

**Linguistic Construction of Figured Worlds, Identity, and Addiction in  
Female College Students**

by

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This study presents an examination of the intersection of figured worlds, identity construction, and perception of addiction and an “addictive identity” in female college students. It investigates whether female college students conceptualize “college” as a figured world as theorized by Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, and Cain (1998), and whether (and to what extent) this figured world affects their willingness to accept and/or ascribe the identity label of “addict”. Using sociolinguistic interviews, students were asked to describe aspects of, and their opinions on, college life in general, drinking and/or drug use in college, and finally how these opinions interacted for them with widely held definitions of “addict” and “addiction”. Students’ responses were analyzed according to Bucholtz & Hall’s (1998) “tactics of intersubjectivity” to define the parameters of their identity formation, and how such formation is occurring within, and therefore likely influenced by, the figured world of “college”.

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## **PREFACE**

I would like to thank all of my friends for their constant support, my family members for graciously withstanding the answer when they asked me what my thesis was about, and my committee members for believing me as I continually promised I was “working on it.”



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

While the legal drinking age in the United States is currently 21 years of age, it is no secret that men and women younger than that – in some cases, much younger – have experience with alcohol. Similarly, the use of illegal drugs is commonplace among teenagers and young adults. A possible factor contributing to this heavy usage is the prevalence of matriculation to college.

Students in the United States graduate from high school at about 18 years of age, and many go on to attend higher educational institutions. Census data from 2008 indicate that 48.6% of 18 and 19 year olds (all races, both sexes) of the population surveyed were enrolled in a higher education institution; 25.1% had graduated high school without matriculating, 17.4% were still in high school, and 8.8% had dropped out of high school without graduating (United States Census Bureau). Most higher education institutions are four-year colleges, and thus most American students graduate from their undergraduate education at approximately 22 years of age, and reach the legal drinking age while they are students in college.

College is many things to American teenagers, a common and often expected rite-of-passage. It is seen as nearly a necessity for many teenagers, and formally marks their transition into young adulthood. Applying for, getting into, and heading off to college is a progressive, recurring ritual known to high school students across the country.

While in college, too, ritualistic behaviors abound. And possibly the most well-known and visible one is the ritual of drug and/or alcohol use. Popular depictions of college students

(movies, television shows, and songs, among others) relentlessly back the point that drinking – excessive drinking, even – is tolerated among and expected of college students. In “Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood”, Zailckas (2005) writes

To me, it is no surprise that underage drinking has spiked, given the fact that so much of it is dismissed as experimentation or life-stage behavior...As a drinking girl, especially a college-aged girl, I assigned happy hours and the subsequent hangovers to behavior that was expected of those my age (xvi).

Moreover, 24-year-old rapper Asher Roth’s song, “I Love College” became the first hit from his debut album, peaking at #12 on the *US Billboard Hot 100* chart the week of April 11, 2009 (Nielsen Business Media, 2009, p. 33). The entire song addresses Roth’s enthusiasm for drinking, drug use, and partying while attending college, and also demonstrates the legitimacy afforded to these behaviors by the college atmosphere:

*Drink my beer and smoke my weed, but my good friends is all I need/*

*Pass out at 3, wake up at 10, go out to eat, then do it again/*

*Man, I love college*

(Allen, Caren, Moorer, Robinson & Roth, 2009)

And yet, alongside this glamorization and constructed expectation of heavy drug and alcohol use in a college setting, there has also been a simultaneous rise in drug and alcohol awareness on college campuses. Most schools include a department that can provide education about drug and alcohol use and problem use identification; most also provide therapeutic programs to help those with self- or other-identified drug and/or alcohol problems. Many require students who have received certain types of university citations to attend such programs as a penalty.

At the University of Pittsburgh, where this study was conducted, there are several such educational and therapeutic programs. The University Counseling Center employs a counselor whose work is devoted entirely to drug and alcohol use and education counseling. The Center also runs a number of group therapy sessions devoted to drug and alcohol use issues, makes various pieces of literature available regarding drug and alcohol use and education, and administers the educational program required of students who receive drug and/or alcohol use-based citations. Similar items of literature are available from the Student Health Service, which also conducts emergency interventions and treatment for medically urgent drug and/or alcohol use on campus. A pamphlet outlining the University's Drug and Alcohol policy is mailed to all students at the beginning of each semester.

Such programs are not uncommon to college campuses in the United States. Furthermore, concern with drug and/or alcohol use among undergraduates is prevalent at even higher levels of educational administration. For example, under the Higher Education Act of 1998, the United States law which governs the provision of Federally-funded tuition assistance, students convicted of an offense related to the sale or possession of a controlled substance are ineligible for any Federally funded loans, grants, or other assistance for a period of time following the conviction, variable based upon the nature and gravity of the offense (Goldman, 2009).

How, then, are college students reconciling these competing lines of thought for themselves? How do they merge the discourse of college as a place where heavy drug and/or alcohol use simply happens, with the more widely prevalent discourses concerning addiction, recovery, drug and/or alcohol awareness, and identification of problem behaviors? This study attempts to answer that question by employing the concepts of figured worlds and linguistic

identity research, examining whether college does in fact represent a figured world to students and then how this figured world might be affecting the linguistic representations of identities (including “addict” and/or “alcoholic”) the students are constructing and performing in their discussion of these topics.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 FIGURED WORLDS**

The concept of a “figured world” was developed in the 1990’s by Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, and Cain as a cross-disciplinary theoretical tool. Called variously “figured worlds”, “cultural worlds”, or “cultural models”, this construct attempts to catalog the organizations of society to which social actors attend, and to explain identity choices as centered around and emerging from one, or several, of these constructed “worlds”.

Figured worlds take into account both the internal interactions of their members, and the personal social experience that each member brings to the figured world, one’s “history-in-person” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 18). They are at once both a micro- and macro- analytic tool; examination of a figured world should incorporate both the ethnographic realities in which the figured world is situated, and the novel interactional work that occurs within them (Urrieta, 2007).

Through the identification of the building blocks of figured worlds, a structure emerges that identifies salient social types, social actions, and social relationships. Figured worlds are a place where people “figure” who they are, and where they develop new identities. (Urrieta, 2007, p. 108).

Holland et al. provide many examples of figured worlds; one such example is the addiction recovery program Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). In examining AA, Holland et al. found that the structure of the program itself contained its own, enclosed set of interpretations regarding alcoholics, alcoholic behavior, and a typical alcoholic's life which, in large part, differs from the sorts of cultural knowledge about such topics that exist outside of AA (Holland et al., 1998, p. 66). For potential members, joining the program and becoming acclimated to its figured world represents "a new understanding of their selves and their lives and a reinterpretation of their own pasts. They enter...a new frame of understanding" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 66). Ultimately, for most – but as Holland et al. are careful to note, not all – this becomes a transformation of self-understanding, a transformation of identity (Holland et al., 1998, p. 66).

Figured worlds have been employed as a construct in several research papers, beginning with the papers presented in the 1987 volume, edited by Holland and Quinn, which introduced the idea as a "cultural model". These papers examined "cultural models" as they related to such diverse cultural subdivisions as folk models of the definition of lying (Sweetser, 1987); Americans' perceptions of gender types (Holland and Skinner, 1987); anger as expressed in American English (Lakoff and Kövecses, 1987); myth vs. experience in the Trobriand Islands (Hutchins, 1987); and Ecuadorian illness stories (Price, 1987).

Several newer research projects situate figured worlds within educational contexts. Hatt (2007) used the concept to characterize "smartness" at an urban high school, and how it affected the students' perception of and claim to various identities within the figured world. Robinson (2007) similarly explained the construction of history learning in a social studies classroom as a figured world, and what learner identities the context of this figured world presented. Coffey &

Street (2008) used narratives given to them by foreign language learners to describe a figured world of language learning that provided differing “language learner” identities. And Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, and Campbell (1998) described the atmosphere of kindergarten as a figured world, co-constructed by the students and teachers, that instilled learner identities which they showed could carry on throughout the students’ educational careers.

### **2.1.1 The Presence and Interaction of Various Figured Worlds**

Understanding the presence and importance of a figured world implies attention to ethnography within the description, and thus the need to situate the figured world within other, larger cultural constructs - and possibly often among other figured worlds. There is high potential for differing interpretations by different members of any given figured world at an intersection of figured worlds, due to the members’ various ethnographic realities (“histories-in-person”). Indeed, it is this possibility for differing interpretations that makes any figured world a fruitful site for the production of identity. Because they take into account both ethnographic differences and situational similarities among their members, figured worlds illuminate the production of identity quite clearly. When there exists a difference of behavior and identification between the members of one figured world, a disjunction with another figured world is a possible explanation.

An example of this disjunct effect between figured worlds can be seen in Prussing (2007). Prussing’s fieldwork on a Northern Cheyenne Native American reservation led her to examine why only the younger generations of Northern Cheyenne women on the reservation were becoming closely involved with, and actively supportive of, the addiction recovery program Alcoholics Anonymous (Prussing, 2007, p. 500). Although AA and similar “twelve-step” programs are often provided to Native North Americans through institutional health services,

many reservation inhabitants are critical of it and frequently cite that it is preferable to quit drinking on one's own (Prussing, 2007, p. 500). Furthermore, AA is often also criticized by community members for "its lack of fit with prevalent local definitions of normal and pathological drinking, conventions for social interaction, and ethnopsychological constructions of person and emotion" (Prussing, 2007, p. 500). However, younger generation women (those born after 1950) were, by the 1990's, the largest social group on the reservation to visit its AA program, and "had become visible proponents of addiction/recovery discourse" (Prussing, 2007, p. 500).

Though she does not explore it specifically, Prussing's (2007) study can be viewed as representing an example of the overlap, and disjunction, of figured worlds, and the differing identity claims that spring from such a disjunction. Her answer to the dichotomy of behavior lies in the identity politics of Northern Cheyenne life – what it means to be Northern Cheyenne, and how this is variably defined. Prussing quotes O'Neil's (1996) construct "the rhetoric of the empty center" to describe Native American identity, where the waves of change that have removed Native Americans from the traditions of the past are seen as a series of concentric circles. Older generations are closer to the pure, pre-reservation Native American past (the "center", in which there are no survivors, hence "empty"), and therefore have more legitimacy in claiming this identity, performing it, and counting upon it to do social work (Prussing, 2007, p 502). The younger generations of women, being further removed and therefore having less legitimate claims to Northern Cheyenne identity features, were more likely to turn to AA as it represented less of a break with the figured world of "Northern Cheyenne Native American" they were already a part of. In fact, for these younger women, the figured world of AA fit neatly alongside the figured world of Northern Cheyenne identity. Correspondingly, the older women,



having more claims to legitimacy in a Native American identity (and more experience with it), were much more likely to state that AA and similar twelve-step programs were stifling, misaligned with customary ways of behavior, and less preferable to quitting on one's own (Prussing, 2007).

