes were not necessary for one to have fun during Spring Break:

It's funny, because we actually called it the best moment(...)We had a good buzz going, and we were just relaxing and catching up. We weren't even in the crazy party scene yet, and we were just like, "*This is awesome!*" We were just hanging out in the sun, not worrying about anything, just bullshitting. It was really simple. It was like all I need is just the atmosphere and those people to be around. That's all I need (Mike, 21).

Perceptions of Spring Break (after Spring Break) – “It’s a week of not having responsibility”.

When asked on their perceptions of Spring Break (“what comes to mind...”) upon their return, all of the participants agreed that it was a week off school, without any pressures, work or responsibilities.

Spring Break is about going away from college and doing different things and resting and having fun. Just forgetting about college.
Refreshing(...)Just relaxing. Changing atmosphere, changing places.
Some people got to go to Hawaii and Florida (Lisa, 18).

It’s a week of not having responsibility, which, when you’re in college you do have a fair amount of responsibility. And being able to kind of, just, revoke all of that for a week is a good experience (Robert, 18).

[Spring Break is](...)a way to get away and relax from all the work of college. Not really as one big, huge party, like I saw before(...)I’d say the biggest thing is it’s really what you want to make it, I guess. If you want to go out and party and have a good time you have every opportunity to do that. Just as if you just want to mosey around or relax, you can do that too (Sean, 18).

After experiencing Spring Break for themselves, participants recognized that their own Spring Break experiences were very different from those advertised by MTV:

It gets a lot more publicity and I think its stuff like that. You always see commercials on MTV and other things like that that are just advertising. Come here to our spring break and they show a lot of young people going there where other vacations it could be like families. Like on cruise things they show families playing. It’s just different (Jennifer, 18).

You think it’s different whenever you watch it on TV. Like on MTV and all of that, they are in Cancun or wherever they are. There’s people doing the ridiculous games and stuff like that but once you get down there and start interacting with people, I think it’s a little bit different. We still had a

great time and all of that but, it wasn't like the craziness that it is on TV. I didn't think it was, at least (John, 18).

Nevertheless, a significant number of participants (79%; n=11) still identified Spring Break with the "crazy party atmosphere" diffused by MTV. The participants' personal experiences over Spring Break caused only minor changes to their previous definition of Spring Break.

I don't think the definition would change too much. I think it'd still be along the lines of you are off of school for a certain time and many people travel to places warm or some people travel colder and go. I'd still mention drinking, a bunch of college kids, basically going crazy and living with freedom for a little while (Anna, 18).

I would just say, it's a blast. It's college students that are, you go somewhere. Usually it's down south, sometimes it's out west to Colorado, whatever they like(...)I mean, you hit the bars and everything. But going to bars, drinking, having a good time, escaping. You don't have to drink, of course, but escaping from the usual mundane college life. Going and drinking and laying on the beach and having fun (William, 25).

One participant in particular (Sharon) went as far as recognizing the existence of "two typical Spring Breaks":

Well, I think there are two typical Spring Breaks. The one that people go, like, to Florida or some warm place and they have party—many party as, like, on the beach, or just spending time on the beach. And then there's another one, which, also, I know a lot of people have done. Just went home and relaxed and just see their friends from home and family. So, basically those are the two typical ones. Maybe the untypical would be staying here (Sharon, 19).

All participants stated that they had fun, and that the experience had been worth it (i.e. it had met their expectations), but many (35%; n=5) mentioned that Spring Break had been somehow of a letdown, given all the hype and excitement that preceded it. It seemed that, for some participants, the Spring Break experience was disappointing, as it did not meet their (high) expectations of non-stop fun created before their departure.

During the day, some days if we weren't going to the beach or walking around, like the first day we would walk around and then we went to the beach and then like the next day we were just kind of waiting until night to go out. So, we were just kind of like sitting by the pool. It was fun but, we were just like, "*Okay I want it to be night time*". That was probably it (Jennifer, 18).

Spring break is just a phenomenon of college students just, well(...)basically it's just a time when people go to the beach and they do crazy stuff. College students. But some people, like me and some of my friends, they just don't have the funds to do that (Sharon, 19).

Furthermore, when prompted to discuss what disappointing/negative experiences had overshadowed their Spring Break vacation, several participants (43%; n=6) expressed regret in regard to some of their Spring Break experiences. Many of these disappointing experiences were as trivial as occasional periods of boredom; not doing everything the participant had planned on doing; too much time spent traveling to and from the destination; living in close proximity with other spring breakers, and so on.

In the middle of the week we traveled a lot. There was a lot of car time. (Karen, 19).

Just I really wanted to go skiing. I just wanted to try skiing and snowboarding, but it didn't really matter(...)I was a little disappointed

that I couldn't skiing, because I'd never been skiing before and I wanted to try it(...)That was like the only kind of bad thing (Mary, 18).

Not as fun? Well, I live alone in the dorms. I don't have a roommate, so, living with other girls in close quarters, that wasn't the best(...)I don't know, I kind of just wanted to be alone, in a sense, and not have to constantly go out (Donna, 19).

A minority of participants (14%; n=2) reported more serious occurrences, such as brushes with the law whilst driving, or drinking at a bar despite being underage:

I got pulled over on the way home. I was going 45 in a 40(...) So he pulled me over and said, "*You know why I pulled you over?*". I said, "*I have no idea*". He said, "*Because you were doing 60*". I was like, "*Bullshit, I was [not] going 60!*" And he's like, "*How fast were you going?*" I said, "*I was going 45 in a 40*". And he was like, "*That's five miles an hour too fast*". So he gave me \$107 ticket (William, 25).

My roommate [and I] got pulled over in Virginia. However, we can add [that] to our stories of Spring Break. Luckily, she got off with a warning because I knew the cop (Karen, 19).

I mean(...)I look back at it, going into that bar probably wasn't a great idea but we still had a good time. I don't think I would change anything major, probably just like little stupid stuff(...)Like I said, going to that bar wasn't a smart idea. Probably taking my uncle's car out to begin with probably wasn't a good idea(...)Yeah, he said that we could take it. After the accident happened, the cops had to call him and do that whole routine to make sure we were allowed to drive it and all that. That wasn't a good idea to take that out in the beginning. Probably, I don't believe we did this but it was like the third or fourth night we were there and we were going back. It was like 3:00 and my two friends went up to this homeless guy and asked him to buy two cases of beer for like ten Big Macs. So, then we carried it back to the condo on the streets. That wasn't a good idea (John, 18).

Why did YOU go on Spring Break?

Participants' reasons for going on Spring Break were expounded upon significantly after the Spring Break experience(see Table 2 below). In hindsight, only one participant (Lisa, 18) mentioned Spring Break's compulsory nature as her reason for going. All other participants cited a number of other motivations for having been on Spring Break, such as getting away (from school) to curiosity, boredom, and opportunity. Above all else, however, participants went on Spring Break in order to "get away" (William, 25).

Table 2: Participants' Reasons for Going on Spring Break

name	age	reasons for going on Spring Break
Anna	18	"It was something to do with myself"
Donna	19	"My friends and I just put the plans together"
Jennifer	18	"To have fun and get away to Florida"
John	18	"To get away from everything"
Karen	19	"I think there was opportunity"
Lisa	18	"I had to leave"
Mary	18	"Just go out and have fun with my friends"
Michelle	18	"Because I wanted to see my boyfriend"
Mike	21	"Just the atmosphere"
Robert	18	"I just wanted to get away from dreary Pennsylvania for a little while"
Scott	21	"I just wanted to see what Spring Break was like"
Sean	18	"Relax for a week, not have to worry about anything"
Sharon	19	"I really wanted to see my family"
William	25	"Because I'd never been on a cruise before"

For male and female spring breakers alike, Spring Break was an escape, a period and an excuse to do nothing, especially work, and not be bound by rules, regulations and expectations. Participants stated that they went on Spring Break for four distinct sets of reason. First, because they wanted to get away from campus, away from classes, rules, and work; away from boredom and their daily environment (43%; n=6). Second, because they wished to spend time with their families and friends and Spring Break provided them with the perfect opportunity to do so (14%; n=2). Third, because Spring Break was something to do, a phenomenon they were curious about and wanted to see for themselves, and also an opportunity and an excuse to do something they had never done before, such as going on a cruise (7%; n=1). And fourth (for 14% of the participants; n=2), because they had to go somewhere, especially if they live on campus (at this particular university, dorms close on Spring Break).

Almost all participants (93%; n=13) mentioned that they went in search of rest and relaxation, much like one does when one goes on holiday. Yet they were adamant (with one exception) in saying that Spring Break is nothing like a typical holiday, the main difference being that they are in control of both the destination and their actions (per opposed to a family holiday, for instance). Only one participant (Scott) went in search of the stereotypical (i.e. MTV's) version of Spring Break, but he too, wanted to get away, with curiosity also playing a role in his decision to go on Spring Break.

Getting away

Five participants (35%; n=5) articulated that the motivations behind their Spring Break vacation were related to the desire “to get away” from the school environment, routine, responsibilities, and bad weather.

To have fun and get away to Florida. I’ve only been there a couple of times. I hadn’t been to Orlando but I was in Miami one time just to fly out of it (Jennifer, 18).

I went away so that I can just go out with my friends and be with them for three days, and I was going to learn how to ski and do different experiences. Just go out and have fun with my friends and be like relaxed, not have to go to work or have something to do (Mary, 18).

You know, [it’s my] last break, [I] want to go somewhere warm, want to see some friends from home, want to get away from [the] Northeast, want to get a tan, want to relax in the heat. Just the atmosphere (Mike, 21).

I went basically just because there was an opportunity for me to go down to Florida for minimal expenses, and I just wanted to see my friends, I wanted to surf. I just wanted to get away from dreary Pennsylvania for a little while(…)I think just my mindset is a little different—was a little different going down there. For me it was about seeing old friends, surfing, just being around people I wanted to be around. Where my other friends who went to Miami or South Beach or all that stuff, it was about going crazy, partying, all that kind of thing. And of course I knew I was going to be partying, there’d be drinking while I was down there, but that wasn’t really—it wasn’t my sole purpose for going down there (Robert, 18).

I think the main reason, like I said before, to get away from everything. I’m so ready for summer right now and I’ve only been back a week. It was really, really nice to get away from the whole school atmosphere and just go with my friends and have fun without parents. I guess you really don’t have parents here but... (John, 18).

Being with friends/visiting family

Four participants (29%; n=4) mentioned that spending time with family and friends, some of which they had not seen in quite some time, were the deciding factor that motivated them to go on Spring Break. Within this group, one participant (7%) mentioned that she was going on Spring Break expressly to spend time with her boyfriend, who attends a university in Florida.

Well, I, as I told you, I wanted to see my family because I haven't seen them in a long time, and I miss my friends(...) And I, honestly, this time, this year, at this moment, before(...)Spring break, I'm not—I don't think even if I had the money to go somewhere I don't think I would because(...)because I just, I don't know, I really wanted to see my family. I would feel like I'm cheating them [if I didn't go see them over Spring Break] (Sharon, 19).

Just as a fun road trip with my friend from high school. Relax for a week, not have to worry about anything (Sean, 18).

I think there was opportunity. It happened to be Spring Break. I didn't have to go. I guess I could have stayed. I think because there was an opportunity to go home and see my family and see friends, I took it knowing that I hadn't been home and I won't be home. I think that was one of the biggest factors of being, this is my first year of college, living on my own and I can do it. I lived on my own pretty much my senior year in high school where my parents really didn't like parent so to speak. Not that I was a wild child, I'm just saying that I had a lot of freedom. Doing my own thing, driving myself, feeding myself but I was tired so I wanted to go home. I didn't mind missing a week up here in State College to go home (Karen, 19).

Because I wanted to see my boyfriend and I figured it would be better to go see him in Florida than stay home and be cold (Michelle, 18).

Something to do/opportunity/curiosity

Four other participants (29%) mentioned that Spring Break merely represented an opportunity to do something that they had not done before (e.g. going on a cruise, going to Peru), or simply “something to do” with oneself during this period.

Because I’d never been on a cruise before, so I thought, hey, let’s go on a cruise. I could have very well stayed here, and I would have been very happy with that. But I’d never been on a cruise before, so I was like, hey, let’s go on a cruise for Spring Break. So we decided to go on a cruise. We would have done it during the summertime. It didn’t necessarily have to be during Spring Break. But just the fact that we’d never been on a cruise before, we decided to go on a cruise, and, also, her Dad lives in Miami, too. So we decided to go and see him and everything. It was kind of like we have some time so let’s do it (William, 25).

It was something to do with myself. When I was in my geography class I just heard about this trip and I was like that’s cool. I had no other plans. If I didn’t go on spring break, I would have just been back home which would have been nice. I’m the kind of person that likes to keep up (Anna, 18).

