

Spring break travel: thirty years of scholarly evidence, 1980-2010

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Abstract:

Spring break is a week-long North American collegiate travel vacation period that draws hundreds of thousands of young tourists to a few select tourism destinations, and has become a topic of growing social and economic importance. In spite of a rising interest by tourism scholars, most of the spring break literature remains dispersed through a wide variety of outlets and disciplines. Moreover, critical appraisals of the current spring break literature in light of the wider phenomenon of youth tourism are absent. The present study presents an integrative and comprehensive assessment of extant spring break literature for the 30-year period of 1980–2010. Our findings identified literature focusing primarily on college students’ motivations and behavior while on spring break, with an emphasis on risky health behaviors such as alcohol consumption and unprotected sex. The majority of the studies surveyed relied heavily on quantitative approaches of data collection and analysis. This review found numerous discrepancies in regard to spring breakers’ previous intentions, motivations, behavior, involvement in the spring break experience, and factors affecting spring break behavior. This review highlighted the complexity of the spring break phenomenon, as well as the necessity of moving beyond the “Spring Bacchanal” paradigm. Directions for future research based upon contradictions and/or gaps identified in the literature are discussed.

Keywords: Spring break travel | Youth tourism | College student travel behavior | Literature review

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SPRING BREAK TRAVEL: THIRTY YEARS OF SCHOLARLY EVIDENCE, 1980–2010

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Spring break is a week-long North American collegiate travel vacation period that draws hundreds of thousands of young tourists to a few select tourism destinations, and has become a topic of growing social and economic importance. In spite of a rising interest by tourism scholars, most of the spring break literature remains dispersed through a wide variety of outlets and disciplines. Moreover, critical appraisals of the current spring break literature in light of the wider phenomenon of youth tourism are absent. The present study presents an integrative and comprehensive assessment of extant spring break literature for the 30-year period of 1980–2010. Our findings identified literature focusing primarily on college students' motivations and behavior while on spring break, with an emphasis on risky health behaviors such as alcohol consumption and unprotected sex. The majority of the studies surveyed relied heavily on quantitative approaches of data collection and analysis. This review found numerous discrepancies in regard to spring breakers' previous intentions, motivations, behavior, involvement in the spring break experience, and factors affecting spring break behavior. This review highlighted the complexity of the spring break phenomenon, as well as the necessity of moving beyond the "Spring Bacchanal" paradigm. Directions for future research based upon contradictions and/or gaps identified in the literature are discussed.

Key words: Spring break travel; Youth tourism; College student travel behavior; Literature review

Introduction

Every year, as the month of March looms nearer, interest in spring break (SB) increases. A relatively short vacation period, usually lasting no longer than

a week, this tourism phenomenon is typically associated with a voluntary migration of North American undergraduate students toward a small number of well-known vacation hotspots for a few days of unsupervised behavior, usually entailing

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the consumption of large quantities of alcohol and the pursuit of frequent, casual, and unprotected sex (Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, & Smeaton, 1998; Russell, 2004; Sönmez et al., 2006). Scholars with an interest in youth travel have long been attuned to the importance of the SB demographic, not only because of the potential health implications of participation in the SB experience, but also because the SB demographic represents an important market segment of increasing economic importance, with hundreds of thousands of college students traveling every year and spending hundreds of millions of dollars during this week-long vacation period (Bosman, 2006; Copeland, 2007; Gianoulis, 2000; Maier, 2000; Porter, 2003; Reynolds, 2004).

Perhaps because the literature is dispersed through a wide variety of journals and disciplines, some scholars have argued that little empirical research has been conducted on SB (Grekin, Sher, & Krull, 2007). Nonetheless, a robust corpus of scholarly literature on this topic exists. In addition to 29 articles reviewed in the present study, two book chapters (Josiam, Clements, & Hobson, 1994; Williams & Burns, 1994), two encyclopedia entries (Gianoulis, 2000; Russell, 2004), and seven theses/dissertations (Delaney, 1997; Healy, 2005; Laurie, 2008; Mewhinney, 1996; Moredock, 1994; Ribeiro, 2008, 2011) devoted to SB were located from the period of 1980–2010. To this literature we must also add numerous scholarly conference presentations, a veritable frenzy of media interest in this topic (e.g., Associated Press, 2006), reports of concern by public/professional interest groups (e.g., American Medical Association, 2002, 2006), and numerous films and TV shows (e.g., Colon, DeMaio, Paley & Partick, 2001), all of which have emphasized the importance of SB.