As discussed above, AA can be seen as a figured world due to the work of Holland et al. (1998). While Prussing does not directly characterize "Northern Cheyenne" or the "Northern Cheyenne reservation" as a figured world, a cursory examination shows it likely can be. There are definable social types (older vs. younger generations), whose positions as either afford them a range of legitimate social actions and identities (eschewing AA vs. attending it; referring to traditions in a more legitimate vs. less legitimate way). Furthermore, certain outcomes are valued more than others, depending upon these positions. The figured world of Northern Cheyenne reservation life, as conceptualized by the older generations of women, is incompatible with the figured world of AA precisely because of their unique interpretations, as a certain type of actor within them, of each figured world. The younger generations of women, existing at a different social type of both the Northern Cheyenne and AA figured worlds, are better able to accept and strategically employ portions of the AA figured world due to the identity processes available to them based on their positions in each. Thus, even within one defined figured world, there is fertile ground for identity formation, since the structure of the world itself relies on differences in social type, social action, and ethnographic variables. The coming together of two figured worlds seems to heighten the likelihood of this process.

## 2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON “IDENTITY” AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Holland et al. (1998) describe figured worlds as a site “where identities are produced” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 108). However, identity research itself is a complex undertaking that spans several humanities disciplines – anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, to name a few. The methodologies for examining identity, and even the concept itself, have undergone various transformations.

Early on, researchers took the viewpoint that identity was a fixed, essential concept that could be stated and referred back to without issue. However, later theories problematized this viewpoint, by noting that identity was in fact a fluid and complex construction, negotiated by an individual as he or she moved through society. Even within that society, too, the smaller subsets and particular circles to which an individual belonged could (and would) affect how people viewed, described, and categorized themselves. Thus, identity could no longer be taken for granted, so to speak. Researchers could not anymore allude, a priori, to a particular race, class, gender, or any other division within a society when conducting anthropological, sociological, or linguistic research, and then claim that the particular findings were indicative of the person’s identity as that division. Rather, it is necessary to account for the fact that particular identities are constantly constructed on a micro, individual level just as the larger divisions are constructed on a macro one.

Given, then, that we progressively and constantly construct our identities within a particular society, it is necessary to realize that identities can only be constructed with reference to prevailing societal discourses about which identities are, in fact, available. Reith (2004) notes that within societies, members are able “to carve out a lifestyle and identity from the marked

options available”, but also “obliged to subjugate aspects of themselves, to mould their subjective states and inner desires in accordance with cultural norms and social institutions” (p. 285). Making yourself into who you want to be is a lifelong business, but a bounded one – you are limited, to an extent, by what your society has taught you to do, and only what your society will recognize.

Thus, the nature of identity research is dependent on so many outer variables, and complicated by larger ideas. These issues inherent to the conceptualization of identities and identity construction have given rise to various theoretical frameworks, set up to better account for them, and there is not at present one widely accepted framework that describes how to conduct it. Though similar at times, various researchers have proposed methods that will allow further research to be conducted with an eye towards the complicating factors. Linguistic descriptions of identity, in particular, have yielded varying viewpoints and subsequent methods on how best to proceed when examining “identity” from a linguistic standpoint.

One such framework for linguistic research on identity is described by Bucholtz & Hall (2005). Bucholtz and Hall are clear in their view that identity should be thought of as a “relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction” (2005, pp. 585-586). Thus they define identity as “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586).

Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) framework consists of five principles they find key to the study of identity. The first one, emergence, points out that identity “is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices” (2005, p. 588). They stress that identity should be seen as socially constructed and maintained; while they admit that an essentialist view of self by an individual is “an important element of

identity”, they point out that “the only way that such self-conceptions enter the social world is via some form of discourse” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587).

The second principle, positionality, takes into account the alignment of speakers who are constructing identities with larger social categories that are in play. Identity, they argue, cannot merely be thought of as “a collection of broad social categories” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 591). Speakers are influenced by these categories, but their stances within them and orientations to them are temporary and constantly in flux. The emergence principle tells us that identity is constantly emergent through discourse; the positionality principle adds to the equation the necessity to realize that the identities at hand are emergent through alignments to larger social categories, smaller scale cultural ideologies, and interactionally specific stances and roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 592). Bucholtz & Hall point out that “from the perspective of the analyst, it is not a matter of choosing one dimension of identity over others, but of considering multiple facets in order to achieve a more complete understanding of how identity works” (2005, p. 593).

The next principle they outline, indexicality, makes the point that identity can be constructed through varying indexical processes: overt mention of identity positions or labels, implicatures and presuppositions about identity positions or labels, orientations to ongoing discourse structures, and the use of structures that are associated with specific groups (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 594). This principle adds to the earlier ones the idea that identity is performed at varying levels of obviousness, with varying levels of indexical directness.

The fourth principle, relationality, takes into account the fact that identities are always constructed in relation to other social actors; no one has an identity in a vacuum. Bucholtz &

Hall (2005) outline this relationality in terms of three axes: adequation vs. distinction, authentication vs. denaturalization, and authorization vs. illegitimation.

Adequation and distinction highlight the importance of sufficiency in identity construction – sufficient similarity, or adequation, and sufficient difference, or distinction. In adequation, “differences irrelevant or damaging...will be downplayed, and similarities viewed as salient...will be foregrounded” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 599). Likewise, distinction “depends on the suppression of similarities that might undermine the construction of difference” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 600).

Authentication and denaturalization describe the processes whereby speakers lay claim to realness or artifice in their identity work (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 601). Authentication elements in discourse serve to verify; denaturalization elements serve to disrupt others’ assumptions of inevitable, inherent rightness of identity. As Bucholtz & Hall note, in denaturalization, “what is called attention to...is the ways in which identity is crafted, fragmented, problematic, or false” (2005, p. 602).

Finally, authorization and illegitimation call attention to prevailing power structures. Through institutionalized ideologies, identities are authorized – granted affirmation, or they are illegitimized – “dismissed, censored, or simply ignored” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 603).

These axes of identity work make clear that relationality in discourse is multilayered. It is true that we construct identities in relation to others, but this is done in a variety of opposing ways.

Bucholtz & Hall’s fifth principle for identity research, partialness, seeks to lay out how identities are always partial, and how “identity exceeds the individual self” (2005, p. 605). Given that identities are emergent, through several layers of discourse, and relational through

various tactics, they are always contingent upon the particular layers of discourse and particular social relations the speaker has encountered.

### **2.3 FIGURED WORLDS AND IDENTITY RESEARCH**

Examining Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) five principles, including the three "tactics of intersubjectivity" in conjunction with Holland et al.'s (1998) construct of figured worlds, then, it is clear that they have the potential to work in a complementary way. Holland et al. (1998) set up figured worlds as an organizing system within which people develop new identities (Urrieta, 2007, p. 108) – but how can we, as researchers, be sure that our description of these identities is analytically viable and sound? Furthermore, Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) principles represent a framework that defines parameters for identity recognition, but also makes clear the need to analyze identity as a "relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 585-586) –thus, there is the potential in identity research to disregard a sufficient amount of attention to the noted "local discourse contexts". By setting descriptions and characteristics of identities within the context of a figured world, we can accomplish both tasks. The characterizations of figured worlds and the framework coincide with one another productively; identifying the figured world locates the identity description, itself based on an analytical process, in a construct that is focused on the emergent, relational, and sociohistorical practices of its members.

Because Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) framework is situated in a practice they call to be named "sociocultural linguistics", it is easily applied to linguistic research. The framework, while laying out a structure, offers a fair amount of flexibility in terms of specific modes of

analysis. For the purposes of this research, the guidelines explored by Fairclough (1992), among others, for identifying stance and positioning of speech will be useful. These specific linguistic parameters, located within Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) framework to identify identity construction, and then more generally situated within Holland et al's (1998) social organization of "figured world" will couch the present analysis at various levels of theoretical specificity.

## **2.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ADDICTION**

This review of literature will now examine the theoretical history and conceptualization of "addiction" specifically as an identity label, and thus its ability to be examined according to the above theories of identity construction, and methodologies for identity research.

The word "addict" comes from Ancient Roman Law; its original meaning was "a surrender, or dedication, of any one to a master" (Reith, 2004). This etymology is interesting given addiction's conceptualization in modern, Western societies as something that literally takes over the addict, and acts as a force to reduce personal agency. This was, however, not always the case.

Reith (2004) catalogs the changing conceptualization Western societies have held for addiction. With the industrialization of the West, the fledgling medical profession began to concern itself with the "will" – as Reith describes it, "the higher ethical faculty that controlled the body" (2004, p. 288). Addiction was thus seen as a dearth of willpower, a "relation between powerful substances and weak individuals" (Reith, 2004, p. 288).

This conceptualization of addiction changed considerably as time went on, coming eventually to represent a more thoroughly medical issue. Addiction is often seen today as akin to

a disease; a causal link between physiology and behavior that establishes a pathology (Reith, 2004, p. 291).

Tension between the conceptualization of addiction as a disease and as a moral shortcoming is still common. Garlitz (2007), for her dissertation research, examined how prevalent each conceptual model was among a survey of undergraduate students, as correlated with their demographic variables, political ideologies, view of legal drug use (such as cigarettes and alcohol) vs. illegal drug use (such as cocaine and heroin), and level of religiosity (p. iv).

Garlitz's (2007) dissertation discusses the disease (or medical) model of addiction as a medical disorder, akin to cardiovascular disease or cancer, and one where "related behaviors, such as craving and drug-seeking, are viewed as signs and symptoms of the disease" (p. 4). In contrast, the moral model of addiction focuses on drug use and attendant behaviors as intentional action, and casts drug use and dependence as failures of morality and the result of poor personal decisions (Garlitz, 2007, p.14).

Garlitz (2007) found that, based on the correlations she observed, her respondents seemed to hold a combination of the disease and moral models in their conceptualization of addiction (p. 55). The strongest correlation of either model with an outside factor was in terms of political ideology; students who tended to be politically liberal also tended to adhere to the disease model, whereas more conservative students tended to adhere to the moral model (Garlitz, 2007, p. 56). There was also a correlation between legal vs. illegal drug use; the students were more likely to characterize addiction to illegal drugs (cocaine or heroin) as more of a moral issue than addiction to legal drugs (alcohol or cigarettes), which they saw generally within the disease model (Garlitz, 2007, p. 61).