Mostly for something to do. I didn’t want to sit around. I just didn’t want to be bored. Mostly I just wanted to see what Spring Break was like. It was just more of a curiosity thing than anything (Scott, 21).

Why? Well, my friends and I just put the plans together. It just came up because of Spring Break (Donna, 19).

Had to leave

Finally, one participant (7%) expressly mentioned that she had no other option but to go on Spring Break, as the campus dorms where she lives during the school year close for Spring Break.

Just the reasons? Because, first of all I had to leave the dorms, so I had to leave. And I didn't want to go home, so I went to Washington, D.C. because I could do it. And I don't take any books. Usually I take books with me (laughter). From experience I never open them (Lisa, 18)

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

College Students' Reasons for Going on Spring Break

Previous studies on Spring Break have chosen to focus mainly on spring breakers' behavior, paying little attention to their motivations for going on Spring Break (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998). Nevertheless, almost 15 years ago, Josiam et al. (1994) found that the four primary travel motivations (push factors – see Crompton, 1979) of spring breakers were, in decreasing order of importance, “to get away” (45%); “to visit family” (13%); “sun, surf, sand” (12%); and the “need to relax” (10%). More recent research, however, has almost unanimously equated spring breakers' (extreme) behavior with their reasons for going on a Spring Break vacation (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Russell, 2004; Sönmez et al., 2006). The prevalent opinion amongst researchers and the popular media is thus that college students go on Spring Break primarily to engage in binge drinking, drug taking, and casual sex (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Marsh, 2006; Moore, 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006; Williams, 2006).

The findings of the present study challenge these assumptions, and lend support to Josiam et al.'s (1994) early findings. Participants in this study went on Spring Break primarily to get away (35%); to be with friends and/or family (29%); because they were curious in regard to Spring Break or because Spring Break was an opportunity to escape

boredom or try something new (29%); and finally, because for one reason or another, they had no other option but to go on Spring Break (7%).

The main reason why participants went on Spring Break was simply to get away. All participants, without exception, mentioned “getting away” or “escape” as motivations for their Spring Break trips “It all comes back to getting away(...) [Spring Break is] just an escape from what you do on a daily basis” (William, 25). But what were participants escaping from? They were basically escaping “routine”, “responsibilities”, “boredom”, “schoolwork”, “cold weather”, “stress”, “social norms”, and “reality”. One participant summarized it best when he said: “It was like, basically, it was really nice and relaxing just to get away, away from everything. Away from [what], I don’t even know. Everything, basically.” (John, 18).

The importance of “getting away” as a motivational factor has long been recognized in the travel and tourism literature (e.g. Carr, 2002; Cohen, 1996; Fodness, 1994; Krippendorf, 1987). In his seminal work *The holidaymakers* (1987), Jost Krippendorf pointed out that “getting away” is the cornerstone of travel behavior: “Travel is motivated by ‘going away’ rather than ‘going towards’ something or somebody. To shake off the everyday situation is much more important than the interest in visiting new places and people” (p. 29).

In the case of Spring Break, however, it is interesting to note that despite some evidence in the literature of “getting away” as a primary motivational factor (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Gerlach, 1989; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997, 1999), its importance has either been downplayed by researchers (e.g.

Apostolopoulos et al., 2002), or irrevocably associated with extreme types of behavior such as binge drinking and casual sex (e.g. Gerlach, 1989).

“Why do students come to Padre Island?(...)They first and foremost come to have a good time and to escape from the drudgeries of school and from the cold. The way they do this is by seeking sun, booze, members of the opposite sex, and other activities.” (Gerlach, 1989, p. 15)

Based on the findings of this study, no such relationship between motivation and (extreme) behavior can be established. It is hypothesized that, in the case of Spring Break, these are two distinct processes, and that no direct relationship can be established between the two.

The second reason that propelled participants to go on Spring Break (visiting friends and/or family) stemmed from more than just a genuine emotional concern about one's loved ones. On one hand, participants felt guilty about neglecting their family and friends, and Spring Break presented itself as the perfect opportunity to visit them. Additionally, there was also some pressure from the participants' families, which only contributed to exacerbate the guilt felt by some spring breakers: “It is hard when I see that they care a lot and they kind of push you to come home” (Sharon, 19). On the other hand, there may be a more prosaic reason behind these participants' decision to spend Spring Break with their families and/or friends. Consonant with previous literature (e.g. Binford et al., 2003; Josiam et al., 1994, 1998), money was a determinant factor in the participants' Spring Break experiences. Money affected spring breakers' choice of destination, transportation, and activities engaged in whilst on Spring Break, and its importance should not be underestimated: “Money is a huge factor [during Spring

Break]” (William, 25). It is quite possible that, faced with lack of sufficient funds to go on a Spring Break trip of their choice, some participants simply chose to go home for the duration of this vacation period.

The third most commonly mentioned reason why participants went on Spring Break (something to do/opportunity/curiosity), is closely tied to their distinct personalities and personal attitudes towards Spring Break. Similarly to what occurs during other college vacation periods (e.g. Christmas, Summer), for some participants (29%), personal preferences dictated their type of Spring Break trip, thus resulting in a number of different experiences. For Scott (21), it was above all else “a curiosity thing”. For Anna (18) and Donna (19), however, it was just “something to do”. Finally, for William (25), going on Spring Break allowed him to go on a cruise, which he had never done before. These responses represent a breakthrough for the Spring Break literature, which until now has failed to recognize the motivational importance of factors such as curiosity, opportunity, and interest, or a combination of these and other factors (Gerlach, 1989; Josiam et al., 1994; see also Kim, Oh, & Jogaratnam, 2007). In this regard, it should be noted that all of the aforementioned participants mentioned “getting away” as an additional reason to go on Spring Break.

Nevertheless, such findings support existing tourism literature on college students’ travel behavior, which stresses the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to college students’ travel motives (Kim et al., 2007). These authors challenge researchers to consider travel motivation as a multidimensional construct, as “people’s motives cannot be explained by a single-dimension because individuals have dissimilar reasons for engaging in leisure or travel activities” (Kim et al., 2007, p. 76).

The case of Scott (21), the sole participant who, out of curiosity, went in search of the “typical”, MTV-like Spring Break (and found it), also provides support to Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior posits that “intentions to perform behaviors of different kinds can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179). For Scott, that could not have been more true. Set out to find and experience the “typical” Spring Break as he thought of it (“women”, “alcohol”, “beach”, and “good times”), he did just that, and his actions were in consonance with both his intentions and his perceived image of Spring Break.

Finally, some participants (14%) simply felt that going on Spring Break was “the thing to do” (Karen, 19). Although only one participant (Lisa, 18), mentioned this compulsory aspect of Spring Break as her primary reason for going, a number of other participants also mentioned feeling somewhat compelled to go. Particularly for those participants that live on campus, in University-provided housing (dorms), the implications of their place of residence during the Spring Break period should be considered. First, students are not allowed to stay in dorms during Spring Break; they must either find alternative accommodation on campus (which is nearly impossible), go home, or go on Spring Break. Thus, students are almost "forced" to go on Spring Break, or at least away from school. Second, living in dorms provides a peculiar atmosphere, which is peppered with excitement during the weeks that precede Spring Break. Students are excited, eager to get away from the cold, school and work, and the small confines of their dorm rooms. Therefore, it is possible that for a minority of spring breakers, these “structural constraints” (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991; Jackson, Crawford &

Godbey, 1993), have conditioned their decision to go on Spring Break. Partial support for this hypothesis can be found in the aforementioned Josiam et al.'s (1994) study, in which the percentage of college students that mentioned Spring Break as "the thing to do" was less than 5% (p. 325).

The Spring Break Experience

Challenging both commonly held beliefs and existing scholarly research on Spring Break (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Sönmez et al., 2006), this study found little evidence to support the view that Spring Break is nothing more than a week of debauchery, heavy drinking, and extreme behavior for all those that participate in it (e.g. Josiam et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998). Rather, this study's findings suggest that a much wider range of Spring Break experiences exist. The broad array of the participants' Spring Break experiences, which ranged from a quiet stay with family and friends to an educational trip to Peru, provided little or no empirical support to a "one size fits all" view of Spring Break (Gerlach, 1989; Josiam et al., 1994, 1998; Russell, 2004).

The Spring Break activities most commonly mentioned by the participants in this study were as diverse as spending time with family and friends, sleeping late, working (not schoolwork), going out at night, surfing, going out for dinner, and relaxing and hanging out with old friends and new acquaintances. The common denominator to all these experiences was the overall atmosphere of relaxation and perceived freedom that permeated the Spring Break experience. Participants felt free of (school) work, duties and responsibilities and, as one of the participants put it, felt that Spring Break was "your one

week out of an entire semester to be who you are, do whatever you want with no obligations” (Mary, 18).

It should be noted, however, that for the participants in this study, and in contrast with existing literature (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998, Sönmez et al., 2006), absence of responsibilities was not synonym with irresponsibility and reckless behavior. Participants did engage in activities typically associated with Spring Break, such as drinking, but were careful not to go over certain self-imposed limits. 13 out of 14 (93%) participants in this study drank alcohol whilst on Spring Break, thus corroborating Binford et al.’s (2003) findings, who reported that 100% of the spring breakers surveyed in their study (n=183) consumed alcohol during Spring Break. But only for a minority of the participants in this study did alcohol consumption reach the outlandish proportions so commonly reported in the Spring Break literature (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Before leaving for Spring Break, one participant emphasized that “if you don’t control yourself, you can get drunk somewhere and(...)you have to control yourself, it’s about control” (Lisa, 18).

Only three of the participants in this study (Mike, 21; Robert, 18; and Scott, 21), admitted getting drunk, including the one participant who went in search of (and found) the “typical” Spring Break (Scott). Whereas Scott considered heavy consumption of alcohol indissociable from Spring Break in general and his own experience in particular (“we had cocoa and Baileys for [breakfast](...)which was amazing”), Mike and Robert had very different attitudes towards drinking in excess. Mike, who was a college senior at the time of this study, although admitting getting “really drunk” on one occasion, seemed

more interested in “keeping a good buzz going”, rather than getting drunk on a daily basis. From his perspective, getting drunk was an undesired outcome in his (and his friends’) attempts to maintain a certain level of blood alcohol that would allow him to enjoy himself without losing control. For Robert, however, drinking for the first time in a bar with his friends (and getting massively drunk in the process) was a highlight of his Spring Break trip, and possible only due to the lax attitude of bar owners in St. Augustine towards underage drinking during Spring Break. Nevertheless, Robert stressed that “of course I knew I was going to be partying, there’d be drinking while I was down there, but that wasn’t really—it wasn’t my sole purpose for going down there”.

The percentage of the participants in this study who reported getting drunk (21%) differs greatly from the more recent results encountered by Sönmez et al. (2006), who mention that from a sample of 539 college students, 51% of males and 40% of females reported getting drunk during Spring Break. An explanation for this disparity in results seems to lie in intrapersonal factors (Bandura, 1977) such as personality, age, drinking habits, and intentions to drink, thus challenging existing literature that emphasizes the importance of context and situational factors during Spring Break (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999). Furthermore, Ryan and Robertson (1997) posit that, whilst on holiday, situational factors alone are not enough to trigger different types of behavior that deviate from a person’s usual conduct in a leisure setting. Factors such as personal motivations, including “a willingness to experiment” (Carr, 2002, p. 978), also play an important role in this process. As one participant mentioned when asked to reflect as to why his and his friends’ Spring Break

experiences were so dissimilar, “I think, really, it depends on the person’s personality and what they want it [Spring Break] to be like” (Sean, 18).

A testament to the influence of personality on the participants’ Spring Break experiences was the fact that almost half of them (43%) chose to spend part or the entirety of this vacation period with their families and old friends, motivated by pangs of guilt for not having seen them in so long: “I really wanted to see my family. I would feel like I’m cheating them [if I didn’t go see them over Spring Break].” (Sharon, 19) These findings support those of a recent survey conducted by a marketing agency specializing in the college student market, which discovered that out of 400 college students, 54% were going home for their Spring Break (Azote, 2006).

For other participants, their personality manifested itself by a steadfast refusal to engage in anything remotely similar to an “MTV-like” Spring Break. As one participant put it, “to me that doesn’t, my personality does not psyche that as ‘*Wow, that’s a great time*’, because I prefer to have a small group of friends around me” (Karen, 19). For this participant, her Spring Break experience was more than just a conscious choice to spend a less “typical” Spring Break. It also corresponded to the acknowledgement of, and rebellion against, a media-induced stereotype she did not agree with. This lends further support to existing research that stresses the importance of intentions and personal normative beliefs as accurate predictors of Spring Break behavior (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Mattila et al., 2001; Sönmez et al., 2006).