Scholarly research on SB behavior has focused mostly on extreme types of conduct, such as binge drinking, casual and unprotected sex, and illicit drug consumption (e.g., Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, & Yu, 2002; Cronin, 1996; Gonzalez, 1986; Grekin et al., 2007; Lee, Maggs, & Rankin, 2006; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, Yu, & Sasidharan, 2001; Sönmez et al., 2006). A majority of scholars have attempted to not only describe how spring breakers behave while on SB but, more importantly, to discover which factors influence risky SB behaviors (e.g., Apostolopoulos

et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, & Mewhinney, 1998; Smeaton, Josiam, & Dietrich, 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Spring break trips are seen as a risk factor for college students, and are perceived to greatly increase their chances of engaging in the aforementioned health-risk behaviors (e.g., Grekin et al., 2007; Sönmez et al., 2006).

Recent research, however, has challenged the idea of SB as a “Spring Bacchanal” (Marsh, 2006), and posited that a much broader range of SB experiences appears to exist (Ribeiro & Chick, 2009; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). There is little agreement among SB scholars on whether SB constitutes a health-risk environment by itself (cf. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Grekin et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006), or whether college students go on SB purposefully to engage in health-risk behaviors such as binge drinking, casual and unprotected sex, and drug taking (cf. Gerlach, 1989; Litvin, 2009; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). Moreover, recent SB scholarship suggests that spring breakers’ behavior may not deviate extensively from “normal” campus behaviors that take place during the rest of the academic year.

In a recent issue of *Tourism Review International*, for instance, Litvin (2009) asked if “the hype” concerning spring breakers’ behaviors was “justified”—that is, whether or not participation in the SB experience represented a departure from ordinary college behavior in regard to alcohol and drug consumption and casual and unprotected sex. In contrast with the majority of previous SB research (e.g., Grekin et al., 2007; Sönmez et al., 2006), but confirming earlier findings by Ribeiro and Yarnal (2008), Litvin (2009) concluded that “students . . . act very similarly over spring break as they do during the rest of the school year” (p. 179). In another article, Lee et al. (2006) found that variables previously thought to predict increased alcohol consumption during SB (gender, fraternity/sorority membership, “party” expectations) were not associated with higher levels of inebriation during SB.

These inconsistencies in the SB literature are worthy of note, all the more so given that recent studies in tourism marketing have used the SB demographic as a testing ground for the study of college students’ consumer behaviors (George & Yaoyuneyong, 2010; Park & Kim, 2009, 2010; Wirtz, Kruger, Scolon, & Diener, 2003). Given its size, economic importance, and availability for

researchers, it is likely that tourism scholars will continue to study this population in the future, and thus a careful analysis of the existing literature is all the more necessary to place future findings in their appropriate context.

Existing SB research spawns a period of more than 30 years, and it is possible, as some have hinted at (Gianoulis, 2000), that spring breakers' motivations and behavior have changed in that period of time. A comprehensive and critical review of the literature is necessary to summarize and contrast existing SB research, so that scholars with an interest in SB and related topics (e.g., travel and tourism, young people's leisure, risky behaviors of college students, etc.) can find firm footing upon which to conduct future studies. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was threefold: a) provide scholars with an integrative review of existing academic research on SB, b) identify emergent themes from the SB body of knowledge, and c) recommend directions for future research based upon contradictions and/or gaps in the literature.

Study Methods

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the authors conducted a comprehensive search for peer-reviewed research articles focused on SB. Nine online research databases were used: Web of Science, Elsevier Science Direct, JSTOR, PsycInfo, Sociological Abstracts, Medline/PubMed, World CAT, SAGE Journals, and Wiley Interscience/Blackwell Synergy. Our specific Boolean search strings were: "spring break," "college student AND travel," "college student AND vacation," and "spring vacation." We sought correspondence between these search strings and words appearing in the article's title, abstract, and/or text. Four exclusion criteria were applied to delimit the review to fit the purposes of our study: a) date—we excluded articles published before January 1980 and after December 2010; b) peer review—only articles that were subject to the peer-review process were considered; c) methods—only articles based on empirical evidence were considered (i.e., conceptual papers were excluded); and d) language—articles in languages other than English were excluded from our review.