These varying conceptualizations of addiction, however, are all intricately bound up with prevailing discourses in Western societies regarding the importance of a “self”. Reith (2004) describes the modern Western view of addiction as a “paradox”, one where “the values of freedom, autonomy and choice associated with the spread of consumerism have been accompanied by the emergence of an oppositional set of discourses concerned with a vitiation of freedom, an undermining of agency and a lack of choice” (pp. 283-4). She likens this process of how addiction discourses are constructed, and the identities they create through description, to Foucault’s ideas regarding the “constitution of subjects”, a similar process “whereby the intersection of various forms of power, knowledge and authority create new ways of conceiving and ‘thinking of’ types of person” (Reith, 2004, p. 284).

Thus, the possibility of an “addictive identity”, at least in Western culture, exists. The new discourses that had become widely known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century changed how certain substances were regarded, and how behaviors connected with them were seen. However, as Reith points out, it more importantly created a new type of person – the “addict” (2004, p. 288). Furthermore, application of the concept of addiction to other, non-substance dependencies (e.g., shopping, gambling, sex, Internet games) is also now widespread.

## **2.5 THEORETICAL RESEARCH ON “ADDICTIVE IDENTITIES”**

In light of this progression in the conceptualization of an addictive identity, and also the progression of identity research as a whole, there are in fact various examinations of an “addictive identity” that exist in the literature.

One such study, conducted by Etherington (2007), is entitled “The impact of trauma on drug users’ identities”. In this study, Etherington elicits narratives from participants about their experiences using drugs, and the possible implications of earlier life trauma on these experiences. Through these narratives, Etherington examines the participants’ claims to an “addictive identity”, and notes “by examining life stories through a research lens we can open up spaces between fixed and often negative ideas about selves and identities” (2007, p. 457).

The article centers around two main participants, Levi and Hannah. Levi and Hannah’s respective narratives describe their introduction to drug use, and why they think they began using drugs. Both relate the onset of drug use to a prior traumatic event or series of events, and describe the shifts in identity they felt during this time (Etherington, 2007).

Etherington (2007) also attends to the notion of identity as a construct, rather than an essentialist possession. She notes immediately that the article is based upon her current idea of identity, one that “views selves and identities as multiple, constructed and constantly reconstructed through the stories that we tell of ourselves” (p. 455). Furthermore, she states that these selves and identities are “in turn influenced by the discourses that surround us as we develop, and guided by our past experiences and memories, and our hopes and fears for the future” (Etherington, 2007, p. 455).

In her article, Etherington, a counselor, wishes more to highlight the impact of her participants’ prior trauma on their current views of themselves, than to explore the theoretical implications of addiction and identity in her participants’ narratives. She does not conduct a sociocultural linguistic analysis of her participants’ narratives, but it is possible to do so using Bucholtz & Hall’s (2005) framework of principles.

Both Levi and Hannah's narratives exhibit several of these principles. For example, Hannah's narrative at one point states "I'd always been really quiet. I was so, so good and all these bad things kept happening. And it was just like...I'm not gonna be good any more, I'm gonna be bad. And this is not gonna happen any more.'" (Etherington, 2007, p. 462). Here, Hannah is displaying evidence of the positionality principle; she attends to larger discourses present in society regarding identities ("good" girls vs. "bad" girls), and draws connections between her perception by others as an "addict", and those larger discourses. For Hannah, being "bad" meant the end of her ongoing trauma – but it also meant drug use and promiscuity.

Similarly, Levi's narrative often displays evidence of the various principles at work together. At one point, Levi says "Like a lot of teenagers on my estate several of us had tried glue...several of us had tried ganja, marijuana...loads of us had tried...acid, but I wouldn't have called myself a 'druggie'. I was someone who...occasionally, would take drugs at the weekend, with my friends" (Etherington, 2007, p. 456). In this statement, Levi attends to positionality – he has access to larger discourses concerning who is and isn't a "druggie". However, he also employs elements of the axes described in the relationality principle, particularly authentication and distinction, to complicate this positionality. His statements authenticate him as a "drug user" – he admits he used drugs occasionally, and provides a list of them as evidence to that fact. However, he simultaneously employs distinction to highlight the inherent ways in which he was sufficiently dissimilar to those he saw (or perhaps, now sees) as "druggies". He is in effect saying, "I was this kind of thing, and here's why" – authentication. But he also is saying, "I wasn't this other kind of thing, I wasn't enough like that to be that, and here's why" – distinction. Additionally, as he sets up these stances, both of them work within the larger social discourse that defines a "druggie", and thus interact with his use of positionality.

### 3.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Thus, based on the foregoing literature concerning figured worlds, linguistic identity research, and addiction as an identity label, this research project will specifically address the following questions: Do college students use linguistic strategies to construct and maintain a figured world corresponding to “college”, and thereby construct, maintain, and perform the identity of “college student”? Do they hold a particular viewpoint, from within this figured world, regarding the identity label “addict”? And, to what extent do this particular (proposed) figured world and identity label interact with each other?

This study holds the hypothesis that the college students will, in fact, show evidence of constructing a figured world of “college”, and that this figured world will not permit addiction as a salient discourse, or strong identification with “addict” as a possible social type.

A secondary hypothesis of this study is that the students will use more ascription of alterity when speaking about addiction, more of the “negative” poles of Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “tactics of intersubjectivity” (distinction, denaturalization, illegitimation) in speaking about addiction within a college atmosphere, and more discourse markers that can create distance (hedging, pausing, qualification, use of modality, lack of cohesion, etc.) (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 232-238). It is claimed that this set of strategies would serve to keep the idea at arms’ length, so to speak, and admit little to no similarity between college students and addicts, choosing instead to highlight whatever differences may exist.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study is in general a qualitative analysis, based on sociolinguistic interviews. It will examine the construction of a figured world, as well as the conceptualization of the identity label “addict” among the participants. Interviews were conducted with eight female undergraduate students at the University of Pittsburgh. A list of the participants and their pertinent information, including the pseudonyms used to indicate them in the transcript and in quotations, is included as Appendix A. It was indicated that the students, in addition to being at least 18 years old and an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh, had to be native English speakers, or if not a native speaker then at least had to have spent most of their lives speaking English. The goal of this restriction was not necessarily based on structural linguistic issues that would be compromised by non-native speakers (such as phonological or syntactic differences), but merely to ensure that the participants were at least “culturally” American, in order to better assume that all the participants came from a similar cultural “base”, and thus to make it easier to draw conclusions about their backgrounds with respect to these ideas. Because of the qualitative nature of the project, and the relatively small sample size, no attempts were made to restrict the sample of participants by race or ethnicity, and no data was collected from them regarding such characteristics.

It was initially the goal of this analysis to perform the interviews and collect data from an even ratio of male and female students; ideally, one male and one female from each

undergraduate year, for a total of 8 interviews. However, this plan had to be changed mid-way through the process of setting up and conducting interviews, as it became clear that it was overwhelmingly female students who were responding to requests for interviews, and willing to set up times to meet and conduct the interview.

This raises an interesting question of whether the project itself, at least in the descriptions given to potential participants, were more skewed to female participation. While I felt that the project's description in collection materials was encompassing enough to apply to any undergraduate student, and not specifically marked as pertinent to females only, clearly it was not seen that way by the population of undergraduate students it reached. The lack of gender difference in the interviews and thus the data is acknowledged as a shortcoming of the research; however, this interest in participation from a majority female population is interesting in light of the data collected, which often made specific reference to differences between male and female behavior with respect to the questions asked. These differences will be discussed in more detail in the analysis section below.

Questions were asked about the participant's ideas of college in general, as well as the importance of college to larger societal goals. Further questions investigated the participant's estimation of drug and alcohol use, addiction, recovery, labels such as "addict" or "problems with drugs/alcohol", and peer group evaluations of such people and labels. The list of questions is provided in Appendix B, and was structured based on the "module" format developed in part by Labov (1984).

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Since particular phonetic variation was not salient to this analysis, the transcription used standard spelling conventions. However, it included measure of pauses in speech, as well as non-speech sounds such as in/out breathing, and

discourse-salient nasal sounds. Notes were taken during the interview as well to document the participant's general demeanor while answering questions. A transcription key is included as Appendix C.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, they were qualitatively examined for examples of identity performance using Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) "tactics of intersubjectivity", and Holland et al.'s (1998) description of a figured world. Determining the presence of the figured world "college" relied on Holland et al.'s (1998) definitive volume, as well as the discussion of figured worlds present in other publications (Urrieta, Jr. 2007, Hatt 2007).

Additionally, the data were examined for concepts that can mark a certain stance or frame to speech – cohesion (pauses and topic shift), instances of qualification (adverbials and other descriptive phrases), and modality (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 232-238). Statements were coded (when applicable) to note the particular strategies, and relative frequency of each, within each student's set of responses.

This analysis was performed to determine whether there is a particular characterization that could be made of principles the students used as they spoke about college, thus indicating the presence, through their discourse choices, of a figured world. It also attempted to determine whether the participant's discussions of college students, drug and alcohol use, and the identity label "addict" represented characterizations of identity construction based on Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) "tactics of intersubjectivity", and finally whether evidence exists to suggest that the presence of the figured world is directly affecting the legitimacy of the identity label "addict" within it.

## **5.0 ANALYSIS**

This analysis will primarily be concerned with three goals: presenting evidence for the construction of a figured world of “college” by the interview subjects, showing how the subjects use Bucholtz & Hall’s (2005) tactics of intersubjectivity to conceptualize the identity label “addict”, and finally showing where and how the figured world is affecting the legitimacy of such an identity label.

### **5.1 CONSTRUCTION OF A “FIGURED WORLD”**

Holland et al. (1998) sum up the description of a figured world by describing it as a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). Figured worlds are cultural phenomena which are to an extent bounded, in the sense that becoming part of a figured world involves a process of recruitment, or a willful entry (Urrieta, Jr., 2007, p. 108). The figured world is a space inhabited by a set of particular types of people; these types relate to each other within a set of meaningful actions and states of being, which are driven by a set of relevant forces within the figured world (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Furthermore, figured worlds are inextricably linked to the specific social histories – “histories-in-person” – of each of their members. The processes that delineate them are “all partly contingent



upon and partly independent of other figured worlds...and larger societal and trans-societal forces” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 60). Above all, figured worlds are a place where people “figure” who they are – in a figured world, people “develop new identities” (Urrieta, Jr., 2007, p. 108).

Figured worlds are at once far-reaching, and hard to pin down. They both influence, and are influenced by, their members’ perceptions of the figured world and feelings about membership. They can be described as a large-scale process of identity realization for the members, and yet work differently and in different ways for each member when viewed on a smaller scale. It would seem that “figured worlds” as a construct both represent nothing and everything at the same time; however, some researchers take this apparent paradox to represent the seat of the construct’s power as a theoretical tool. Urrieta, Jr. (2007) points out that figured worlds have been criticized for a lack of empirical operationalization. However, he further writes, “the strength of this framework...lies in the very fact that it cannot be reduced to one simple, content-specific definition” (p. 112). I agree with Urrieta, Jr.’s (2007) idea; figured worlds represent a powerful theoretical tool that can be applied across a variety of disciplines; the inability to reduce it to one specific definition only strengthens its power within research, as it can be applied to the different frameworks and bodies of literature which form the theoretical basis for these disciplines.