Thus, for the participants in this study, personality, personal beliefs and previous intentions emerged as the most likely explanatory variables for the diversity of Spring Break experiences encountered amongst them. Such findings are akin to those found in

Mattila et al.'s (2001) study, in which they discovered that gender and religious beliefs had a significant impact on college students' Spring Break behavior. Nevertheless, for participants such as Scott, who went in search of a "typical" Spring Break, it is likely that context, environment and factors such as "situational disinhibition" (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002) plays a bigger role in their Spring Break experiences, thus prompting more extreme types of behavior during this vacation period (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2006; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998, Sönmez et al, 2006).

Existing research has comprehensively established that spring breakers that do go to "typical" Spring Break destinations such as Panama City Beach, Daytona or Cancun, are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as unprotected sexual intercourse, excessive alcohol intake, and drug use (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). But what to say of all other spring breakers (that constitute the majority) who do not do so? It is thus posited that existing studies have ignored them, and merely paint an incomplete picture of what is a much larger and more complex phenomenon. It is suggested that such studies can be generalized only to a small fringe of the population, one that has already decided to go to such places in advance and probably engages in such behaviors during the rest of the year, lending support to both Maticka-Tyndale and Herold's (1999) study of Canadian spring breakers and to Carr's (2002, 2002a) tourism-leisure continuum hypothesis.

Therefore, based on the personal experiences of the participants in this study, Spring Break can hardly be equated with the "Spring Bacchanal" advertised by the media (Marsh, 2006, p. 1). For the vast majority of the spring breakers interviewed for this study, Spring Break was above all an opportunity to get away from school, bad weather

and responsibilities, and “just chill” (Mary, 18) with old and new friends in a relaxed and pressure-free environment. Thus when asked to recall their most memorable Spring Break experiences, participants did not mention any extreme or exceptional events. Rather, they pointed out that the relaxed and laid back atmosphere, the presence of friends, and the absence of work all contributed to turn a seemingly ordinary vacation – Spring Break – into an extraordinary event.

Perceptions of Spring Break and Spring Break Experiences – A Strange Dichotomy

One of the most interesting findings of this study was the fact that participants’ perceptions of Spring Break remained unchanged by their respective Spring Break experiences. That is to say, their perceptions of what Spring Break is (i.e. their image of Spring Break), suffered virtually no alteration upon their return from Spring Break, despite the fact that their own experiences contrasted heavily with such preconceived notions of Spring Break (i.e. the “typical” Spring Break). Although their own experiences contradicted the Spring Break stereotype, the majority of participants (85%) maintained that the “real” or “typical” Spring Break still corresponded to the image perpetuated by MTV – “women”, “drinking”, “beach”, “crazy”, “wet t-shirt”, “hangover”, and so forth.

Two factors may have contributed to this apparent dichotomy. First, it is possible that the influence of the media, with MTV at its forefront (“when I was in high school, I was brainwashed by MTV” – Karen, 19), is so prevalent that it creates an image of Spring Break able to overshadow the reality of the participants’ own Spring Break experiences. Interestingly, MTV’s influence was not sufficient to influence the

participants' actual Spring Break behavior. Similarly, Binford et al (2003) discovered that, out of a sample of 183 spring breakers, only 6%, acknowledged the influence of MTV in their Spring Break behavior.

Nevertheless, through media such as television (e.g. Colon et al., 2001), cinema (e.g. Francis, 1998), newspapers (e.g. Marsh, 2006), magazines (e.g. Horovitz, 1994), the internet (e.g. Bai et al., 2004; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006), or even clothing stores' catalogues (e.g. Leland, 2008), college students are constantly exposed to a certain image of Spring Break, over and over again, until that image *becomes* Spring Break in their minds. In *Mediated* (2005) Thomas de Zengotita claims that the power of the media is such that "reality is becoming indistinguishable from representation in a qualitatively new way" (p. 19). That may very well be the case of Spring Break. Programs such as "MTV Spring Break" (Colon et al., 2001), "Girls Gone Wild: Spring Break" (Francis, 2007), and "The Real Cancun" (de Oliveira, 2003), represent Spring Break as a hedonistic, drunken, overly sexualized, yearly ritual (Rand, 2004). Despite the fact that their own experiences contradicted this media-fabricated image, for the majority of participants in this study (93%) such representation corresponded to what they thought Spring Break really was.

Second, participants stressed the importance of "telling the tale", that is to say, of sharing their experiences of Spring Break. This might explain why, upon their return from Spring Break, although visibly tired, the participants in this study seemed eager to share their experiences with me. Indeed, for some participants (21%), that was, if not the point, at least an integral part of the Spring Break experience. For these participants, there seemed to be a "necessity" of having something (usually memorable) to tell about once

they return from Spring Break. Such Spring Break “stories” can be related to Spring Break itself (e.g. going to an unusual or exotic destination), or to activities engaged in during Spring Break, ranging from the mundane (e.g. shopping, sleeping), to the extreme (e.g. having hot cocoa and Bailey’s liqueur for breakfast), and to the unusual (e.g. getting pulled over by a cop who turns out to be an acquaintance). Thus it seems that an indissociable part of the Spring Break experience is the telling of it upon one’s return, and in this Spring Break is no different from any other travel experience (see Josiam et al., 1998; Rojek, 2006).

No doubt many of these “Spring Break stories” are more akin to “Spring Break tales”, as they incorporate some degree of fantasy in them, to make them more appealing to the listener. This may help explain the degree of excess that one usually associates with Spring Break, particularly in the case of studies that have used self-administered post-Spring Break surveys as means of data collection (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998), where the human element is absent to judge the veracity of the spring breaker’s claims. Finally, one participant mentioned that one of the reasons that, in his mind, young people go on Spring Break (per opposed to going home or staying on campus) is, precisely, to have something to talk about: “I think a lot of people go on Spring Break just because(...)they want that story(...)and they want to make it, like, maybe as extravagant as possible.” (William, 25)

The implications of such findings are particularly relevant for the body of literature that has looked into predicting and ultimately influencing college students’ extreme behavior, such as social norms theory (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). Social norms theory has its origins in a study by Perkins and Berkowitz (1986) that looked into

college students' alcohol consumption. They discovered that not only did college students misjudge their peers' drinking habits (i.e. college students believed that their colleagues drank more alcohol than they actually did), but also that such misperceptions were accurate predictors of drinking behavior (Berkowitz, 2004). Thus the underlying assumption of social norms theory is that "our behavior is influenced by incorrect perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act" (Berkowitz, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, "when individuals perceive their attitudes to be different from the normative attitudes of their social group, they will experience discomfort and will resolve the discrepancy, usually by changing their attitudes in the direction of the norm" (Prentice and Miller, 1993, p. 243). For instance, an individual who incorrectly believes that his or her peers drink more heavily than he or she does, will in all likelihood increase his or her alcohol consumption in order to "fit in" with the prevailing social norm (Berkowitz, 2004).

The results obtained in this study suggest that there may be limitations to the applicability of social norms theory, as participants' misconceptions about Spring Break seemed to have had little or no effect on their Spring Break behavior. In addition, correcting college students' misperceptions of such a prevalent phenomenon as Spring Break may prove extremely difficult, since the dichotomy between the participants' perceptions and experiences of Spring Break remained unresolved upon their return from Spring Break. These considerations echo recent criticism of social norms theory (Campo et al., 2003; Stamper, Smith, Gant & Bogle, 2004; Thombs, Ray-Tomasek, Osborn & Olds, 2005), particularly in the case of complex phenomena such as sexual risky behaviors (Scholly, Katz, Gascoigne & Holck, 2005).

Another interesting point to note is that no noticeable differences were found between male and female perceptions of Spring Break, as both genders shared not only the same image of Spring Break, but also both identified its source as the media (“when you think of Spring Break, I always have these pictures of MTV” – Anna, 18). In regard to their Spring Break experiences, however, males tended to be slightly more adventurous than females, particularly in regard to behaviors such as drinking, drug taking, and sexual activity. For example, the few veiled references to sex made by the participants came exclusively from males (“There were a lot [of girls]. My friends had a couple sleepovers a couple of nights.” – John, 18). This stands in contrast with existing Spring Break literature, which argues that male and female behavior during Spring Break tends to be very similar in nature (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006; Smeaton et al., 1998; Welch, Appleford, & Wright, 2004). For instance, in their analysis of sexual behavior of Canadian college students on Spring Break in Daytona Beach, Florida, Maticka-Tyndale and Herold (1997) discovered that “some gender differences that are commonly documented in research on sexual interaction were absent in the spring break environment” (p. 324). On the other hand, we must also take into account that differences in male and female behavior during Spring Break, although rare, are not inexistent (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001). Nevertheless, such differences are usually attributed to an over reporting by males and underreporting by females, a common and well documented occurrence in the Spring Break literature (e.g. Josiam et al., 1998).

The findings of this study allow us to posit that, for the participants in this study, gender similarities in regard to perceptions of Spring Break are more than likely to result

from the pervasive influence of the media, especially MTV (Rand, 2004; Smith, 2005), coupled with similar motivations of both genders to go on Spring Break (i.e. “to get away”). It is further posited that the absence of differences in male and female Spring Break behavior so commonly reported in the Spring Break literature (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006; Smeaton et al., 1998; Welch, Appleford, & Wright, 2004) makes sense only in the context of a “typical” Spring Break (“beach”, “booze” and “girls”) and cannot be generalized to the entire population of college students that go on Spring Break.

Campus Life, Spring Break, and the Tourism-Leisure Behavioral Continuum

One of the aims of this study was to characterize the Spring Break experience, by seeking answers to the question “How do spring breakers perceive the Spring Break experience?” An interesting outcome from this analysis was the way in which most participants (85%) described Spring Break. These participants chose to do so by contrasting their Spring Break experiences with campus life, that is to say, by pointing out that Spring Break represented an escape, a “break” from their everyday school environment.

Participants described campus life and Spring Break in different lights, portraying them as two separate, distinct environments. Consistent with existing literature (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998), campus life stood in stark contrast with Spring Break. Whereas the former was synonym for “stress”, “work”, and “responsibility”, the latter was described as “relaxed”, “impulsive” and “easygoing”. For example, during the rest of the semester,

one participant described her daily life as revolving around school, schoolwork, and associated responsibilities: “all that school stuff, it’s(...)always on your mind(...)Your books are always sitting in front of you, and you just [want to] completely get away from it” (Jennifer, 18). By contrast, during Spring Break, such responsibilities are simply non-existent: “at Spring Break, you have absolutely nothing to do. You don’t have to wake up early. You don’t have to go to class. You don’t have to do work.” (Mary, 18).

What was interesting to discover was that, paradoxically, no major differences between on-campus drinking behavior and spring break drinking behavior were reported by the participants in this study. Based on previous literature, one would expect to find them, as a number of studies have consistently reported high levels of alcohol abuse and binge drinking amongst college-aged spring breakers (e.g. Gonzalez, 1986; Josiam et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Few of these studies, however, compared college students’ alcohol consumption during Spring Break with their average on-campus drinking behavior (Lee et al., 2006). Results from this study, however, show that participants did not use Spring Break as an excuse to drink alcohol for the first time, nor to dramatically increase the level of their alcohol consumption, but seemed to merely engage in a practice that they already pursue whilst on campus, albeit in a more open and carefree manner.

With a population of over 40,000 undergraduate students, the Mid-Atlantic university where this study was undertaken is regularly ranked amongst the nation’s foremost “party schools” (Majors, 2006). What is more, this particular university is said to “brew a strong drinking culture” (Haugh & Snodgrass, 2007), where drinking and binge drinking are considered normal and acceptable occurrences amongst the student

population (McFeaters, 2002). Numbers from a recent alcohol consumption survey show that 84.4% of the students at this university drank alcohol in 2006, with a mean drink consumption of 5.50 drinks per student “when partying” (The Partnership, 2006).

In the current study, participants acknowledged that they did not go on Spring Break in order to drink, or even to drink in higher quantities, since their university already provided ample opportunities to do just that. The following quote, in which a participant acknowledges the university’s “party” reputation, is significant: “Believe me! If I wanted to party, I’m at the best school to do that! (laughter)” (Karen, 19). Besides, as one participant put it, “it’s a lot cheaper to party here than it is in Florida” (Robert, 18).

In face of these results, it is proposed that, rather than regarding Spring Break as an excuse to drink without restrictions, college students merely see it as a continuation of a practice that they already engage in during the rest of the year, lending support to Carr’s (2002, 2002a) notion of a tourism-leisure behavioural continuum.

Based on an extensive review of the existing leisure and tourism literature (Carr, 2002) and empirical studies (Carr, 2002a, 2002b), Neil Carr argues that leisure and tourism are not two separate phenomena but rather, opposite ends of the same continuum (Carr, 2002). He describes this “tourism-leisure continuum” thus:

“At one end of this continuum there is the leisure behavior exhibited by people within their home environments that is influenced by the residual culture. At the opposite end of the continuum is tourist behavior, influenced by the tourist culture. In between these two extremes the tourist and residual cultures both influence behavior to varying degrees.” (Carr, 2002, p. 976).