This portion of the analysis will draw on the major aspects of figured worlds, as outlined above, by using both excerpts from the collected, transcribed data and existing research on similar topics. These characteristics of figured worlds are summarized in table 5.1. The purpose is to show that college can be construed as a figured world and, therefore, a fertile site for the production of identities. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which identity labels and

identity label acceptance are subverted, re-conceptualized, and appear to be disjoint with such identity labels as they exist outside of the figured world of “college.”

Table 1: Defining Characteristics of Figured Worlds

Defining Characteristic of a Figured World	Example in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (Holland et al. 1998)
1. Bounded; entering is a process of willful entering or recruiting	Members attend meetings and socialize with other members; they are referred to the program by friends or family or make a conscious decision to adopt its practices and maintain them
2. Situated within larger cultural contexts	AA makes use of existing models of alcoholism and recovery, and yet holds particular viewpoints on them
3. Populated by a set of specific social types	New members vs. longtime members; time in the program is signified by “sobriety chips” given for periods of time spent sober
4. Social types relate to each other through meaningful actions or states of being	Listening to drinking/recovery stories and telling one’s own are central parts of the program; maintaining sobriety with the help of program sponsors
5. Site for identity shift and change	Members use the program’s practices to ideally reconceptualize themselves as “former drinkers” and maintain sobriety

The first aspect of a figured world that will be examined is the sense that it is a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). This “realm” can be identified by reference to boundaries between it and both other figured worlds, and to the larger society within which the figured world is situated.

These “boundaries” became apparent in the collection of the present data when participants were asked the question “What made you decide to attend college?” The following excerpts represent the participants’ answer to this question. As will be seen, a frequent answer

alluded to attending college as something entirely expected or commonplace; less a conscious decision than a predestined transition:

Abby: [I've just] always like been (0.56) kinda like? [it's a-] (0.46) been brought up in me? like (0.23) when we were raised always school? and then (0.73) whatever followed afterwards

Brenda: I mean both my parents went to college (0.25) I felt like it was just the automatic next step in my life like there was no question? (0.53) um I don't know when if it was a conscious decision? it was just like assumed my entire life that I would

Cindy: um? I think it's just something that (0.58) like is expected in my family? you know just keep getting more and more education

Carla: um I don't know? it's always something I assumed I would do (1.18) ever since I was a little kid

Donna: um well it's something that (0.37) like I just knew I would do like my family was alw- always talking about oh well you'll just go on to college so I just thought it was a part of life

Interestingly enough, it does not seem at first glance that this “assumed” attendance on the part of these young women, perhaps for most of their lives, indicates a “willful entry” – indeed, Brenda overtly states that it probably wasn't a “conscious” decision, laughing as she does so. However, a figured world can also be a space into which people are recruited – and these young women's (potentially quite varied) upbringings themselves constitute a form of recruitment. The discourse regarding attendance in college that they were exposed to – from family members, and very likely their educational systems and other social institutions – combined with the social position of their families (i.e., Brenda's reference to how “both [her] parents went to college”) and apparent social prestige of college attendance (discussed below in further detail) recruited them over time into the space of “college” and identification as someone who belongs there. The participants' inability to vocalize a specific moment when the choice was made, or single key influence in attending, underscores the consistency of this recruitment for these young women.

However, this type of answer was by no means the only one observed. Three participants answered this question by giving specific reasons for attending college. Two answers to the question “What made you decide to attend college?” reflect a conscious personal decision for attendance:

Anita: um (1.21) I kinda wanted to? (0.48) be a doctor  
I did a mentorship? (0.71) at an oncological place? (0.32)  
between my junior and senior year? that summer (0.25)  
and it was a lot of fun I loved it (0.82)  
and I knew I’d have to go to college to do something [like that]

Betsy: um:? I w- (0.33)  
didn’t want to go to the workforce first?

These two answers illustrate that college is a place into which one can willingly and actively enter, for specific reasons (in contrast to the majority of the others who were recruited, albeit passively.) Betsy, especially, indicates that “college” symbolizes a distinct and discrete “realm”, separate from “the workforce”, and thus presents an ability to avoid it (for whatever personal reasons she may have).

Finally, one student, Debbie, offered a perspective on the reason she attended college that appears to incorporate both modes of entry:

KMN: What made you decide to attend college?  
Debbie: uh I’m the first woman in my family? (0.28) to go to college? so (0.40)  
I was strongly encouraged= and uh (0.23) I wanted to absolutely wanted to

In this excerpt, Debbie refers very clearly to her own specific social history by noting that she is the first woman in her family to attend college, and implies that this in particular caused her family members to encourage her “strongly” to attend. It is perhaps a common reason, across the population at large, for a prospective college student to be in this position and receive such encouragement because of it. However, it highlights the notion that college represents a place of privilege – at least to Debbie’s family – and further is a place where only certain people enter. A

fair assumption is that Debbie's family found attending college a privileged social act, and one that had been lacking in their family – hence their “strong” encouragement. Debbie was both recruited, by her family's encouragement of her and (one supposes) reference to the particular social history she represents for them, but also indicates that she “wanted to absolutely wanted to”. Thus she entered the social space willingly. Her inclusion of “absolutely” and repetition of “want” indicate emotional connection to her speech, and emphasize the personal aspect of this decision.

Participants were also asked the question “Do you think it's important to attend college?” The answers given to this question generally make reference to the links that exist between the figured world of “college” and the larger society within which it is situated. As seen, a common theme in the answers was a reference to the privileged social position that could be gained through college attendance; more specifically, to the larger sphere of job opportunities that it could present:

Anita: from my understanding to get a majority of the higher paying jobs?  
and (0.37) better (0.73)  
I guess health care and stuff like that? generally comes from a better education

Abby: cause like it helps you prepare for the rest of your life?  
like it basically gives you more (0.50)  
classes that can help you decide what you want to do the rest of your life

Debbie: oh my gosh yes to get a good job? I think (0.60)  
I think now um: (0.51)  
college education is uh even just becoming the norm (0.11)  
you know so I I feel like you have to just to get a decent job now

Clearly, for these students, college represents a place that has a specific function: advancing education, and opening up opportunities further along in life. They are well aware of the temporality of college attendance, and being a student in college is linked, in their answers, with the meaning that having attended will encompass once they are no longer students.

Some of the answers to this question also illustrated both these “links” to larger societal realms, but also the boundedness of the “realm” that college represents, as discussed above. They simultaneously situate college within larger societal contexts, and underscore the notion that entering college is the product of either a process of recruitment, or of a willful desire to enter:

Carla: yeah I think it is? because (0.82)  
For the educational purposes? and also just like a good (0.68)  
transition? From being like living with your parents and? (0.42)  
like being an adult and living on your own

Here, Carla makes reference to both the educational advantage, but also to a larger sense of “importance” of the whole experience. Two other participants made reference to such an “experience” of college in general:

Betsy: um it’s an important experience that every (0.56) teenager (0.37)  
twenty (0.34) year old person needs to have and?  
it prepares you for real life (0.61) moreso than high school?

Cindy: I feel like college? like it’s it- for most? um (0.99)  
young people it’s the first time where they’re independent and? (0.23)  
being able...to be on their own

These quotes highlight how “college” as a figured world is situated within other cultural contexts by characterizing it as an important change, and a period of transition in one’s overall life story. Carla’s direct reference to a “before” (“living with your parents”) and an “after” (“being an adult and living on your own”) situate college, for her, in a larger scheme of life and social experiences, and also indicate that it has a clear boundary with its own contextual meaning. Betsy, too, spoke of these “before” and “after” stages (“high school” vs. “real life”). And Cindy characterized college as important because it represented a place where one could experience “independence” and “being on [one’s] own”. These students’ answers refer directly to, and indeed indicate as crucial, the time spent in college in relation to *other* stages of life, and the

differences that exist between them. They reflect the link between the experience of “college” and the larger society within which it sits, and also a sense of the boundary there.

Finally, two participants made very clear reference to college as a social space which is not for everyone; that there existed a solid break between those who “should” attend college, and those who should not:

Donna: I think it’s important to attend college but like I don’t think that everyone has to I think like only certain students are really good for college?

Brenda: honestly if someone (0.47) does not like school? ah prefers to? (0.65) like work on cars or something? (0.70) [they can] that’s perfectly fine but for me? I think it’s important? cause (0.53) I see myself in a job that (0.45) I’m not going to get unless I attend college

These two statements illuminate, in a complementary way, that college is a defined and bound social space that has a context of meaning for its participants, and that is not for everyone. Furthermore, their reference to other options – “work[ing] on cars” or a different path for other “kinds of students” situates college attendance within larger society and links it to other potential figured worlds. Any overt reference to a decision implies the existence of *other options*; by referring to these other options, Donna and Brenda both indicate that there is an active boundary, negotiated by a choice, and linked to the other options because of specific histories-in-person.

The varying answers to the question of whether it was important to attend college also indicate that, for these participants, college has a particular social meaning – both internally, for the people within it, and externally, in relation to society at a larger level. Again, their simultaneous references to college and the worlds both before and beyond college indicate, by complement, that particular boundaries exist for this social space and define it from other possible spaces, and from the larger space within which it sits.

A further characteristic of a figured world is that it is populated by familiar, particular “types” of people; certain characters whose actions with respect to the values of the figured world have meaning (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, Jr., 2007).

A flaw in the collection of this data, and therefore of this analysis, is that the questions relating to types of social actors within “college” were more directly questions about drinking and drug use behavior; therefore, the answers themselves are linked to this context and are more dependent from the behaviors than the “types” themselves. However, even within this limitation, it is clear that college students can recognize and even sometimes define particular, familiar social types that exist within college, and link them to specific behaviors because of these “type” characterizations.

Participants in this study were asked various questions about drinking and drug use, including ones where they were asked to indicate a specific year or kind of person who was likely to drink and/or use drugs, and further a specific year or kind of person who was likely to use them heavily.<sup>1</sup> The participants’ answers to these questions referred to various different social groupings, most of them not mutually exclusive. Only one student (Carla) indicated that she found the generalization too hard to make. The most common reference to “type” was a to a particular year of student – freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. In fairness the question itself asked the participants to categorize this behavior based on “year *or* type”; however, it is telling that most students immediately made a characterization based upon year, while few appeared able to make any based upon other “types”. Occasionally the participants referred to “underclassmen” (freshmen and sophomores) and “upperclassmen” (juniors and seniors). The

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<sup>1</sup> Participants were told in the interview that if they found such a generalization hard to make, then admitting so would be an acceptable answer. Participants were also told to use their own, personal definition of “heavy” drug and/or alcohol use.



participants also referred to social clubs such as fraternities and sororities, people who participate in athletics, and occasionally differences based upon gender.

Cindy responded that she thought freshmen were more likely to drink, but she further elaborated:

Cindy: I don't think it's also just one like (0.87) type of student?  
I feel like there'd be honors students? or like (0.40) you know  
engineering or like the smarter? the stereotypically smarter  
like everyone does it

While Cindy's answer doesn't necessarily indicate that there is a specific social type she can elaborate about who is likely to drink, she does go into detail about why that is so, by listing a slew of familiar types and finally noting that "everyone does it". For Cindy, "drinker" can't be defined as a specific social character within the figured world of college for her, but this is only because she notices this behavior in a very wide range of other specific actors she *can* differentiate between.

Brenda's answer to this question also highlights the difference, in her view, between various recognized social types in college:

Brenda: I think maybe certain kinds of students? like definitely (0.56)  
## I hate to stereotype but it's ## inevitable like? (0.61) um like kind of  
sorority girls? fraternity guys? I think they drink more?

Brenda's inclusion of "I hate to stereotype" indicates that her recognition of this social type, linked to this behavior, is something widely recognized. She further qualifies the stereotype, however, as "inevitable" and indicates that the recognizable social actor of a "sorority girl" or "fraternity guy" is salient enough for her to make judgments about their behavior.

Abby: I just like (0.66) think the ones that (0.71)  
used to party when they were in high school? pretty much (0.31)  
guys and girls

Abby's answer of "ones that used to party...in high school" indicates yet another "type" of student. It also reflects how the figured world of college is situated within larger social spheres, and depends heavily on the histories-in-person brought into the figured world from that sphere by its members (as discussed above).

Somewhat in contrast, Betsy's answer indicates the existence of a particular "type" that she cannot really describe:

Betsy: there's definitely a kind of student that wants to drink and use drugs?  
(0.65) I can't (0.31) I don't know what kind of person it would be  
but there is a type of person?

Although she is unable to articulate exactly who that person might be, in terms of other identifying characteristics, she still expresses certainty that the type exists. This type is familiar to her, albeit indescribable. Her answer is somewhat analogous to Cindy's above; whereas Cindy provides a laundry list of recognizable "types" to support her estimation that there isn't a specific type of person who is likely to drink, Betsy is certain that there is, but cannot articulate exactly who that might be using other characterizations. In either event, there is discussion of recognizable types.

Figured worlds are further characterized by meaningful actions and states of being. As Holland et al. (1998) noted, there is a significance attached to certain acts, and a value associated with particular outcomes over others (p. 52).

Luke's (2009) dissertation explored the hypothesis that college represented a community of practice, and an identity concerned with "partying" was organized along specific gender and ethnic boundaries within it. In her discussion, she notes:

For many young people, particularly middle and upper middle-class young people, college is constructed as a time and space in which they are "supposed" to be having fun. They are "supposed" to be being young and carefree – before the responsibilities and pressures of the "real world" set in (Luke, 2009, p. 31).

This reflects both the discussion above regarding college as a socially and culturally constructed realm – something that the students seem to have understood, even before they entered it – and foregrounds the below discussion regarding the significance of “fun” or “a social life”, and the value attached to it. For the students participating in this project, having friends, fun, and a social life had a significant – though not static – meaning, and was a valued outcome.

During the interview, participants were asked whether they thought it was important to have fun or a social life while in college. All of the participants responded, in some form, that it was important to do so. Betsy stated “you can’t go to college without...making friends”, and Abby said “it’s just like part of college...to meet new people and make new friendships and have fun”. Carla related the importance of having fun in college specifically to other kinds of colleges (and possibly, then, other figured worlds):

Carla: I know like? some of my friends? who go to like community colleges?  
and they miss out on that? and I like I feel really bad for them (0.48)  
cause it’s like it’s?

KMN: it’s like a part that they’re not getting?

Carla: yeah

Carla’s indication that she feels “really bad” for her friends who don’t go to residential colleges because they are missing out on the pervasive social life, and agreement that it’s “a part that they’re not getting”, highlights the importance of it to her. For Carla, within the figured world of college, a social life is of such importance that she appears to consider those who don’t have this experience as not fully a part of it. It is doubtful that she would say her friends who go to community colleges simply “aren’t in college”; however, having a full social life while in college has enough value to indicate a sense of exclusion for those who do not experience it, an experience that seems non-canonical.

Two answers to the question “Do you think it’s important to have fun or a social life while in college?” were remarkably similar to each other, and yet different from other answers:

Donna: um (0.11) well I think it is specially for like (0.23) first year students?  
just because of the fact that (0.38) having um (0.45)  
a large group of friends just makes (0.30) life so much easier?  
like the last you know like three years of college for me was kind of a breeze  
cause I like knew so many people

Donna further stated:

Donna: like I definitely think my first three semesters it was all about being social  
and then like after that I really just bunkered down and was all about  
like (0.55) getting good grades

Another student, Debbie, said:

Debbie: I think that’s a small part of it...maybe it’s because I’m a senior but (0.60)  
classes get harder and I just don’t-  
sometimes I wonder how people (0.18) get- get all that done and have (0.38)  
a good (0.51) uh full social life...  
you should have a social life but (0.26)  
school has to be the priority and I learned that (0.37) slowly # #

For Donna and Debbie, having fun and a social life has a particular meaning and value, in that it makes the experience “easier” – Donna in particular stated that it made her final years of college “a breeze”. However, this value is also subject to change, as other acts and outcomes take on increased value and significance – hence their reference to the increased workload of upper level classes, and the time it is necessary to spend on them. Therefore, as one’s time in “college” goes along, the value attached to this particular act of having friends and a social life changes, and becomes less important in relation to the value of “getting good grades” and keeping up with one’s classes, which “get harder”. As Debbie indicated, “school has to be the priority...I learned that...slowly”. Interestingly, these two participants were in their senior year, perhaps indicating that this change in meaning and value happens gradually over time, and is therefore likely

different across all the years due specifically to personal acknowledgement of the time already spent, and time left, in the figured world of college.

The final aspect of a figured world that will be discussed is the process of identity change that can, and likely will, occur within a figured world. Figured worlds characterize a space where differing histories-in-person come together with shared “contexts of meaning” (Holland et al., 1998) to name and define social positions and relationships. They “provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self – that is, develop identities” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 60).

In Arnett’s (2000) research on “emerging adulthood”, defined as the period of life between 18-25 years old, he finds that experimentation and identity development are particularly common, and salient, in this period. College students, being approximately 17 or 18 to 22 or 23 years old in general, fit directly into this period of “emerging adulthood”. Furthermore, this period of “emerging adulthood” and the themes of experimentation and identity development have been specifically explored in college students by other researchers (Arnett 2000; Luke 2009).

Thus, although it could be said that young men and women of this age are experiencing identity construction and change no matter what their station in life, college or not, characterizations of college *specifically* as a place where identity shifts can happen were observed in the data. Cindy, in particular, was quite clear about this identity forging aspect of the figured world she was a part of:

KMN: do you think it’s important to attend college?

Cindy: [I feel} like at this time you’re- you’re- (0.39) you’re **developing** who your **self** is? like (0.23) you’re- [exp-] (0.70) you’re maturing?  
and you’re just finding out who you are

Here we see a direct reference to college as a place where identities are likely, and maybe even intended, to change. Cindy’s reference to “developing” one’s “self”, to “maturing”, and “finding

out who you are” are overt indicators that, at least for Cindy, changes in identity are a necessary and perhaps even expected outcome of membership in the figured world of “college”.

While other answers were less overt about this identity change, they still reflected that it was there for the participants:

Brenda: I see myself in a job that (0.45) I’m not going to get unless I attend college (0.44) # I don’t know what I wanna be? but I #have a feeling I need college

Here, Brenda directly indicates during her discussion of possible future jobs that she doesn’t know what she wants to be, but that she has “a feeling” she will “need college”. It is not necessarily an indicator that Brenda expects “college” to change her identity, but perhaps it is an indicator that she believes that having attending college will only help her when that does happen. She makes no indication that attending college will definitely cause her to figure out what she wants to be, but at the very least, Brenda’s sense that she will need college is reflecting a sense of being at ease with not knowing; that she is where she needs to be if and when she does figure it out.

A similar point was made by Abby, in her discussion of why she thought it was important to attend college:

Abby: like it helps prepare you for the rest of your life?  
like it basically gives you more (0.50) classes  
that can help you decide what you want to do the rest of your life

Like Brenda, Abby makes reference to the importance “college” will have on her life once she has left the figured world, but she directly relates an experience particular to college – taking various classes – to that post-“college” period, and indicates that it can “help you decide” what to do once “college” is over. Although done indirectly, Abby’s reference to “college” as

preparation and a way to “decide” is an indicator that “college” can cause an identity shift, and open up new identities that will last “the rest of your life”.

Thus, college appears to represent a figured world, based on the data collected from the participants in this study. It is a realm into which members are recruited or enter willfully; it has a sense of both being bounded from and yet dependent upon other societal constructs. There was clear reference in the data to personal sociocultural histories and how they affect the perception of college. It was also shown that the participants could enumerate recognizable social “types”, had attached value to certain outcomes, and held beliefs that some outcomes were valued over others. Finally, it was also observed that “college” for the participants represented a place for the forging of personal identity.

## **5.2 COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THE IDENTITY LABEL “ADDICT”**

Thus, based on the defining characteristics as developed by Holland et al. (1998) and employed by various other researchers (Hatt 2007; Urrieta, Jr. 2007, etc.), there is in fact evidence that “college” can be conceptualized as a figured world. But how does this figured world work with respect to a particular identity label, namely “addict” or “alcoholic”? This analysis will now turn to an examination of the participants in the interview, and their perceptions of the identity label “addict/alcoholic”. Recall, from the review of the literature, that “addict” is in fact a societally defined and dynamic label of a particular identity, taken to mean different things at different times. Further, it implies different perceptions and different acceptable courses of action for those identified with the label.

This section will examine how the students defined “addict” and/or “alcoholic” specifically. It will then present the participants’ discussion of these identity labels in the context of the “figured world” of college, using Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “tactics of intersubjectivity” as a measure of identity construction.

### 5.2.1 Participants’ Definitions of Addiction and/or Alcoholism

In the interview, the participants were asked to define “addict” and/or “alcoholic”, and to describe what kind of person they considered that to be. They were also asked to provide behaviors that they associates with a person with this identity label.