Each of these two types of behaviors (leisure and tourism) is, in turn, affected by two distinct cultures. Leisure behavior is influenced by the home or residual culture, consisting of habits, needs and skills necessary in daily life and that the tourist is unable to discard (Carr, 2002; see also Bystrzanowski, 1989; and Ryan, 1994). On the other hand, we have the tourist culture, based on the pursuit of pleasure and “responsible for the hedonistic behavior demonstrated by the tourists” (Carr, 2002, p. 975).

This study’s findings support and add to Carr’s (2002, 2002a) thesis of a tourism-leisure continuum. For some participants, such as Scott (21), the influence of the tourism culture was clearly prevalent: “It was crazy(...)I ended up winning a beer chugging contest” (Scott, 21). For the other participants, however, the home (residual) culture prevailed: “It was just very relaxing and like chill” (Mary, 18). Furthermore, for *all* participants, their Spring Break behaviors did not correspond to a total and complete break with their ordinary, daily, on-campus behaviors. Although in varying degrees of intensity, participants’ Spring Break behaviors, such as drinking, represented an extension of practices they already partake in during the rest of the semester, thus providing evidence for continuity between these two distinct environments.

Spring Break – A Fake Rite of Passage?

The expression “rite of passage” (Van Gennep, 1961) has been used extensively by both academic researchers (e.g. Josiam et al., 1994, 1998; Russell, 2004; Smeaton et al., 1998) and the popular press (e.g. Copeland, 2007; Jacobsen & Riggs, 1982; Marsh, 2006; Moredock, 2003) to designate the Spring Break phenomenon. In Van Gennep’s

(1961) classical definition, rites of passage are “ceremonies whose purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined” (p. 3). Ceremonies of birth, funerals, high school/college graduation, marriage, and so on are common examples of such rites.

This study found no empirical evidence to support the claim that Spring Break should be considered a rite of passage. Furthermore, no ritualistic aspects of Spring Break were mentioned by the participants, nor were they apparent in their descriptions of their respective Spring Break experiences. None of the “obvious aspects of ritual” such as formality, performance and the purpose of communication (Rappaport, 1979, p. 173) were present in the participants’ Spring Break experiences. Instead, participants emphasized lack of rules, responsibilities, and structured behavior as defining characteristics of their Spring Break experiences. Unlike what has been reported elsewhere in the Spring Break literature (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997), the participants in this study did not follow a pre-determined script during their Spring Break vacation. On the contrary, they felt free to do as they pleased: “[During Spring Break] you weren’t restricted in any way. It was just whatever you wanted to do, if you could do it you were free to do it without any ramifications” (Robert, 18).

Furthermore, one would be hard-pressed to see in the participants in this study any life-changing alterations brought about by the Spring Break experience. When asked if going on Spring Break had changed them in any way, participants were usually at a loss for words, or saw no change at all: “I don’t think I changed. I could be wrong” (John, 18). For the few participants (14%) that acknowledged change caused by Spring Break, this change had to do primarily not with themselves, but with the way they perceived

their friends, particularly those who had accompanied them on Spring Break: “Not really [Spring Break didn’t make me look at myself differently]. Definitely not about myself, but it showed me a little more of the things that I don’t like about my friends (...)But, I wouldn’t say [that] about myself too much.” (Scott, 21).

Based on these findings, it seems premature to classify Spring Break as a rite of passage, as a number of Spring Break scholars have done (e.g. Josiam et al., 1994, 1998; Russell, 2004; Smeaton et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the question remains: where does this conviction that Spring Break is a rite of passage come from?

I would like to posit that the media (of which MTV is a prime example), along with the marketing efforts of a number of corporations, have created a distorted image of a fake rite of passage, complete with its own history and tradition(s), in a manner bearing striking similarities to what Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) deemed the “invention of tradition”.

Beginning in the 1960’s with the release of the MGM production of “Where the Boys Are” (Pasternak & Levin, 1960), based on the eponymous novel by Glendon Swarthout (1960), corporate business and the media soon realized the immense revenue potential of these “hordes” (Gerlach, 1989, p. 29). The “tipping point” (Gladwell, 2000) seems indeed to have been the 1960 MGM release: “*Where the Boys Are* did offer something that any promoter – or movie producer – would find irresistible: a well defined and affluent market, i.e., America’s college population” (Moredock, 2003, p. 72). The year following the theatrical release of “Where the boys are”, 30,000 college students arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for Spring Break, a 50% increase from the previous year (Gerlach, 1989). MTV’s first Spring Break broadcast in 1986, live from Daytona

Beach, Florida (Marsh, 2006a), was another hallmark in the corporate history of Spring Break, and set the stage for yearly broadcasts from popular Spring Break destinations (“Gimme a break”, 2006). Since then, Spring Break has acquired a rich and colorful history (e.g. “Gimme a break”, 2006; Interactive Event Marketing, 1997; Marsh, 2006a), manufactured little by little by those with interests in establishing it as a deeply-rooted tradition, such as tour operators, travel agents, beer and tobacco manufacturers, marketing agencies, and local businesses (e.g. Copeland, 2007; Gerlach, 1989; Sepe et al., 2002).

For example, one of the most popular websites amongst spring breakers (Josiam et al., 1998) is *springbreak.com* (<http://www.springbreak.com>), which has been the subject of scholarly research (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006). On this website, operated by Interactive Event Marketing, Inc., we can find an entire section dedicated to the “history” of Spring Break (<http://www.springbreak.com/history.htm>), which reads:

“Spring Break actually is an established cultural tradition among college students, an annual event with its own sets of rituals, a piece of 20th century Americana. Some argue that Spring Break goes back farther and deeper than that – that it is the modern manifestation of an age-old rite in which young people celebrate the return of the Spring. Thus, those who partake in Spring Break(...) are actually adding their touch to the annals of the Spring Break tradition.” (Interactive Event Marketing, 1997).

Ludicrous as this claim may seem, it finds its more respectable counterpart in scholarly research in Russell’s (2004) definition of Spring Break:

“A contemporary ritual with reminiscences in classic celebrations of the rites of spring, spring break offers North American students the self-declared right to a one-week vacation, typically in warm and sunny locales. With ramifications in the areas of tourism, law enforcement, and social problems, spring break is the annual media-enhanced migration of mostly college students to the sun-and-fun hot spots.” (Russell, 2004, p. 303)

These two examples should suffice to show just how prevalent the notion of Spring Break as a rite of passage is. The dwindling numbers of spring breakers recorded at “typical” Spring Break destinations in the last few years (Azote, 2006; “Gimme a break”, 2006), as well as the growing popularity of “alternative” Spring Breaks (Ivory, 1997) have, with some exceptions (e.g. Azote, 2006), largely been ignored by scholarly research and the popular press alike. Furthermore, the media, with MTV playing a primordial role (e.g. Colon et al., 2001), have been relentless in their portrayal of Spring Break as a rite of passage, that is to say, as a life-altering experience that all college students must experience at least once (Bai et al., 2004; Smith, 2005). Interviewed *a propos* PBS’s documentary “The merchants of cool” (Goodman, 2001), Bill Graden, Director of Programming for MTV, further reinforced the idea of Spring Break as a rite of passage:

“But the interesting thing about ‘Spring Break’ is, as it is, it’s something that is a rite of passage. And when you’re 20 years old, you don’t do it 52 weeks a year. You go for one week of your life and you let loose and that is the experience. So MTV very much approaches it in the same way, which is that we do not do ‘Spring Break’ 52 weeks a year--to see a repeat of it is pretty rare. We indulge it

one weekend a year, in March, when they're going through spring break, and we do it as honestly as we can. (...)It's a ritual. It's a rite of passage. It happens once a year. And we sort of leave it at that.” (Graden, 2001)

For the participants in this study, it would seem that corporations and marketing firms have been successful in creating a Spring Break stereotype: “Well, when I was in high school, I was brainwashed by MTV, so I think the typical thought was ‘*Oh my gosh we gotta (sic) go party put on our little bikini and go to Cancun*’” (Karen, 19). As I mentioned before, participants’ perceptions of Spring Break were consonant with MTV’s image of Spring Break as a “Spring Bacchanal” (Marsh, 2006). Yet, as we’ve seen previously, their perceptions of Spring Break were at odds with their actual Spring Break behavior. This may be due to the fact that college students are “the most marketed group of teens, young adults in the history of the world. These consumers are so brand savvy, they know exactly if they’re being hyped to” (Graden, 2001). This study’s findings support this assertion. Participants in this study promptly recognized that the origin of the Spring Break stereotype resided in the media: “I think a lot of people’s perceptions [about Spring Break] are affected by the media, because I personally never went on a typical Spring Break, so I have no other source to know what Spring Break is, except from the media” (Sharon, 19). Furthermore, participants recognized that this “media hype” about Spring Break clearly had a commercial intent: “MTV obviously wants to promote it [Spring Break] (...)I don’t really know how they would benefit from that(...) They’re probably getting paid by the hotels to advertise for them” (Robert, 18).

We can thus hypothesize that one way that corporations have found to overcome this “brand savviness” of spring breakers, is by “ritualizing” Spring Break (Grimes,

2004), stressing its compulsory nature. By ritualizing I mean “the act of deliberately cultivating or constructing a new rite” (Grimes, 2004, p. 28). If, as Kertzer (1988) argues, “rite makes might” (p. 102), and the ability to enforce rituals translates into power, corporations with a business interest in Spring Break (e.g. Bosman, 2006; Copeland, 2007; Esquivel, 2006; Sepe et al., 2002), have of course every interest in ritualizing Spring Break. By emphasizing the ritual nature of Spring Break, complete with its own manufactured history (Interactive Event Marketing, 1997), and associated rites, such as extreme behavior (e.g. Gerlach, 1989, Moredock, 2003), corporations seem to be doing what Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) called “the invention of tradition”. Hobsbawn (1983) defined “invented tradition” as:

“a set of practices(...) which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” (p. 1)

Traditionally a tool of governments and authority to acquire and/or consolidate political power (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983; Kertzer, 1988), in this particular case the goal is not to turn Spring Break into a “field of political struggle” (Kertzer, 1988, p. 104), but rather to use this phenomenon as a tool of corporate marketing (Bosman, 2006; Copeland, 2007). The purposes of a ritualized Spring Break are not political, although the methods used closely resemble those present in political rituals (Bell, 1997; Kertzer, 1974, 1988). In the case of Spring Break, the purpose is not to “specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions(...)or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups” (Bell, 1997, p. 128). Rather, corporations wish to

associate their brands to a particular event – Spring Break – regarded by college students as a pleasurable and memorable occasion. Bosman (2006) points out that “Marketers who establish a presence in spring break areas hope not only to reach the 18- to 24-year-old demographic, which is typically resistant to traditional advertising, but to associate their brands with the positive memories students have of their vacations.” By doing so, corporations are in effect creating an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) of spring breakers, thus turning them into a homogenous mass, to whom marketing a variety of products will ultimately be easier.

Judging from the following comment from one of the participants in this study, corporations with a business interest in Spring Break have largely been successful in their endeavours, at least in inculcating the desire to go on Spring Break amongst college students: “I don’t know why (...) [maybe because of] MTV (...) every since I was young I get that feeling that it’s important to go [on Spring Break], like at least one time” (John, 18).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to seek answers to the questions: “Why do college students go on Spring Break?” and “How do college students perceive the Spring Break experience?” The results obtained not only provided surprising answers to these questions, but also painted a vivid picture of the Spring Break experience, which stands at odds with much of the existing literature on Spring Break (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998, Sönmez et al., 2006).

Above all else, participants in this study went on Spring Break to “get away” from school, school-related responsibilities, and routine. Other reasons for going on Spring Break included being with friends and/or family, curiosity, boredom, the desire to try something new, and the simple lack of alternatives. Spring breakers sought rest, relaxation, fun, warm weather, and the company of friends and family in a pressure-free environment. Despite the fact that all participants in this study drank alcohol whilst on Spring Break, with a few participants getting drunk in the process, the overall Spring Break atmosphere was a relaxed one, with little evidence of the extreme types of behavior so commonly reported in the Spring Break literature (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). In fact, the Spring Break experience as described by the

participants in this study had little in common with the “Spring Bacchanal” advertised in the media (Marsh, 2006). Spring breakers relaxed, hung out with friends, went to the beach, got a tan, “chilled out” by the pool, went out to restaurants, bars and nightclubs, saw their families, worked, slept in, spent time with their boyfriends/girlfriends, and engaged in a number of other activities, the common thread among them being the absence of (school) work, stress, and responsibilities. This wide variety of Spring Break experiences reported by the participants challenges the prevailing view, so common in the academic literature and the popular press (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Gerlach, 1989; Marsh, 2006; Moredock, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006), that Spring Break is nothing more than an “institutionalized bacchanalian event(...) [revolving around] beer, beach, and bikinis” (Gerlach, 1989, p. 14). A much broader and diverse range of Spring Break experiences seems to exist.