While no student gave the exact same definition, all eight students’ answers showed particular trends. Four students gave a definition that associated the identity label with physiological attributes of addiction, most commonly compulsion and physical addiction:

Anita: someone who has a dependency on a drug? (0.34) or alcohol?  
like if they wanted to they couldn’t just not drink  
like it would? (0.64) it would bother them

Brenda: um I think when (1.52) someone has no control over? (1.52)  
doing something like? (0.34) when it’s not- no longer a choice?  
but it’s a need

Betsy: um they’re very? (0.38) dependent? (1.06) um:  
(0.61) not just on the drug but just on like? (0.33)  
people? too?

Debbie: someone who (0.97) has to have (0.37) the substance  
in order to feel normal? or to (1.08) get along with their day?  
just you know they have a reliance on it they can’t go a certain number  
of hours without it

Luke (2009) found a discourse surrounding compulsion, or the *necessity* to drink, as highly stigmatized among her participants (p. 47). For the four students above in the present study, the



need to drink, rather than the simple desire to, was what defined addiction for them (Anita: “like if they wanted to they couldn’t just not drink”; Brenda: “when it’s not- no longer a choice”; Debbie: “someone who has to have the substance in order to feel normal”).

The other four students in the present research gave a definition of addiction that interpreted the label as a function of sociability:

Abby: someone that can’t have fun with their friends? Unless they’re under the Influence of something

Carla: I think (0.20) it’s a person who drinks like (0.90) a majority of the nights of the week (0.42) um if you like drink by yourself? # like (0.87) and? (2.91) I don’t know if you like have unhealthy practices about it like drink so much that you make yourself sick?

Cindy: I feel like (0.26) you’re an addict or an alcoholic once you take it- take drug and alcohol use outside the social realm like you just so [*sic*] dependent on it you don’t have a social life anymore

Donna: I always think of an addict as someone who um (0.31) like they have an anti-social like habit? like if you’re drinking on your own or if you’re doing drugs by yourself

As Luke (2009) discussed, drinking for college students is a social activity, in a space where social activities are highly privileged (p. 42). Furthermore, Luke (2009) found that similar definitions of addiction also prevailed in the students she interviewed for her research. Common discourses among her participants defended their drinking or drug use behavior by noting that “their grades were still good”, that addicts and alcoholics were people who “sit on the street corner and ask people for money”, and that drinking and drug use behavior in college was not associated with any “need” to drink or a lack of self-control (Luke, 2009, pp. 46-47). Luke (2009) noted that her participants rarely voiced concerns that their drinking and drug use behavior, or the behavior of others, constituted a “problem” or a tendency toward addiction (p.

46). Across the eight interviews of the present research, fully half defined addiction purely in terms of whether or not the substance use was done socially, and the other half cited compulsion and need to drink, rather than choice and desire to, as the defining characteristic of addiction and/or alcoholism. At least in terms of the trends observed by Luke (2009), the participants in this research appear to have similar views on and personal definitions of addiction.

### **5.2.2 Can College Students be “Addicts”?**

Thus the students represented two different “camps” of defining addiction. One set of students defined addiction as a function of compulsion or need to engage in drinking or drug use behavior; the other employed a definition based upon the sociability (or lack thereof) of the drinking/drug use behavior. Given these definitions, then, this analysis will now examine how the participants discussed and defined the possibility of someone being both a member of the figured world of “college” and holding the identity label “addict”. It will employ the “Tactics of Intersubjectivity” as defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) to examine in what ways, and to what extent, college students theorize the identity label of “addict” or “alcoholic” within the figured world of college<sup>2</sup>. Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “Tactics of Intersubjectivity” are summarized in Table 5.2.

The hypothesis for this analysis was that the participants would use more of the “negative” poles of the tactics of intersubjectivity, and I theorized that this created a cognitive distance between the participants and the conception of an “addict” existing within the figured world of college. To a large extent, this hypothesis was corroborated by the data.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants were told in the interview that “addict” and “alcoholic” could be used interchangeably.

Table 2: Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Tactic of Intersubjectivity	...Makes reference to:	...By:
Adequation	Similarity/Difference	Foregrounding of similarities; aspects of identity which are “sufficiently similar”
Distinction		Foregrounding of differences; aspects of identity which are “sufficiently different”
Authentication	Realness/Artifice	Verifying legitimacy or inevitability of a specific identity label
Denaturalization		Disrupting assumptions of inevitability or inherency of a specific identity label
Authorization	Overarching institutional or structural ideologies	Affirming identity labels based on ideologies of prevailing power structures
Illegitimation		Highlighting how identity labels are dismissed, censored, or ignored by ideologies of prevailing power structures

The final two questions that the participants were asked were “Would you ever refer to a college student who drank or used drugs regularly as an addict or alcoholic?”, and “Do you think that students like this would ever refer to themselves as addicts or alcoholics?” In response to the first question, the participants’ answers overwhelmingly employed distinction in discussing this identity label with respect to college, and also at times employed denaturalization and illegitimation. Consider Anita’s answer to the first question:

Anita: mmm? (1.74) I would say some of them yes? (0.51)  
 but again only the ones who (0.20) drink? (0.48) more than socially?

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) describe “distinction” as a process which “depends on the suppression of similarities that might undermine the construction of difference” (p. 600). Anita’s qualification of an “addict” or “alcoholic” within college as only someone who drinks “more

than socially” actively suppresses the similarity between those who drink in general, and those who drink in college – that is to say, drinking at all – and foregrounds the distinction she perceives between these two categories; a distinction which relies on the social atmosphere within which the drinking occurs.

Interestingly enough, Anita (unlike most of the other participants) does admit to there being the *possibility* of an “addict” within college; however, she is clear that certain characteristics must hold for it to be considered as such.

Abby: no- I don't think they'd be addicts or alcoholics just cause like (0.30)  
It's a regular thing that is for fun? but once it hits heavy that's when you  
wanna get scared of the addictions

Similar to Anita, Abby uses distinction to separate college students who drink from those she sees as “addicts” or “alcoholics” by noting that the drinking is “regular” and “for fun”. Her discussion of “heavy” drug or alcohol usage as indicative of addiction also marks a usage of adequation, between “heavy” usage and addiction.

Carla: I probably wouldn't  
I think (0.65) that (0.82) most undergraduate students like (1.21)  
sometimes they may drink a lot one week? but like not the next week  
and sometimes they might get sick? but not every time they drink

Here, Carla uses distinction when she highlights the differences between what she considers “addiction” or “alcoholism” and how she feels “most” college undergraduates behave in terms of drug and/or alcohol use; they drink more one week but not the next, they occasionally get sick but not every time they drink. Her foregrounding of the choice to drink, and desire to – rather than a sense of compulsion or need – separates undergraduate students from “addicts” or “alcoholics” who do not display drug and alcohol use behavior with this choice involved.

Cindy: for the most part I would say no...I feel like most of the time kids just do it to (0.45) as a social thing just party?  
you know we're just with everyone and having fun or (0.73)  
you know it's not (0.56) they're not focused on it  
like they- other people still go to classes they still...  
do other social stuff on campus

Cindy's foregrounding of a lack of "focus" on drinking behavior and the ability to "still go to classes" or "do other social stuff" employs distinction, in that it highlights the differences between what she sees as alcoholism or addiction, and how she feels college students behave "most of the time". Her immediate qualifications regarding how college students behave can be seen as an explanation of how they "actually" behave; her attempts to separate the behaviors through such qualification are an example of distinction.

Debbie: no I think addicts or alcoholics are um- at least I tend to think of them more as older (0.48) you know not in college (0.31) because eh- you know again everyone's doing it? quote unquote so (0.88) you just (0.43)  
it's- it's not- you just feel like you're with the in crowd?

Here, Debbie clearly describes a difference between who she thinks addicts and alcoholics are; "older", and "not in college", and goes on to qualify this difference by referring again to the social importance of drinking to college students. She notes that "everyone's doing it" and that drinking can make you feel like part of an "in crowd." Debbie uses distinction to clearly separate the ideas of "addict" or "alcoholic" and college student by bringing to the foreground differences between the behavior and characteristics of "addicts" and "alcoholics" and of college students, for her, while not discussing the similarities that may exist.

While it may seem excessive to focus so extensively on the examples of distinction which appear in the data, it is consistent with the distribution of Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) "tactics" in general. Bucholtz and Hall state themselves that distinction is a "familiar identity relation", and that the vast majority of identity research has focused on this process, because "social

differentiation is a highly visible process” (2005, p. 600). The fact that almost every participant immediately turned to distinction to describe the identity label of “addict” within the context of college both underscores the familiarity of it, to them, and brings to bear the visibility, to them, of such a process.

However, other processes as defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) do exist in the data, and they create a deeper understanding of how the participants theorize the conception of “addiction” within the figured world of college. One such tactic involves the opposing processes of authentication and denaturalization.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) define this axis of tactics as the ways by which speakers refer to realness and artifice, respectively (p. 601). It sets up a vector of identity construction that deals solely with the authenticity of specific identities, and how speakers make claims to such an authenticity through their speech. Authorization denotes a speaker verifying a claim to an identity, through discourse, and Denaturalization is a process whereby “claims to the inevitability or inherent rightness of identities is subverted” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, pp. 601-602.)

Several examples of such denaturalization were observed in the data. Consider, again, Anita’s example from above (represented here in longer form):

Anita: mmm? (1.74) I would say some of them yes? (0.51)  
but again only the ones who (0.20) drink? (0.48) more than socially?...  
well I guess (0.31) when I mean socially they only have (0.53)  
maybe three or four like they- they’re (0.48) they do that fine and if  
they don’t do it every single night (0.25) they- they can-  
they take nights off they take weekends off like it wouldn’t really bother them

While Anita’s statement makes use of distinction, as discussed above, it also is an example of denaturalization in that the identity label of “addict” does not apply, for Anita, because of the overarching situation the behavior is occurring in. For Anita, college students are not *inevitably*

alcoholics or addicts, even if they are heavy drinkers or drug users – the label is only applicable if specific characteristics regarding the sociability of such behavior do not hold. Anita does not find drinking in and of itself problematic; she does not find it inevitably indicative of a situation that could be called “addiction”. The behaviors only become problematic when they are removed from a realm of social activity.