Furthermore, this study found ample evidence that, although they constitute two distinct and separate environments, Spring Break and campus life are not unrelated. This was evident in the participants’ Spring Break drinking behavior, which seemed to be a reflection of their drinking behavior during the rest of the semester. Such findings are rather surprising, especially when one takes into account previous literature on Spring Break drinking patterns, which points towards a marked increase in alcohol consumption during this vacation period (e.g. Gonzalez, 1986; Josiam et al., 1998; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Additionally, this study found only feeble evidence to support the claim that Spring Break is “an environment in which personal codes are temporally suspended” (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998, p. 263). Sure, spring breakers did indulge in activities that they do not ordinarily pursue during the rest of the year (e.g.

sleeping in, drinking underage in an open manner, going on a cruise), but these were neither out of character of their respective personalities nor did they represent extreme deviations from their ordinary behaviors. Furthermore, participants in this study were quite aware of their actions during Spring Break and the consequences that such actions might bring in the future. This was particularly evident in the emphasis placed by spring breakers on the necessity for control and restraint during this vacation period. Thus, Maticka-Tyndale and Herold's (1997) assertion that "nothing that happens here [on Spring Break] is serious, long-lasting, or permanent" (p. 321) was, in this particular case, found not to be true at all. Such findings challenge existing Spring Break literature (e.g. Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006; Sönmez et al., 2006), whilst providing support for Carr's (2002, 2002a) tourism-leisure continuum hypothesis.

Finally, the dichotomy between participants' perceptions of Spring Break (which were consonant with the Spring Break stereotype of extreme behaviors) and their actual Spring Break experiences (which were not) points towards a powerful media influence in the construction of an artificial image of Spring Break (Bai et al., 2004; Smith, 2005). With MTV and its promises of alcohol-fueled sex parties at the forefront (Graden, 2001), the media have been apparently so successful in creating an image of Spring Break as an extreme ritual experience, i.e. a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 1960), that participants' perceptions of Spring Break remained unchanged by their respective Spring Break experiences. Despite the fact that their own Spring Break experiences had little in common with the Spring Break stereotype propagated by the media, participants in this study seemed to believe that the "real" Spring Break was indeed akin to the one

broadcasted by MTV every March (Colon et al., 2001), and that their own experiences had been the exception rather than the norm.

This notion of Spring Break as a rite of passage has been canonized in both the popular press (e.g. Copeland, 2007; Jacobsen & Riggs, 1982; Marsh, 2006; Moredock, 2003) and the scholarly literature on Spring Break (e.g. Josiam et al., 1994, 1998; Russell, 2004; Smeaton et al., 1998). In the present study, however, such notion was found to be completely unsubstantiated. No evidence of ritual or ritualistic behavior was found among the Spring Break experiences of the participants in this study. Instead, there was ample evidence of a corporate “ritualization” (Grimes, 2004) of Spring Break. The presence of ritualizing elements such as an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983) of Spring Break, linking it with Ancient Greek and Roman celebratory rites of spring (Interactive Event Marketing, 1997) is evidence of the corporate interest in the Spring Break demographic (Bosman, 2006; Copeland, 2007).

It is my belief that by deliberately introducing these ritualizing elements, corporations with business interests in Spring Break wish to create the impression that Spring Break is a compulsory event, i.e. a ritual. By doing so, they are in effect attempting to create an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) of spring breakers, bound together by their participation in a manufactured event that transcends them as individuals but that also reduces them to an anonymous spec in an homogenous mass of drunken bodies herded together in a carefully chosen beachfront, swaying in time with the music from the pop artist sensation of the moment, whilst leering at a wet t-shirt contest, and surrounded by a wall of corporate advertising.

The implications of the findings of this study are twofold. First, this study highlighted the value of qualitative research and ethnographic means of data collection, such as face to face interaction with those we seek to know more about (e.g. spring breakers). The contributions and challenges to the Spring Break literature present in this study would not have been possible without the direct contribution of the participants in this study. Had spring breakers not been given a voice, a much different image of the Spring Break experience would have emerged, in all likelihood similar to the one currently put forth by the popular press and the academic literature on Spring Break (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Colon et al., 2001; Gerlach, 1989; Marsh, 2006; Moredock, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). This study further emphasizes the value and need of ethnographic research as the starting point for larger, more generalizable, quantitative-type studies, particularly in the field of leisure research (Chick, personal communication, March 14, 2008). If future leisure studies are meant to be successful and indeed bring about positive social change, then one must make sure that the theoretical framework upon which they are grounded is the most appropriate (Chick, 2000). That will not be possible if we distance ourselves from those we seek to study, and do not allow them to tell us their own stories in their own words.

Second, broader implications for society at large and practitioners in particular must be considered. Every year, extreme types of Spring Break behaviors such as the ones typically emphasized in the popular press and the academic literature (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Marsh, 2006; Moredock, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006), are cause for concern, not only amongst health professionals, but for parents, educators, and policy-makers (American Health Association, 2006;

Associated Press, 2006; Williams, 2006). Millions of dollars are spent yearly in initiatives aimed at curbing those behaviors (e.g. Shevitz, 2002), or in alternatives to the “typical” Spring Break experience (e.g. Ivory, 1997). Even admitting that such expense is justified, and that those behaviors are widespread (a notion challenged by the present study and some emerging literature – see Azote, 2006 and Binford et al., 2003, for example), would it not be preferable to treat the cause rather than the symptoms of this phenomenon?

With this in mind, we must ask ourselves: What is the purpose of Spring Break? What does it do? Why does it even exist? Given the amount of corporate influence over this phenomenon, perhaps the time has come for us, as researchers and educators, to question the very existence of a Spring Break vacation, as Broadbear (2007) has done:

“Why, for example, has spring break become such a standard for colleges and universities? Other than making students available for the multi-billion dollar spring break industry, is anything accomplished by this time away from studies? What educational value does it serve? Collectively, although not purposefully, universities accommodate the spring break industry by spacing out these mid-term breaks over several weeks running from early March to late April.” (Broadbear, 2007)

Whether we choose to question its existence or not, Spring Break remains an extremely complex phenomenon, of which we have merely scratched the surface. If we want to go deeper and truly understand Spring Break, we cannot do so without the help of those who have experienced it, or, alternatively, experience it ourselves.

Limitations

This study possesses a certain number of inherent limitations, which must be acknowledged. First, this study used a convenience sample of college students that fit a pre-determined criteria (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994), thus affecting its external validity. That is to say, the findings of this study apply to this cohort of college students only, and cannot be generalized to a larger population. Furthermore, as this study targeted college freshmen only (with one exception, interviewed for comparison purposes), findings in this study cannot be generalized to college students at different stages in their collegiate careers (e.g. sophomores), and comparisons with other studies that have looked into this population (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006), must be drawn carefully.

Second, it must be taken into account that Spring Break is a “once a year” and sometimes a “once in a lifetime” experience (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2006). Its effects (if any) on the remainder of college students’ lives have not been looked at by existing research, nor were they the object of this current study. If some of the findings presented do indeed point towards a less than significant impact of Spring Break in participants’ lives, further research is needed to formulate a sound hypothesis regarding this matter.

Third, it is possible that the researcher’s gender may have affected the results obtained, explaining why male participants were more at ease with the researcher than female ones, and thus willing to share more intimate experiences. This was true

particularly in regard to drinking and sexual behaviors during Spring Break, as female participants were noticeably more reluctant to share such experiences with me.

Nevertheless, as Bernard (2002) so acutely points out, “there is no way to eliminate the ‘personal equation’ (...)in any scientific data-gathering exercise” (p. 353).

Finally, particularly in the case of drinking and sexual behaviors, over reporting by males and underreporting by females is common in this type of study, and has been reported by other Spring Break scholars (Josiam et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006).

Although this tendency was somewhat minimized by contrasting participants’ responses amongst themselves and with previous literature, it is possible that such phenomenon occurred in the present study, and thus must still be considered a limitation.

Directions for Future Research

This study's findings point towards a number of possible research directions that leisure scholars may wish to pursue in the future. For example, it would be interesting to replicate this study in other campuses across the U.S., particularly those with a different "campus culture" (Horowitz, 1988), such as campuses where drinking is less prevalent (e.g. Brigham Young University – see Ross, 2005). Doing so would allow us to find out to what extent on-campus behaviors affect Spring Break behavior, and if a particular campus culture is more influential on Spring Break behavior than another. Such studies would also offer further testing opportunities for Carr's (2002) tourism-leisure continuum hypothesis, and hopefully provide estimates of its prevalence across college campuses in the U.S.

Naturally, replicating the current study in different countries/cultures would also be of the utmost interest (Chick, 2000a). Contrasting the North American Spring Break with similar phenomena across the globe, such as the Australian Schoolies' Week (Gleeson, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Smith & Rosenthal, 1997; Zinkiewicz et al., 1999), would not only expand the current Spring Break literature with transnational examples, but would allow us to discover if and how this phenomenon varies cross-culturally. Looking at non-spring breakers (i.e. students that do not go on Spring Break), and their reasons for (not) doing so, would also further our knowledge of the Spring Break phenomenon. It may very well be the case that Spring Break leaves some students apathetic (e.g. Binford et al., 2003), and it would be interesting to investigate why that

occurs. Further analyses of Spring Break media, such as films, TV shows, newspaper and magazine articles, and internet sources, in similar fashion to what Ribeiro and Yarnal (2004) and Smith (2005) have done, would also further our understanding of the media's role in the Spring Break phenomenon and perhaps explain how such role is created and maintained.

Leisure scholars with an interest in Spring Break might also seek to increase the external validity of this study (i.e. the possibility of generalization of results) by the adoption of more sophisticated sampling techniques. Provided that sufficient time, funds and accurate information about the study population are available to the researcher, stratified random sampling (Trochim, 2001) or, in the case of multi-site studies (e.g. multiple campuses across the U.S.), cluster random sampling (Trochim, 2001), should preferably be used. Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach (Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 2001), incorporating both survey-type questionnaires and ethnographic data, for instance, might also provide a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge on Spring Break. Another possible avenue of research would be to incorporate some of the findings of the present study (e.g. difference between perceptions of, and behaviors during, Spring Break; media influence; carry-over effects of on-campus behavior) into existing Spring Break studies (e.g. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Sönmez et al., 2006), and perform them again. Doing so would allow researchers to establish a solid Spring Break theoretical and methodological framework, upon which future studies could be based.

Finally, I would like to point out that there is still dire need of qualitative data on Spring Break, particularly ethnographic studies. For example, this study showed that

college students go on Spring Break to “get away”, but what are they getting away from? Could it be that, during the rest of the semester, the school’s atmosphere is so daunting, so oppressive, that students *must* get away from it? Or is this “need” artificially created by the media, and perpetuated by a corporate-based educational system, as Broadbear (2007) suggests? And lastly, is there a Spring Break culture? All of these questions can only be answered by extended fieldwork and ethnographic means of data collection and analysis (Bernard, 2002), which are conspicuously and regrettably absent in the current Spring Break literature. The present study was no doubt a step in the right direction, but much work still lies ahead of us. If, as leisure scholars, we are to truly understand the Spring Break phenomenon from the perspective of those who participate in it, and not merely write “books about books and articles about articles” (Durrenberger, 1996, p. 7), then perhaps hanging out with spring breakers for a while would not be such a bad idea to begin with.

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APPENDIX A

Spring Break Study Recruitment Poster



SPRING BREAK

RESEARCH STUDY

LOOKING FOR SOME CASH

FOR SPRING BREAK?

EARN \$25.00 PER

INTERVIEW, FOR A

TOTAL OF \$50.00!

The purpose of this study is to understand the Spring Break phenomenon from the spring breaker's perspective. Participants will be asked to take part in two individual interviews, one before and one after Spring Break. Topics discussed will range from the student's reason(s) for going on Spring Break, to his/her expectations and experiences, and so on. Recruitment and interviews will take place on campus, with the first one lasting no more than 1 hour, and the second interview no more than 2 hours. Interviews will be digitally recorded (audio only). Personal information will be kept to a minimum and all data will be treated as strictly confidential.

Contact:

Nuno F. Ribeiro

Graduate Student, Leisure Studies
232 Mateer Building
University Park, PA 16802
Phone: 814-222-1789 • E-mail: nfr106@psu.edu

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Stage One of Data Collection (Before Spring Break)



“Getting Away”: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Spring Break

Experience

Interview protocol A (before Spring Break)

Interview # _____

Date/time of interview: ___/___/_____ began: ___:___ ended: ___:___

Place (brief description): _____

Interviewee: _____

Questions:

(Initial greetings; issues of confidentiality and privacy; ask participant to sign consent form; ask permission to tape record and/or take notes)

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

2. When you think of Spring Break, what comes to your mind?

3. Where are you going on Spring Break? Why did you decide to go to_____?

4. What are your expectations for Spring Break? What do you expect to do? What do you expect *others* (e.g. friends)to do?

6. Why have you decided to go on Spring Break?

(Thank subject for his/her participation. Stress issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Acknowledge his/her important contribution to the project. Tell participant that a copy of the transcript will be send to her/him and that she/he will be able to edit it. A copy of the final manuscript will also be provided at a later date, before its final submission. Exchange contact numbers and e-mail addresses. Set a tentative date for the second interview, once participant has returned from Spring Break.)

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol for Stage Two of Data Collection (After Spring Break)



“Getting Away”: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Spring Break Experience

Interview protocol B (after Spring Break)

Interview # _____

Date/time of interview: ___/___/_____ began: ___:___ ended: ___:___

Place (brief description): _____

Interviewee: _____

Questions:

(Initial greetings; issues of confidentiality and privacy; ask participant to sign consent form; ask permission to tape record and/or take notes)

1. Can you tell me a little bit about what you did during your Spring Break holiday?

2. Did you enjoy yourself? What made Spring Break fun/unpleasant?

3. Would you go on Spring Break again? Why? To the same place/with the same people?

Why?

4. What was the overall atmosphere [amongst spring breakers] in _____ like?

5. Based on your personal experience, how would you characterize Spring Break?

6. Why do you think (other) people go on Spring Break?

7. Why did *you* go on Spring Break?

8. Do you think that having had this experience, you've changed in anyway? How so?

Can you elaborate a little on this subject?

(Thank subject for his/her participation. Stress issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Acknowledge his/her important contribution to the project. Tell participant that a copy of the transcript will be send to her/him and that she/he will be able to edit it. A copy of the final manuscript will also be provided at a later date, before its final submission. Exchange contact numbers and e-mail addresses. Probe participant regarding follow-up interviews.)

APPENDIX D

IRB Spring Break Study Approval Letter



Date: February 28, 2007
From: Dolores W. Maney, IRB
Administrator
To: Nuno F. Ribeiro
Subject: Results of Review of Proposal -
Expedited

(IRB #24887)

Approval Expiration Date: February 22, 2008

“The (Not So) Innocents Abroad: Taking a Closer Look at the Spring Break Experience”

The Social Science Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

Enclosed is/are the dated, IRB-approved informed consent(s) to be used when recruiting participants for this research. Participants must receive a **copy** of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

DWM/dwm

Enclosure

cc: Caren M. Yarnal

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

APPENDIX E

IRB Spring Break Study Proposal

PENNSSTATE



Office for Research Protections

201 Kern Building

University Park, PA 16802

<p><i>OFFICE USE ONLY</i></p> <p>IRB NO. _____</p>

APPLICATION FOR THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

EXPEDITED & FULL REVIEWS

Form Instructions:

- To complete the form, press TAB or SHIFT TAB between boxes and enter an 'X' or text. For assistance, contact the Office for Research Protections.
- This application will ask general questions about your study. Depending on your response, additional appendices may need to be completed in order to provide more detailed information. For example, if you indicate that your study involves prisoners, **Appendix 4** will also need to be completed and submitted.
- Submit recruitment materials, informed consent forms, and all other materials as attachments to the application. **Do NOT** include within the application.
- Handwritten applications will NOT be accepted.

Project Title: **The (Not So) Innocents Abroad: Taking a Closer Look at the Spring Break Experience**

Principal Investigator: Nuno F. Ribeiro	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123): nfr106
University Status (Faculty, Staff, Student, etc.): Graduate Student	Telephone Number: 814-222-1789
Email Address: nfr106@psu.edu	Dept: Recreation, Park & Tourism Management
College: College of Health & Human Development	Campus: UP

Mailing Address: 232 Mateer Building, UNIVERSITY PARK PA 16802

Faculty Advisor, if PI is a student: Careen M. Yarnal	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123): cmy122
Email Address: cmy122@psu.edu	Telephone Number: 814-863-5559
Dept: Recreation, Park & Tourism Management	College: College of Health & Human Development
Mailing Address: 232 Mateer Building, UNIVERSITY PARK PA 16802	Campus: UP

Is there anyone you wish to include on correspondence related to this study (e.g., a study coordinator, etc.)?	
Name: Careen M. Yarnal	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123): cmy122
University Status (Faculty, Staff, Student, etc.): Faculty	Telephone Number: 814-863-5559
Email Address: cmy122@psu.edu	Dept: Recreation, Park & Tourism Management
College: College of Health & Human Development	Campus: UP
Mailing Address: 232 Mateer Building, UNIVERSITY PARK PA 16802	Role in this study: Advisor

A. Funding:

1. Is this research study internally or externally funded?

Yes → Answer Questions 2 – 4

No → Skip to Question 6

Pending → Answer Questions 2 – 5

2. Provide the name and mailing address of internal and external sources of funding. Provide a copy of your grant proposal with the application. If a copy of the grant proposal is not included, explain.

3. Is the sponsor providing the drug, device, etc. free of charge?

Yes No N/A

4. Has the sponsor agreed to pay for direct costs of treating injuries?

Yes No

5. If funding is not awarded, will the research still be conducted?

Yes No N/A

B. Conflict of Interest:

6. Do any of the investigator(s), key personnel, and/or their spouses or dependent children have a conflict of interest (COI), as defined by PSU Policy RA20, "Individual Conflict of Interest," associated with this research?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 1, Section A**

No

7. Does PSU have an ownership or royalty interest in any intellectual property related to this study?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 1, Section B**

No

8. Are there are other significant conflicts that could possibly affect or be perceived to affect this study?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 1, Section C**

No

C. Class Projects:

9. Is this a class project?

Yes → Provide the following information:

- Instructor's Name:

Course Title and Number:

Semester course is being offered:

No

D. Review Level:

10. What level of review do you expect this research to need?

Expedited Review → Answer Question 11

Full Review → Skip to Question 12

11. Expedited Research Categories: Read the following categories and choose one or more that apply to your research. Your research must fit in at least one category and be no more than minimal risk in order to be considered for an expedited review.

Category 1: Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) **OR** (b) is met.

(a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR 312) is not required. (*Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.*)

(b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

Category 2: Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick or venipuncture as follows:

(a) From healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 100 pounds. For these participants, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; **OR**

(b) From other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the participants, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these participants, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

Category 3: Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means. Examples include:

- Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner;
- Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
- Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
- Excreta and external secretions (including sweat);
- Uncannulated saliva collected either in an unstimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue;
- Placenta removal at delivery;
- Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor;
- Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques;
- Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings;
- Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization

Category 4: Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications. Examples include:

- Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the participant or an invasion of the participant's privacy;
- Weighing or testing sensory acuity;
- Magnetic resonance imaging;

- o Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography;
- o Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.

Category 5: Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, image recordings made for research purposes.

Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

E. Research Personnel:

NOTE:

- The Principal investigator is responsible for ensuring that all individuals conducting procedures described in this application are trained adequately prior to involving human participants.
- All personnel listed on this application who (1) are responsible for the design/conduct of the study, (2) will have access to the human participants (i.e., will consent participants, conduct the study), or (3) will have access to identifying AND confidential information must successfully complete the IRB's Training on the Protection of Human Participants or provide verification of training from their home institution. PSU's training may be located at <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/irb/index.asp>. Approval will NOT be granted until all individuals have successfully completed the training. Verification of training does NOT need to be sent in if the individual completed the Penn State's training.
- As personnel change, you must submit a *Modification Request Form – Expedited & Full Review* to add or remove personnel.

12. Provide the name of the other individual(s) assisting with this study who (1) will be responsible for the design/conduct of the study, (2) have access to the human participants (i.e., will consent participants, conduct the study), or (3) have access to identifying AND confidential information. If the individual does not have a PSU Access User ID, please provide some other form of contact information. If additional space is needed, attach a separate sheet containing the same information.

Name	Email Address	PSU User ID (e.g., abc 123)	Mailing Address	Role in this Study
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following
				Choose one of the following

13. Identify (1) the procedures/techniques each person (including advisors) listed in Question 12 and on the first page of the application will perform and (2) describe their level of research experience.

N/A

14. Explain how the persons assisting with this research are kept adequately informed about the study and their research-related duties and functions.

N/A

F. Purpose & Procedures:

15. Provide a detailed description of the research that includes (1) the background, (2) aims/objectives [hypothesis], and (3) a description of how the research will be conducted [methodology – what participants will be asked to do].

1) Background

Spring Break, the yearly one to three week-long North American college vacation period, has its origins in the College Swim Forum held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1938. Since then, Spring Break has known exponential growth, and is now one of the most popular holiday activities amongst college students, with 2.4 million spring breakers reported in 2005. What is more, the Spring Break phenomenon has pervaded American culture, notably through the influence of motion pictures. Spring Break, from its humble beginnings, has endured dramatic change and is now firmly entrenched in the college imaginary.

The Spring Break phenomenon and its connection to college students' risky behaviors has already been established by recent research. This body of literature claims that, during Spring Break, social norms are temporarily discarded in an atmosphere of hedonism and momentary suspension of personal and social norms. Male and female spring breakers alike perceive that their actions, since taking place away from their usual environment where they are subject to social norms and sanctions, will bring little or no consequence. Past research on Spring Break has been conducted largely from a quantitative perspective. We know how spring breakers behave (that is, where do they go on Spring Break, how many alcoholic drinks they consume, how many sexual partners they have, and so on), but we are yet to discover why they do it. Missing from the literature are studies that allow spring breakers to speak for themselves, describing the Spring Break experience in their own words, their reasons for going and the meaning that such experience has for them. To date, reasons for participating in, and the meaning of, the Spring Break experience for its participants are not known. The voice of spring breakers remains, therefore, unheard.

Other authors have classified Spring Break as a "rite of passage" (a ritualized transition from either a social group, status or life stage to another), i.e. a liminal experience.

2) Hypotheses/Objectives

The term "liminality", meaning "a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering social status...a time of enchantment when anything might, even should, happen", could potentially explain what happens during Spring Break. We can hypothesize that the spring breaker too is "betwixt-and-between": on one hand, he or she is no longer a college student belonging to a particular campus, with its rules, codes of conduct and social norms; at the same time, the spring breaker is not a part of the community that plays host to this event, be it San Padre, Daytona or Panama City Beach. Rather, we can further conjecture that the spring breaker is part of a 'communitas', an anti-structural community, where no distinction in status, power and/or behavior can be discerned between him or her and his or hers fellow spring breakers. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial". This state of "in-betweenness" would allow, even compel, the spring breaker to engage in a number of (extraordinary) behaviors without fear of social reprisal. Support for this hypothesis can be found in the unwritten rule "nothing that happens here [on Spring Break] is serious, long-lasting, or permanent". Nevertheless, scant empirical evidence, conducted mostly from a quantitative perspective, supports these claims. Our understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon remains, therefore, limited.

There is, thus, dire need for qualitative data in order to further our so far incipient knowledge of Spring Break. A qualitative approach will “generate data rich in detail and imbedded in context”, going beyond the analyses that have been done thus far. Thus the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon, by seeking answers to the following question: “Why do college students go on Spring Break?” Additionally, this study will also ask: “How do spring breakers perceive the Spring Break experience?” Adopting a qualitative approach, this study will, by means of in-depth interviews conducted before and after Spring Break, give a voice to spring breakers, in an effort to decipher its meaning for those who participate in it and thus contribute to existing research.

3) Methods

Data will be collected via face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews. Individual face-to-face in-depth interviews aim to “foster learning about individual experiences and perspectives on a given set of issues”, thus making them the most appropriate type of interviews for this study. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when the researcher seeks information about a given set of topics, but still wants to retain enough freedom to follow interesting leads that may arise during the interview process.