Recall the conclusions made above, bolstered by Luke’s (2009) research, which indicate that sociability is a driving force in the figured world of college. Someone who drinks non-socially appears to be eligible (at least for Anita) for the identity label “addict”; however, Luke (2009) concluded that non-sociability in any form is not considered “acceptable” behavior anywhere within the space of college. As she noted, social practices, including “partying”, construct the students as “not just any kind of college student, but college students who are fun, social, and *full participants* in college culture” (Luke, 2009, p. 34) [emphasis added]. Addicts must exhibit non-social tendencies, but this alone removes them from the characteristic space of being “in college”; thus, addicts are in many senses not “part” of the figured world, even if by other standards they could be defined as such. Anita’s statement both denaturalizes addiction within the value structure of college *and* authenticates the identity of being “sociable” while there.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) note that denaturalization emerges the most clearly in “parodic performance”; joking adoptions of identity meant to unsettle others and bring to light issues involved with the consideration of certain identities as “inevitable” or “natural” (hence, denaturalization.) Two participants specifically related instances of observing others “joking” about alcoholism, or “jokingly” applying the term themselves, and both remarked on how unsettling the joke is found to be:

KMN: do you think undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly would ever refer to themselves as addicts or alcoholics?

Cindy: I think it- like they'll joke about it? but- (0.26) when they take like (0.63) seriously? like saying would they consider themselves a- alcohol- addicts? I don't think so

KMN: why not?

Cindy: umm (0.23) you know they're just like it's a social thing it's just part of the experience you know we're gonna get drunk

KMN: do you think undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly would ever refer to themselves as addicts or alcoholics?

Betsy: no (0.69) I know I've used the term like alcoholic in just like joking terms? and like (0.47) people (1.15) don't agree like they get mad?

Telling, perhaps, is the observation that both of these students could recount usage of the term “alcoholic” in a joking manner; the fact that they refer to the label only being accepted when it's part of a “joke” implies a sense of distance and lack of relation to what it entails, as a college student. Betsy, in particular, appears to anger her friends when she “jokingly” refers to them as alcoholics.

This “joking” application of the identity label “alcoholic” to those who are drinking, in college, shows that usage of it is a process of denaturalization. Usage of it *at all* implies some similarity to what the identity label constitutes (drinking behavior), but the fact that it is either something to joke about or something to get angry with someone else for calling you implies an even greater sense of the absurdity of applying such a label. The use of “alcoholic” jokingly subverts, for the college students from within the “figured” world of college, the identity label with respect to their behavior – it creates an atmosphere where the overwhelming mindset is that drinking – even heavy drinking – does not naturally, inevitably, mean alcoholism. These



situations, at base, rest on a shared assumption of the falsehood of “alcoholism” or “addiction” happening within the figured world of college.

The final “tactic” this analysis will explore is that of authorization and illegitimation. This pair of identity construction processes is concerned with how identity construction happens in relation to larger structural and institutional places of power; authorization with how such structures affirm certain identity labels, and illegitimation with how the same structures dismiss, censor, or ignore identity labels (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 603). It is in this pair of tactics that ideologies particular to the salient institutional structures can affect acceptance and usage of identity labels.

Again, while not so prevalent as distinction, this set of relations was observed in the data. Some participants used authorization to discuss how they felt that “addiction” and “addict” were not compatible with being a college student, such as Cindy:

Cindy: I just feel like it’s just (0.83) the college culture you know you just  
you know drink

Debbie: I think that’s what you- I think that’s sort of a norm in college  
for the first year or so

Here, Cindy references a “college culture” that authorizes drinking behavior; she uses it to justify heavy drug and alcohol use by referring to how such behavior is affirmed by, and tolerated within, the figured world of college. Debbie echoes this authorization; she refers to drinking and drug use behavior as “sort of a norm”.

Cindy: it’s just part of the experience you know  
we’re gonna get drunk (0.34)  
one night we’re gonna try drugs it’s just (0.29)  
I guess expec- not expected but just (1.26)  
it’s just the college culture I guess

Cindy further references, in several ways, that drinking and drug use behavior is simply “college culture”; that this behavior is not considered problematic from within the space of college. She begins to say that it is “expected” but retracts this statement; overall, however, she projects a sense of there not being an issue, whatsoever, with drinking and drug use because it is part of the “experience”, and “the college culture”. Cindy, too, feels unable to apply the identity label of “addict” or “alcoholic” to college students, and explains this feeling by authorizing these behaviors within the structure of “college”.

Participants were also observed using the tactic of illegitimation when discussing “addiction” and college students. Recall that illegitimation is a tactic that focuses on how institutional power structures dismiss or ignore certain identities. The excerpts below present examples of this:

Betsy: it’s strange to think of (0.65) college students as alcoholics (1.19)  
they always say that once you go on to the real world that’s when  
you become the alcoholic

Donna: I don’t know...there’s always that saying like you know  
right now in college it’s cute but when you turn thirty? ##  
like it’s called alcoholism

Betsy and Donna are both clear to point out similarity between behaviors that they would call alcoholism and behaviors they would not, but the defining factor separating them is simply existence within the world of college. Indeed, they do not even seem to find any difference between the drinking behavior of students within college, and of alcoholics outside of it – in college, such behavior is “cute”. However, once someone with these kinds of drinking behaviors leaves college and goes on to the “real world”, the behaviors are now able to be construed as alcoholism. For these participants, the figured world of college has a clear illegitimizing effect on the identity label “addict”. It is not that the behaviors do not run parallel to ones which could

be considered “addictive” or “alcoholic”; the label itself is simply dismissed within such a space. Betsy finds it “strange” to conceive of a college student as an alcoholic, and describes it as something you “become” once you leave. Donna describes the behavior as “cute” in college (a quick bit of authorization, in that the college atmosphere affirms such behavior), but illegitimizes the label of “addict” within college, only giving it credence to appear when someone continues to exhibit such behaviors upon turning thirty (and one would expect, not an undergraduate anymore.) The specific ideologies that define the institutional structure of “college”, for these participants, are dismissing “addiction” and ignoring the application of the label until the institutional structure no longer applies and the ideologies surrounding the behavior change – not necessarily the behaviors themselves.

### **5.3 THE FIGURED WORLD OF “COLLEGE” AND THE IDENTITY LABEL “ADDICT”**

To this point, this analysis has: (1) shown that “college” can be conceptualized as a figured world for its members; and (2) shown that the members of this figured world (i.e., students) do not admit strong identification with “addicts” or “addiction” within the figured world. The final section of this analysis will examine in particular the apparent disjunction between the figured world of “college” and the identity label “addict” or “alcoholic”. It will also examine whether discourse markers such as modality, hedging, and voice shift are present in the data, indicating a particular stance, and contributing to this disjunction.

Fairclough (1992) describes modality as a dimension of grammar that can indicate the “‘interpersonal’ function of language.” He continues, “In any propositional utterance, the

producer must indicate...a degree of ‘affinity’ with the proposition” (p. 158). Such representations of affinity, or lack thereof, are accomplished through the use of modals (“must”, “may”, “should”, “would”, etc.), and further through hedges (“sort of”, “sometimes”, “a little”, etc.) and hesitation in speech (Fairclough, 1992, p. 159).

Further, Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between “subjective” and “objective” modality; the former a statement that makes explicit the amount of affinity for the subject at hand, and the latter a statement that leaves such affinity implicit (p. 159). Fairclough’s examples are “I think/suspect/doubt the earth is flat” (subjective modality) and “the earth may be/is probably flat” (objective modality). Subjective modality in a statement, according to Fairclough (1992), makes clear that the speaker’s own, personal affinity with the utterance is what is expressed. Objective modality, on the other hand, does not indicate clearly exactly whose perspective is represented by the utterance – potentially the speaker’s perspective, presented as universal, or potentially also the perspective of another individual or a group for which the utterance is acting as a vehicle (Fairclough, 1992, p. 159). Further, Fairclough (1992) explains “the use of objective modality often implies some kind of power” (p. 159).

When participants in the present study were asked the questions “Would you ever refer to undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly as ‘addicts’ or ‘alcoholics’” and “Do you think that undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly would ever refer to themselves as ‘addicts’ or ‘alcoholics’”, their answers showed some indications of affinity – in particular, use of modals, hedges, and pauses that indicate low affinity with the statements they were making. It is theorized that this indicates less certainty with the utterance, and a sense of “distance”, and that this distance and lack of affinity are highlighting the disjunction present between the figured world of “college” and the identity label “addict”. While the students often

made reference to the similarity of the simple *behavior* of college students with respect to drinking and drug use and addicts or alcoholics, they were in general unwilling to make strong – that is to say, high affinity – connections between the two groups as they perceived them.

Consider Anita’s answer to the second question, as given above:

Anita: mmm? (1.74) I would say some of them yes? (0.51)  
but again only the ones who (0.20) drink? (0.48)  
more than socially

Anita’s use of “would” is a modal construction that separates her from her statement regarding labeling undergraduate students as potential addicts or alcoholics, and indicates low affinity with her expression. Furthermore, it is a subjective modality – Anita is directly expressing her own personal affinity for the statement by commenting on what she “would say”.

Anita also hesitates often during her expression (nearly two seconds’ pause between her first utterance, “mmm?”, and her second; close to a half-second in other places) and immediately qualifies her statement that “some” undergraduate students are ones she “would” label addicts or alcoholics with hedges that discount several groups within the larger one from the label she is discussing.

Cindy: I don’t (0.28) for the most part I would say no because? I feel like it’s just?  
(0.83) the college culture you know you just you know drink that’s definitely?  
(0.28) something maybe drug use is just also (0.56)  
um experimentation or whatever

Debbie: I- I think a lot of freshmen or sophomores who do it (0.38) in the beginning?  
they (0.23) [and] are just learning how to handle it? what they can handle?  
and they probably tend to overdo it [because] peer pressure and those sort of  
things (0.74) but I would say that if that continues? for (0.28) an extended  
period of time maybe two years three years (0.31)  
then I would probably call them an addict

Cindy and Debbie’s quotes above also exhibit similar tendencies as Anita’s in terms of modality, hedging, and pausing. Both, in particular, use the modal construction “would say” to describe

their affinity and tendency to label undergraduate students as addicts or alcoholics; both also use many hedges (“it’s *just* the college culture”; “*probably* call them”; “*just* also experimentation or *whatever*”). Both also pause often during their expressions, and exhibit hesitancy in their speech.

It is admittedly a possibility that the participants used the modal “would” simply because the question contained the modal “would”; the impact of this should not be discounted. However, the participants all produced other discourse markers that indicate a low affinity for their statements, and it is believed that the importance of the modal usage cannot be discounted entirely because of its use in the question.

The most significant conclusion that can be drawn from these final two questions in the interview is that most participants either indicated that they didn’t know how to answer the question, or made direct reference to why they did not think it possible for undergraduate students to be labeled as addicts or alcoholics.

[*discussing undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly*]

KMN: do you think that they would refer to themselves as addicts or alcoholics?

Brenda: I think if they truly are? then probably not  
(1.52) um I don’t know

KMN: do you think that you would ever refer to an undergraduate student who drinks or uses drugs regularly as an addict or alcoholic?