Participants will be interviewed individually over two different stages: before and after their Spring Break holiday. Having two rounds of interviews has yielded good results in other studies involving young people and their behaviors. Although the decision to go on Spring Break is generally taken months in advance, it is not until a few weeks prior to the event itself that a general sense of excitement takes over the (future) spring breakers. On the other hand, spring breakers’ overall remembered experiences were more intense 2-4 days after Spring Break, whereas remembered negative experiences were more acute 4 weeks after Spring Break. Based on these findings, and attempting to capture the spring breakers’ experience with as much detail as possible, the first stage of interviews will take place two weeks before Spring Break and the second stage one week after the event. During the first stage, interviews will be conducted with the purpose of “breaking the ice”, and inquiring why the participants have decided to go on Spring Break. Establishing rapport with the participants during this first set of interviews will be crucial, so that more in-depth questions can be asked during the second stage of interviews. Participants will also be asked to free list as many words as possible that they associate with Spring Break. Free listing is used to define “semantic domains” and basically consists in asking participants to list words they relate to, or associate with, any given word or subject. Participants will then be asked to select the 10 words that they most closely associate with Spring Break and rank them in order of importance. The same technique will be used during the second stage of interviews, so that comparisons can be drawn and the participants asked to reflect on the differences and/or similarities between the two lists, mediated by the Spring Break experience. Duration of the interviews will range from 45 minutes to one hour. Acknowledging the importance of the setting in conducting qualitative interviews, interviews will be conducted in a quiet, convenient, non-threatening, and ‘neutral’ place, in order to minimize its influence over the participants. The setting of the interviews will not change from one stage to another, unless participants react negatively to the same.

The second stage of interviews will attempt to capture spring breakers’ overall perception of the Spring Break experience. Initial rapport with the participants should be established by then, which will help the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the overall meaning and relevance of the Spring Break experience. The question “Why did you go on Spring Break?”, rephrased in the past tense, will be asked again during this stage, in order to gauge the effect of the Spring Break experience on the participants’ initial views. Duration of the interviews will range from one to two hours. During both stages of the interview process interviews will be digitally recorded. Notes will also be taken throughout the interviews, as “tape is not a substitute for taking notes”.

16. How long will participants be involved in this research study? Include the number of sessions and the duration of each session.

This study will comprise two sets of interviews, with the first interview lasting from 45 minutes to 1 hour, and the second interview lasting from 1 hour to 2 hours, for a combined total of no more than 3 hours.

17. Where will this research study take place? **Choose all that apply.**

University Park → Specify the building and room number. If not yet known, **not known yet** indicate such.

GCRC at University Park

Other PSU Campus Location → Specify the campus, building and room number. If not yet known, indicate such.

Hershey Medical Center → Specify the building and room number. If not yet known, indicate such.

GCRC at the Hershey Medical Center

Mt. Nittany Medical Center

Other Site(s) → Explain:

NOTE: For other sites such as schools, doctor offices, businesses, etc., the IRB requires that research conducted at these sites be approved by an individual in a decision making position at the site. Documented approval (i.e., a letter of agreement) is required.

18. Is this a multi-center study outside of PSU?

Yes → Answer Question 19

No → Skip to Question 22

19. Is any Penn State investigator on this application the lead investigator (project director) of this multi-center study?

Yes → Answer Questions 20 – 21

No → Skip to Question 22

20. Provide the name and location of all other centers. Copies of IRB approval letters from each site will be required with the supporting documentation for this application.

21. Describe the plan for the management and communication of multi-site information that may be relevant to the protection of participants (e.g., unanticipated problems, adverse events, interim analyses, modifications).

22. How will the data be analyzed?

Data obtained from interviews and personal notes will be transcribed verbatim and subsequently coded and analysed by hand . Although with a theoretical framework in mind (modern ritual), this study will allow for data to emerge during this stage, in the tradition of grounded theory . Thus, in an initial phase, analysis of data will involve open coding – “writing words and phrases that identify and name specific dimensions and categories” . Codes will be written on the margins of interview transcripts and personal notes. On a regular basis, analytical memos will be written on particular topics, or “core themes” that catch the researcher’s eye . Next, constant comparison between categories and meanings , will allow for a conceptual map of the initial findings to be drawn . A concept map is “an interpretable pictorial view (concept map) of their [the participants’] ideas and concepts and how these are interrelated” . Based on this map, which will link interrelated categories according to recurrent patterns , data will be recoded, using axial coding, based on these interrelations . Interview transcripts and personal notes will then be re-analyzed based on these

codes, “piecing them together” and “building a logical chain of evidence” until a clear and accurate depiction of the Spring Break experience and its meaning(s) for spring breakers emerges.

23. List criteria for inclusion of participants.

- 1) Penn State students;
- 2) college year - freshmen;
- 3) age - 18-25;
- 4) Spring Break experience - no previous experience;
- 5) decision to go on Spring Break - only students that have made the firm decision to go on Spring Break will be accepted.

24. List criteria for exclusion of participants.

- 1) non Penn State students;
- 2) college year - sophomores, juniors, or seniors;
- 3) age - under 18 or over 25;
- 4) Spring Break experience - students with previous Spring Break experience will not be accepted;
- 5) decision to go on Spring Break - students that have not made a firm decision to go on Spring Break will not be accepted.

G. Participants:

25. Maximum number of participants/samples/charts to be enrolled at this institution (Enter one number – not a range): **15**

26. Was a statistical/power analysis conducted to determine the adequate sample? Yes No

27. Does this research exclude any particular:

Gender Identity Yes No If Yes, please explain.

Racial/ethnic groups Yes No If Yes, please explain.

Sexual Orientation Yes No If Yes, please explain.

28. Age range – **Choose all that apply.**

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 – 12 years | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18 – 25 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 – 65 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 6 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 13 – 17 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 26 – 40 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 65+ years |

29. **Choose all categories of participants** who will be involved in this research study.

Healthy volunteers

Penn State students

Subject Pool Students – Indicate the subject pool: CAS 100A Psychology – UP

Psychology – Behrend

↳ Will all participants involved in this study be from the subject pool? Yes

No

Children – Individuals under the age of 18

[Complete & Submit Appendix 2](#)

International Research – participants live outside of the U.S.

[Complete & Submit Appendix 3](#)

Prisoners

[Complete & Submit Appendix 4](#)

Pregnant Women

Women of reproductive potential at the time of this research – Choose one of the following:

The research poses no added risk associated with pregnancy and/or lactation

- Precautions against pregnancy and/or lactation, and pregnancy tests are addressed in the research proposal and consent form
- Patients
Complete & Submit Appendix 5
- Individuals with a decisional impairment who are targeted for this study (e.g., research on Alzheimer's enrolling only individuals with Alzheimer's)
Complete & Submit Appendix 6
- Individuals with a decision impairment who are NOT targeted for this study (e.g., decisionally compromised person eligible for a study on a new treatment for breast cancer)
Complete & Submit Appendix 6
- Institutionalized individuals (e.g., patients in state hospitals or nursing homes)
Complete & Submit Appendix 7
- Fetus, embryo, fetal material in vitro fertilization
- None of the above categories will be used in this research
30. Will participants be currently enrolled in a course/class of any personnel listed on this application?
- Yes → Describe the measures taken to avoid coercion & undue influence:
- No
31. Will participants be employees of any personnel listed on this application?
- Yes → Describe the measures taken to avoid coercion & undue influence:
- No
32. Could some or all participants be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence due to special circumstances? Do not include children, decisionally impaired persons, and prisoners in your answer.
- Yes → Describe the measures taken to protect these individuals:
- No
- H. Recruitment:**
33. Indicate the types of recruitment that will be done for this research & **attach copies of the materials**. Choose all that apply:
- Newspaper/magazine ads
- Radio/TV ads
- Letters/Emails to potential participants
- ↳ Explain how potential participants contact information was obtained:
- Letters/Emails to healthcare professionals for recruitment purposes
- ↳ Which healthcare groups will receive these letters?
- Flyers/posters – Where will the items be displayed/distributed? **across campus on student bulletin boards**
- Brochures – Where will the items be displayed/distributed?
- Web sites – List the sites the recruitment materials will be posted:
- Email via Listserv – Has permission been obtained from the listserv administrator? Yes
 No
- Script – Verbal (i.e., telephone, face-to-face, classroom)
- Subject Pool → Indicate which subject pool will be used:
- ↳ CAS 100A Psychology – UP Psychology – Behrend
- Note:** If you are not a member of the subject pool's department, a permission letter will be needed.
- Other → Explain: **study will be advertised on the ORP Study Listing website (<http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/outreach/services/studylisting.asp>)**
34. Who will approach and/or respond to potential participants?
The PI.

35. Before potential participants sign a consent form, are there any screening questions that will be asked to determine whether an individual is appropriate for the study?

Yes → Answer Question 36

No → Skip to Question 37

36. During screening questions, will identifiable information about these individuals be recorded?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 8**

No

NOTE: Please attach, as appropriate, a procedure and script for the screening questions. Also, attach a copy of the screening question data collection sheet.

37. Will investigators access medical charts and/or hospital/clinic databases for recruitment purposes?

Yes → Answer Question 38

No → Skip to Question 39

38. Has a waiver of authorization to access protected health information been requested?

Yes

No → Explain why a waiver of authorization has NOT been requested:

39. Will physicians/clinicians provide identifiable, patient information (e.g., name, telephone number, address) to investigators for recruitment purposes?

Yes → Provide a copy of the written authorization release form for review.

No

I. Consent:

40. When and where will participants be approached to obtain informed consent/assent [include the timing of obtaining consent in the response]? If participants could be non-English speaking, illiterate or have other special circumstances, describe. **Attach a copy of the informed consent/assent form(s).**

Participants will be notified of the necessity of obtaining informed consent when scheduling the first interview. (Signed) informed consent will be obtained at the time of the first interview, a few minutes before the actual interview takes place.

41. Who will be responsible for obtaining informed consent/assent from participants?

The PI.

42. Do the people listed in Question 41 above speak the same language as the participants?

Yes

No → Explain how consent will be obtained.

43. What type of consent will be obtained? **Choose all that apply.**

Signed consent – participant will sign consent form

Implied consent – participant will not sign consent form (e.g., mail survey, email, on-line survey)

↳ **Complete & Submit Appendix 9, Section A**

Verbal consent – participant gives consent verbally (e.g., in-person interview, telephone interview)

↳ **Complete & Submit Appendix 9, Section A**

Passive/Opt Out consent – participant only required to act if they do not want to participate

↳ **Complete & Submit Appendix 9, Section B**

Complete waiver of informed consent

↳ **Complete & Submit Appendix 9, Section B**

Other → Describe:

44. If multiple groups of participants are being utilized (i.e., teachers, parents, children, people over 18), who will and will not sign the assent/consent form? Specify for each group of participants.

N/A.

45. Participants are to receive a copy of the informed consent form with the approval box/statement on it. Describe how participants will receive a copy of the informed consent form to keep for their records.

Both the participant and the PI will sign two copies of the informed consent form. The PI will keep one and the participant the other.

J. Payment for Participation:

46. Indicate the type and amount of payment for participation that will be offered. **Choose all that apply.**

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|---------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Money | Amount: \$50.00 | Skip to Question 48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gift Certificate | Amount: | Skip to Question 48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra/Class Credit (e.g., 5 points, 1% of final grade) | Amount: | Skip to Question 47 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing | Explain: | Skip to Question 48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (e.g., merchandise) | Explain: | Skip to Question 48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compensation will NOT be offered | | Skip to Question 49 |

47. An alternative, equal in time and effort, must be offered in place of participating in the research. Describe the alternative available for earning the extra/class credit. The description should include the length of time it will take to complete the alternative as well as how undue influence will be prevented.

48. Will compensation be pro-rated? NOTE: Pro-rating is required for FDA-regulated studies.

- Yes → Explain how payment will be pro-rated:
 No

K. Data Collection Measures/Instruments:

49. **Choose any of the following** data collection measures/instruments that will be used in this study. **Attach a copy of all instruments/measures, interview and focus group topics/questions to the application.**

- Biological Specimens – blood, urine & other human derived samples
 Biomedical Devices – EEG, EKG, MRI
 Diaries/Journals completed by the participants
 Focus Groups
 Individual Interviews
 Knowledge/Cognitive Tests
 Observations
 Physical Testing Measures – Height, Weight, Body Mass Index, Blood Pressure
 Questionnaires/Surveys – Mail, Internet, Telephone, Email, Paper/Pencil
 Other → Explain:

50. Will participants be assigned to groups?

- Yes → Answer Questions 51 – 52
 No → Skip to Question 54

51. Will a control group(s) be used?

- Yes → **Choose one of the following:**
 Placebo control
 Standard therapy control
 Other control method → Explain:
 No

52. Is the research a blinded (masked) study?

- Yes → Answer Question 53
 No → Skip to Question 54

53. Is emergency unblinding permitted?

Yes

No → Explain why emergency unblinding is NOT permitted:

L. Recordings – Audio, Video, Photographs

54. Will any type of recordings (audio or video) or photographs be made during this study?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 10**

No

M. Computer/Internet

55. Will any participant interaction in this study be conducted on the Internet or via email (e.g., on-line surveys, observations of chat rooms or blogs, on-line interviews)?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 11, Section A**

No

56. Will a commercial server (i.e., SurveyMonkey, Psych Data, Zoomerang) be used to collect data or for data storage?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 11, Section B**

No

N. Discomforts and Risks

57. List all of the potential discomforts and risks (physical, psychological, legal, social or financial) and describe the likelihood or seriousness of the discomforts/risk. If there are no discomforts/risks, state such.