Carla: um? (2.90) I don’t- (0.23) think so unless?  
(2.90) I don’t know

For many participants, not just Brenda and Carla, “I don’t know” was a common usage. Carla’s response, in particular, is quite fractured – there are significant pauses (twice, close to three seconds), and very little speech that displays content.

This examination of modality, hedging, and pauses could be considered rather paltry – there were some examples of them in the data, but not many, and not strong ones. However, consider the answers given below:

Betsy: I just- it's strange to think of (0.65) college students as alcoholics

Cindy: I feel like it's just (0.83) the college culture you know  
you just you know drink

Possibly, the difficulty in finding instances of hedging, modality usage, and pausing in this data that strongly indicate a lack of affinity for, or distance from, the concept of an undergraduate student being an addict was because the participants are so directly affected by the figured world that they have a *high* affinity for statements that it is not the case. Certainly the statements that did so, such as Betsy's and Cindy's above, were not very strongly indicative of this situation, but they are less fraught with hesitation, modals, and hedges than other statements that attempt to explain the opposite situation; i.e., why college students *could* be considered addicts or alcoholics. It was hypothesized at the beginning of this research that there would be heavy use of such low-affinity markers, and that this could be taken to indicate distance from the concept of an undergraduate student being an addict or alcoholic. The data do not provide a wealth of examples of such affinity markers; they do, however, include several direct explanations of why it *cannot* be so, and almost always in reference to a college "culture" or "norm". The students were directly expressive of their belief that undergraduate students cannot really be labeled alcoholics or addicts simply because of the context within which such a situation were hypothetically to occur; what's more, they appeared to have a fairly high affinity for these statements. It was not the case that the distance from the idea had to be "teased out", so to speak, from the data with low-affinity discourse indicators. Rather, the participants' views were plainly stated with a certain bit of conviction. Donna's discussion, below, is a prime example of this:

[*discussing undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly*]

KMN: you wouldn't be very inclined to refer to them as addicts nor do you think  
(0.41) they would themselves

Donna: no I mean like? (0.26) cause like even as I say that and I think about it  
I'm like yeah it's signs of like the fact that they have like an addictive  
you know like pattern in their life however it's just (1.69)  
that I feel like that's how their like social life (0.54)  
like you know circulates?

Here, Donna acknowledges that the behavior she observes in her fellow students resembles addiction, and comments on how even as she says and thinks about how they could not be addicts, it is strange to believe both things at once. But she ends by stating that “it’s just how their social life circulates”; that even though similar if not identical behaviors are present, the figured world of “college” and the identity label addict simply do not intersect for her in any strong way. This conceptualization was common throughout the data, with all participants, and echoes Luke (2009): “broader cultural forces have constructed ‘partying’ as an important social practice for college students. This social practice...is so important to many college students that it organizes their social worlds” (pp. 26-27).



## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This research project hypothesized that “college” represented a figured world for undergraduate students, and that it further was one which would not admit strong acceptance of the identity label “addict” or “alcoholic”. It further hypothesized that undergraduate students’ discussions of college students and addiction, viewed from the perspective of Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “tactics of intersubjectivity” would use more “negative” poles of the tactics (distinction, denaturalization, illegitimation), and that the students’ discussions would show discourse markers such as modality usage, hedging, and pausing to indicate low affinity with the idea of an undergraduate student being labeled an “addict” or “alcoholic”.

It was demonstrated that a figured world was present, through examination of how students entered or were recruited into the space; of the boundedness of this space and it is situated within and with respect to larger societal contexts, of the examination of familiar social types that populate the figured world, and of how identities were able to be shifted, constructed, and solidified within the figured world.

It was further demonstrated that the students conceptualize the identity label “addict” and “alcoholic” with generally more usage of the “negative” poles of Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) “tactics of intersubjectivity”, although some instances found usage of “positive” ones (authorization in particular.) However, these instances were shown to be positive constructions of the behaviors common to the figured world, and thus by complement a negative construction

of the possibility of “addict” or “alcoholic” within such a figured world (by reference to how such behaviors *do not* fit in properly.)

Finally, it could not be strongly demonstrated that students used discourse markers such as modality, hedging, and pausing to indicate low affinity for the conceptualization of “addict” or “alcoholic” within the figured world of “college”. However, this is believed to be due to the fact that most participants chose to make more high-affinity statements regarding such a situation’s impossibility, referring in particular to the norms and cultural ideologies surrounding “college” and the inadmissibility of “addiction” or “alcoholism” thereto. While the particular hypothesis presented with respect to this research question was not proven by the data, the trends present there are interesting in that a similar situation regarding the conceptualization of the figured world and the identity labels at hand was observed, albeit through a different process.

Thus, even with the small sample size and lack of attention to other ethnographic details such as ethnicity, social class, and gender (in that all participants were of the same gender), trends were observable throughout the data in such a frequency as to support the major research questions of this study.

This research can serve as a pilot study for future studies situated at the intersection of social group theory, perception of social and cultural groups, social group identity, and sociocultural linguistic performances and construction of identity. One possible future project could use as participants college students who self-identify as heavy drug or alcohol users, and compare their estimations on drinking and drug use behavior with those found in the present study, where none of the participants self-identified in this way. Would these students’ conceptualizations of addiction or alcoholism within the figured world of “college” be different? If so, in what ways and to what extent? How do these students in particular reconcile these

conceptualizations of “addict” or “alcoholic” with the figured world of college, which the present study showed is not strongly applicable within such a figured world?

Another possible research study could examine the specific nature of the identity of a heavy drug or alcohol user within college. The students in the present study were asked what they and their friends do for fun, and also what they believe Pitt students in general do for fun. While most students mentioned drinking or going out to bars as one of many things that they personally do for fun with their friends, none foregrounded it or indicated it was the most common activity. However, all but one indicated that drinking or “partying” was the most common thing Pitt students in general do for fun. Is the identity label “drinker” or, more broadly, “partyer” only ascriptively applied within college? If it is sometimes self-applied, are there specific aspects of the figured world – such as being a certain one of the recognizable social types – that can predict who will and will not self-apply such a label?

It is believed that the present conclusions, and those of the proposed future studies, would be applicable to University Counseling Centers, student organizations, and other groups concerned with the prevalence and treatment of drug and alcohol use among college students. If college students can be shown to hold a specific conceptualization of drinking and drug use and a specific characterization of addiction which is unrelated to that used by a counseling or advocacy group to propose treatment, then it is unlikely the treatment will work to the extent that it could if it were structured more in alignment with the students’ own conceptualizations. Studies such as this can provide a template for possible rhetoric for approaching such issues that can ensure higher rates of program relatability to students, involvement, and ultimately success.

Future studies in a similar vein can be improved by interviewing students of both genders, by using a larger sample size, and by more thorough ethnographic study of the

participants beforehand. Attention was paid to ethnographic details, but only cursorily; research of this nature is dependent upon ethnography for basis for conclusions and a more in-depth attention to such variables would only strengthen the findings of similar projects. It is likely that male college students hold different viewpoints on drinking, drug use and addiction, considering several of the female participants in the present study made reference to gender as a determining characteristic of who does and does not engage in drinking and drug use behavior. It is also possible that more ethnographic details would provide a more fine-tuned set of conclusions to be drawn about the students themselves and the figured world of college. Garlitz (2007) found that political ideology and religiosity were significantly correlated to a student's viewpoint on addiction; if such factors were included in an ethnographic background of the participants or even of the school itself, it could provide a way to understand in a richer way how the figured world of "college" is structured, and thus how identity labels such as "addict" are interacting with it.

## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 3: List of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Year
Anita	18	Freshman
Abby	18	Freshman
Betsy	19	Sophomore
Brenda	20	Sophomore
Cindy	20	Junior
Carla	21	Junior
Debbie	22	Senior
Donna	22	Senior

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### *Module 1 – College (General)*

- 1.1. What are your age and year in school?
- 1.2. What made you decide to attend college?
  - a. Do you think it's important to attend college?
  - b. What made you decide to attend Pitt specifically?
- 1.3. Are you enjoying Pitt? Do you like college so far?
  - a. What do you like/dislike about it?
- 1.4. Do you think it's important to have fun/a social life while in college?
  - a. Is this part of the college 'experience'?
  - b. What do you and your friends do for fun?
  - c. What are common things you think Pitt students in general do for fun?

#### *Module 2 – College (Drinking/Drugs)*

- 2.1. Please tell me a bit about what you know about drug and alcohol use on the Pitt campus.
  - a. How frequent do you think drug and alcohol use is among undergraduates?

- b. Is it more common with certain years of students?
  - c. Is it more common with certain kinds of students?
- 2.2. How frequent do you think *heavy* drug and alcohol use is among undergraduates?
- a. Is it more common with certain years/kinds of students?
  - b. Are there occasions for heavy drinking, among people who normally wouldn't?
- 2.3. What do you know about resources for drinking/drug use problems on the Pitt campus?

*Module 3 – People (Drinking/Drugs)*

- 3.1. Do you know anyone personally who spends a lot of time drinking and/or using drugs?
- 3.2. Do you think these people need help with their drinking and/or drug use?
- a. Why or why not?
- 3.3. How do you feel about people who drink and/or use drugs excessively?
- a. Would you want to hang out with people who do?
  - b. Have you ever hung out with people who drank/used drugs excessively?
    - i. How did you find the experience?
- 3.4. Did you ever learn about drinking and/or drug use in a structured way (School DARE programs, Awareness lectures, health class, etc.)?
- a. How old were you when you learned about it?
  - b. Did it change the way you thought about drinking and/or drug use at all?
- 3.5. Do you know anyone (fellow students, other friends, family members) who has sought help (from any source, for any reason) about their drinking or drug use?
- a. What sources have they used?

- b. What do you think made them seek help?
  - c. Do these people still drink and/or use drugs?
  - d. How do these people talk about drinking and drug use now?
- 3.6. How would you define an “addict”? What kind of person is that?
- 3.7. Do you think you would refer to undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly as “addicts”?
- a. Why or why not?
- 3.8. Do you think undergraduate students who drink or use drugs regularly would refer to themselves as “addicts”?
- a. Why or why not?



## APPENDIX C

### TRANSCRIPTION KEY

<u>Transcript Mark</u>	<u>Indicates</u>
(text)	Pauses (in seconds)
<b>bold text</b>	Emphasized statements
[text]	Statements said softly/unclearly
?	Rising tone at end of phrase
...	Omitted section of transcript (considered not salient to analysis)

Pseudonyms in these transcripts were assigned to indicate the undergraduate year of the speaker, to avoid the necessity of explaining this repeatedly within the text. The two pseudonyms beginning with A were freshmen, beginning with B were sophomores, beginning with C were juniors, and with D were seniors.

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