There are no known discomforts/risks associated with this study.

58. Describe how risks will be minimized and/or how participants will be protected against potential risks throughout the study.

N/A.

59. Does this research involve greater than minimal risk to the participants?

Yes → Answer Questions 60 – 61 → **Study must be reviewed by the Full IRB at a convened meeting.**

No → Skip to Question 62

60. Will medical or psychological care be available for participants who may require it as a result of the study?

Yes → Identify the source of medical or psychological care available – include address & telephone number:

No → Explain why medical or psychological care will NOT be available:

61. Does the research protocol have a plan for routine analysis or monitoring of the data and safety of this research study?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 17**

No → For studies involving greater than minimal risk, a plan will need to be developed for review and approval at the convened IRB meeting.

O. Benefits

62. What are the potential benefits to the individual participants? If none, state such. PLEASE NOTE: Payment for participation cannot be considered a benefit.

Participants might learn more about themselves and about their Spring Break experience by participating in this study. Participants might have a better understanding of how important Spring Break is to college students. Participants might realize that others have had similar experiences to theirs and relate to them. Participants might realize that the Spring Break experience has brought about changes (or not), and how such changes have affected who they are.

63. What are the potential benefits to society? If none, state such.

This research might provide a better understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon, particularly from the spring breakers' perspective. This research might expand the current body of knowledge currently available on Spring Break. This study might also contribute to a better understanding of modern rituals in general and of their prevalence and implications in contexts such as Spring Break

in particular. Future health campaigns, marketing actions, and/or other interventions in Spring Break destinations might benefit from the findings of this study.

64. Explain how the benefits outweigh the risks.

Since there are no known risks associated with this study, the benefits enunciated above clearly outweigh the (inexistent) risks.

P. Reporting

65. Is it possible investigators will discover a participant's previously unknown condition (e.g., disease, suicidal thoughts, wrong paternity) as a result of study procedures?

Yes → Explain how and when such a discovery will be handled: **In the possible, yet unlikely event that such discoveries are made, they will be reported to the appropriate legal and/or helping agencies (e.g. CAPS – Penn State's Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, at 221 Ritenour Building; phone: 814-863-0395 or Penn State's Campus Police, at 20 Eisenhower Parking Deck; phone: 814-863-1111).**

No

66. Is it possible investigators will discover a participant is engaging in illegal activities (e.g., drug use, domestic violence, child abuse/neglect, underage drinking) as a result of study procedures?

Yes → Explain how and when such a discovery will be handled: **In the possible, yet unlikely event that such discoveries are made, they will be reported to the appropriate legal and/or helping agencies (e.g. CAPS – Penn State's Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, at 221 Ritenour Building; phone: 814-863-0395 or Penn State's Campus Police, at 20 Eisenhower Parking Deck; phone: 814-863-1111)**

No

Q. Deception

67. Does this study involve giving false or misleading information to participants or withholding information from them such that their "informed" consent is in question?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 12**

No

R. Confidentiality and Privacy

68. Describe the provisions made to maintain confidentiality of the data. **Choose all that apply.**

Password protected computer files Locked offices

Locked file cabinets Other → Explain:

Identification code (i.e., code numbers, pseudonyms) – data will NOT be associated w/personal identifiers

69. Describe the provisions made to protect participants' privacy interests.

All personal information concerning the participants will be known to the researcher alone. Only participant's first letter of their first names (e.g. "J.") will be used to identify participants and all material associated with each participant (e.g. transcripts, computer files) will be identified solely by the participant's number (e.g. "Participant # 01"). If, at any given time during this study, a participant wishes to have any type of information removed from the study, such data will be destroyed. This will be made clear at the onset of study, and will be stated in the informed consent form. Data will be stored in a fire-proof locked file cabinet, in a locked office, of which only the researcher and his advisor will have a key, and all digital information will be kept in password protected computer files and encrypted.

70. Who will have access to the data?

The PI and his advisor.

71. Will identifiers be disclosed to a sponsor or collaborators at another institution?

Yes → List the identifiers that will be disclosed and explain why this is necessary:

No

72. Will a list containing a code (i.e., code numbers, pseudonyms) and participants' identity be used in this study?

Yes → Answer Questions 73 – 75

No → Skip to Question 76

73. Where will the list linking the code to participants' identity be stored and how will the list be secured?

A list containing a code linking participants' identities and their participant number will be kept in a password protected computer file. A back-up hard copy will be stored in a fireproof locked file cabinet, in a locked office.

74. Who will have access to the list linking the code to participants' identity?

The PI only.

75. Will the list linking the code to participants' identity be destroyed?

Yes → When will the list be destroyed? **3 years upon the completion of the research study.**

No

76. What will happen to the research records when the research has been completed? **Choose only one.**

Stored indefinitely with identifiers removed

Stored indefinitely with identifiers attached

↳ List the identifiers that will be attached to the data:

↳ Explain why the data must be stored indefinitely with identifiers:

Stored for length of time required by federal regulations/funding source & then destroyed (minimum of 3 years)

Destroyed after a number of years (minimum of 3 years) → Specify the number of years: **3 years**

Destroyed when notified by sponsor

Other → Explain:

77. Could the information being collected for this study have adverse consequences for participants or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, insurability or reputation?

Yes → Indicate the type of information being collected:

Substance abuse or other illegal risk behaviors

Determination of HIV status for the research

Genetic information about inheritable diseases

Other → Explain:

No

78. Will a "Certificate of Confidentiality" be obtained from the federal government?

Yes → Indicate who will obtain the Certificate of Confidentiality

Sponsor

Principal Investigator

Other → Explain:

No

S. Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) – Use of protected health information

79. Will participant's protected health information (PHI) be obtained for this study?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 13**

No

T. Drugs, Medical Devices, and Other Substances

80. Does this research study involve drugs or biologics?

Yes → **Complete & Submit Appendix 14, Section A**

No

81. Does this research study involve a device?

Yes → Go to Question 82

No → Skip to Question 83

82. Does the device meet the FDA's definition of a medical device?

Yes → [Complete & Submit Appendix 14, Section C](#)

No → Go to Question 83

FDA's Definition of a Medical Device: If a product is labeled, promoted or used in a manner that meets the following definition in section 201(h) of the Federal Food Drug and Cosmetic (FD&C) Act it will be regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a medical device and is subject to pre-marketing and post-marketing regulatory controls. A device is:

- "an instrument, apparatus, implement, machine, contrivance, implant, in vitro reagent, or other similar or related article, including a component part, or accessory which is:
 - Recognized in the official National Formulary, or the United States Pharmacopoeia, or any supplement to them,
 - Intended for use in the diagnosis of disease or other conditions, or in the cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease, in man or other animals, or
 - Intended to affect the structure or any function of the body of man or other animals, and which does not achieve any of its primary intended purposes through chemical action within or on the body of man or other animals and which is not dependent upon being metabolized for the achievement of any of its primary intended purposes.

U. Biological Specimens

83. Will biological specimens (including blood, urine and other human-derived samples) be used in this study?

Yes → [Complete & Submit Appendix 15](#)

No

NOTE: If the response to Question 80 is YES, an application must be submitted to the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC). The IBC Applications may be located at <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/biohazardous/applications/index.asp>.

V. Other Biomedical Procedures – Diagnostic Radiation Procedures, Physical Activity, Diet Modifications

84. Will participants be asked to undergo **diagnostic** radiation procedures while enrolled in this study?

Yes → [Complete & Submit Appendix 16](#)

No

85. Will participants be required to engage in or perform any form of physical activity?

Yes → Describe the nature and extent of the physical activity:

No

86. Will any type of electrical equipment other than audio headphones be attached to the participants (e.g., EMG, EKG)?

Yes → Submit a letter describing the most recent safety check of the equipment with the supporting documents for this application.

No

87. Will there be any diet modifications or restrictions?

Yes → Describe:

No

W. Assurances

As the principal investigator on this research study, I assure that...

1. this application, if funded by an extramural source, accurately reflects all procedures involving human participants described in the grant proposal to the funding agency previously noted or an explanation is given for any differences.

2. I will obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before initiating any changes to the approved study, including changes in procedures, personnel, documents, instruments, etc., except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. In the latter instance, the IRB must be notified by the next workday.
3. I am familiar with and will comply with all pertinent institutional, local, state, and Federal regulations and policies. I will adhere to the policies and procedures described in Penn State's Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections as well as Federal regulations for the protection of human participants involved in research (45CFR46; 21CFR parts 50 & 56). Copies of these documents are available in the ORP upon request or on their website – <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/>.
4. the information provided in this application reasonably summarizes the nature and extent of the proposed use of human participants.
5. I will notify the IRB within 5 business days regarding any significant adverse events that impact human participants.
6. all individuals listed on this form are competent and have been properly trained. I also assure that all individuals will complete the required training for the protection of human participants available on-line prior to contact with human participants.
7. any individual associated with or responsible for the design, the conduct, or the reporting of this research will comply with Penn State's Conflict of Interest Policy, RA-05.

Signature of Principal Investigator, REQUIRED

Date

I hereby confirm that I have read this application and my signature denotes the completeness and accuracy of the information provided.

PRINT Name of Faculty Advisor, REQUIRED IF PI IS A STUDENT

SIGNATURE of Faculty Advisor, REQUIRED IF PI IS A STUDENT

Date

I hereby confirm that I have read this application and my signature denotes departmental/unit approval of this project. To the best of my knowledge, the information in the attached application relating to members of my department is correct.

The investigator(s) who are members of my department are qualified to perform the roles proposed for them in this application. Any novice researchers from my department will be supervised by qualified investigators.

PRINT Name of PI's Department/Unit Head, REQUIRED

SIGNATURE of PI's Department/Unit Head, REQUIRED

Date

APPENDIX F

IRB Spring Break Study Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

ORP USE ONLY: IRB#24887

Doc.#1

The Pennsylvania State University

Office for Research Protections

Approval Date: 02-28-2007 DWM

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Title of Project: The (Not So) Innocents Abroad:
Taking a Closer Look at the Spring Break Experience

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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon. This study will, by means of interviews conducted before and after Spring Break, give a voice to spring breakers, in an effort to decipher its meaning for those who participate in it and thus contribute to existing research.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to take part in two individual interviews, one before and one after Spring Break. Interviews will be (digitally) audio recorded. Topics discussed will range from your reason(s) for going on Spring Break, to your expectations and experiences, and so on. Interviews will be digitally recorded (audio only).

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no known discomforts/risks associated with this study.

4. **Benefits:** You might learn more about yourself and about your Spring Break experience by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of how important Spring Break is to college students. You might realize that others have had similar experiences to yours.

This research might provide society in general, and the academic community and practitioners in particular with a better understanding of the Spring Break phenomenon, particularly from the spring breakers' perspective. This research might expand the current body of knowledge currently available on Spring Break. Future health campaigns, marketing actions, and/or other interventions in Spring Break destinations might benefit from the findings of this study.

5. **Duration/Time:** Interviews will take place on campus, with the first one lasting no more than 1 hour, and the second interview no more than 2 hours, for a combined total of 3 hours. Participation will take place during the month of March 2007.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the person in charge will know your identity. The data will be stored and secured in a locked office in a locked file cabinet (interview transcripts) and in a password protected file (digital recordings). All personal information concerning you will be known to person in charge alone. Only the first letter of your first name (e.g. "J.") will be used to identify you and all material associated with your participation (e.g. transcripts, computer files) will be identified solely by a number (e.g. "Participant # 01"). A list containing a code linking your identity and your participant number will be kept in a password protected computer file. A back-up hard copy will be stored in a fireproof locked file cabinet, in a locked office. Please be aware that the researcher is bound by ethical obligations to report any illegal activity, suicidal intentions, and/or concerns for personal well-being to the appropriate legal and/or helping agencies. If any of the questions asked during the interview cause you to feel anxious and/or upset, beyond normal daily living, you may seek additional assistance at PSU CAPS – Penn State's Center for Counseling and Psychological Services, at 221 Ritenour Building (phone: 814-863-0395). If, at any given time during this study, you wish to have any type of information removed from this study, such data will be destroyed. The following may review and copy records related to this research: The Office of Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Penn State University's Social Science Institutional Review Board, and Penn State University's Office for Research Protections In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions at any time about this research. Contact Nuno F. Ribeiro at (814) 222-1789 with questions. You can also call this number if you have complaints or concerns about this research, or if you feel that you have been harmed by this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or

you have concerns or general questions about the research, contact Penn State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.

8. Payment for participation: You will be paid \$25.00, in cash, per interview, for a total of \$50.00. You will be paid at the end of each interview. Total payments within one calendar year that exceed \$600 will require the University to report these payments to the IRS annually. This may require you to claim the compensation that you receive for participation in this study as taxable income.

9. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date