The authors of this study reached a consensus on 29 articles that met the purposive criteria and

included them in the review process. The authors reviewed and summarized each article individually. Summaries were organized according to topic, research methods, and primary findings from each of the articles reviewed. Following the initial collection of data, the authors exchanged materials and open-coded the content and findings contained in the summaries. The authors then met to review and analyze the data using content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) until they reached agreement.

In addition to analyzing the content of the articles, the authors examined the process and dissemination of SB research. Twenty-nine articles were published in 23 distinct journals by 48 authors. Of these authors, only 14 (29%) published more than one article. Fourteen articles were published in travel and tourism journals (48%); eight articles were published in journals focusing on health and sexuality (28%); four articles in psychology journals (14%); and single articles appeared in leisure (3%), college affairs (3%), and consumer research (3%) outlets. Only four journals (17%) published more than one article on SB, namely the *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* (three), the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (three), the *Journal of Travel Research* (two), and the *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* (two).

It is interesting to note that, while only one article (3%) was published from 1980 to 1990, 13 articles (45%) were published between 1991 and 2000, and 15 (52%) from 2001 to 2010. Moreover, 31% of all articles reviewed were published in the period 2005–2010, indicating a growing trend in scholarly interest in the SB demographic. In regard to methods, a majority of researchers collected quantitative data. Twenty-four studies (83%) used surveys/questionnaires (of these, five were conducted on-site); seven (24%) used focus groups; four (14%) used interviews; two (7%) used diary methods; and two others (7%) used secondary data. Nine studies (31%) combined two or more of these methods. Eight articles (28%) used longitudinal data, and three studies (10%) used on-line methods of data collection. Descriptive statistics (69%), regression (38%), ANOVA (28%), and factor analysis (24%) were the most common means of data analysis, with qualitative procedures (e.g., grounded theory) being used in only three (10%) of the 29 studies reviewed. A summary of peer-reviewed SB research for the period 1980–2010 can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of Methods and Findings of Spring Break Peer-Reviewed Research, 1980–2010

Author(s) (Date)	Topic	Methods of Data Collection/Analysis	Findings
Apostolopoulos et al. (2002)	Determining HIV risk behaviors during SB	Cross-sectional survey/Chronbach's alpha, factor analysis, OLS regression	Spring breakers were more likely to engage in casual sex if they had prior experiences with casual sex, had consumed alcohol prior to sex, acted on impulse, or had peer influence to do so. Condom use was significantly linked to the availability of condoms and acting on impulse to engage in sexual activities.
Bai et al. (2004)	Online SB travel planning	Survey following completion of a complex online travel planning process using three different websites/descriptive statistics, ANOVA, multinomial logistic regression	Students were generally satisfied with planning a SB trip online. Convenience, discounted prices, and past experience had the greatest impact for online SB planning. In addition, willingness to release credit card information and guidance for meeting a specific budget increased the probability of online planning. Time spent planning, however, decreased levels of satisfaction with online SB planning.
Butts et al. (1996)	Influence of contextual marketing factors on student SB travel selection	Cross-sectional survey/descriptive statistics	Students assessed a list of 16 contextual factors for selecting a SB destination. Images of sun, get back to nature opportunities, and a wide choice of lodging opportunities had the greatest influence on travel decision. In open-ended responses, students indicated that word-of-mouth recommendation from friends, price of accommodations, and reputation of night life were important factors for selecting a SB destination.
Chen (2003)	Segmentation of the college student SB travel market	Cross-sectional survey/descriptive statistics, CHAID, misclassification matrix, ANOVA, chi-square, logit analysis	Four segments of SB travelers exist. Individuals who identified their destinations of choice as (1) adventuresome or (2) different, fascinating, and having a nice climate belong to segments that are more likely to be loyal to their destinations. The only sociodemographic variable that differed significantly between groups was travel company. Loyal segments were more likely to travel with friends and interest groups while less loyal segments were more likely to travel with family.
Clements and Josiam (1995)	Role of involvement construct in SB travel decisions	Cross-sectional survey/descriptive statistics, factor analysis, OLS regression	Involvement, or a person's perceived relevance of an object based on inherent needs, values, and interests, was linked with college student SB travel patterns. Students with high levels of involvement were more likely to travel for SB and also more likely to visit non-US destinations.
Cronin (1996)	Alcohol use intervention for college students on SB	Personal diaries/descriptive statistics, ANOVA, ANCOVA	Students who participated in a 15-minute intervention discussing alcohol-related problems prior to their SB trip were less likely to have alcohol-related problems during SB compared to students who did not participate in the intervention. In addition, this research provided further evidence that males consume more alcohol than females prior to and during SB.

Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999)	Using the investment model to predict factors of dating infidelity among non-married college-aged couples during SB and over the course of the semester	Longitudinal questionnaires and diary methods/descriptive statistics, factor analysis, ANOVA, OLS regression, correlation	Use of the investment model to predict dating infidelity (emotional and physical) was supported. Higher levels of relationship commitment negatively predicted participant infidelity and level of intimacy in non-partner relationships during SB and the rest of the semester. Males and females reported different levels of investment, attitudes, and motivations to engage in infidelity during SB and the rest of the semester.
George and Yaoyuneyong (2010)	Impulse buying and feelings of regret among college student shoppers on SB resulting in cognitive dissonance	Exploratory online survey/descriptive statistics, paired <i>t</i> -tests, correlation, bivariate regression	SB impulse buyers experienced lower levels of cognitive dissonance than SB planned shoppers. Authors suggest that impulse buying behavior during SB may be a coping strategy to overcome product/service dissatisfaction.
Gonzalez (1986)	Alcohol knowledge and drinking patterns of student SB participants, 1981–1983	Consecutive cross-sectional on-site questionnaires (1981, 1982, 1983)/descriptive statistics	Males who participated in SB consumed more drinks than females. Between 1981 and 1983, both females and males had an equivalent general increase in knowledge about alcohol consumption habits. However, there were greater decreases in male consumption in comparison to female consumption.
Grekim et al. (2007)	Changes in alcohol consumption during the SB vacation period	Secondary data drawn from a longitudinal study of college student health/Random coefficient multilevel models	Students who took SB vacations with friends dramatically increased their alcohol consumption during the trip. However, students who elected to stay home or vacationed with their family did not increase alcohol consumption during SB.
Hobson and Josiam (1992)	Determining the characteristics of the student SB market	Focus groups, quantitative survey/descriptive statistics	The majority of students (55%) did not engage in SB travel and the majority of students (86%) who did travel visited US destinations. The primary reason for SB travel was to visit friends or family (50%). During their trips students most commonly did not book the trip, traveled by car, stayed 7 or less days, and spent \$500 or less.
Hobson and Josiam (1996)	Assessing the stability and changing characteristics of the student SB market, 1991–1994	Focus groups, quantitative survey/descriptive statistics	Many aspects of SB travel, including the number of students participating in SB travel, use of travel agents, and barriers (i.e., work or lack of money) were stable from 1991 to 1994. However, expenditures and travel destinations showed that they were susceptible to economic market conditions and promotion of the destination.
Josiam et al. (1998)	Examining alcohol, sex, and drug use behavior patterns during SB	Focus group, on-site survey/descriptive statistics, <i>t</i> -tests	Males were significantly more likely than females to have intercourse during SB and also significantly more likely to have intercourse with a new partner. However, students were more likely to use condoms during SB than prior to the trip. Alcohol abuse also increased during SB, especially among travelers who selected their destination based upon its party reputation. Drug use increased, but primarily among students that already used drugs, not new users.
Josiam et al. (1999)	Determining the relationship between involvement, travel motivations, and destination attributes	On-site cross-sectional survey, focus groups/descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, semantic differential scale, ANOVA	The majority of SB participants were “highly involved” in their trip. Females were significantly more involved than males, but age and year in school were not related to involvement. The strongest push factors (i.e., travel motivations) included a “dose of sun, surf, and sand” and “I wanted to get away.” The strongest pull factors (i.e., travel destination), which were more significant than push factors, included party reputation of the destination and friends attending.

continued

Table 1
Continued

Author(s) (Date)	Topic	Methods of Data Collection/Analysis	Findings
Klenosky (2002)	Exploring the utility of means-end theory for understanding inter-relationships between push-pull factors	Face-to-face open-ended structured interviews/Laddering procedures, implication matrix, open and axial coding, hierarchical value map	While push and pull factors play different roles in the stages of travel planning, the researcher found that the factors may not be independent of one another. By using a means-end analysis the researcher found that pull factors may be used to identify push factors desired by the traveler.
Lee, Lewis, and Neighbors (2009)	Examining SB-related alcohol use and its negative consequences	Online repeated surveys of first-year college students who reported high-risk drinking behaviors in the context of a 6-month longitudinal study assessing drinking behavior/descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, zero inflated negative binomial correlation	After controlling for participants' sex and typical alcohol consumption, SB alcohol consumption was positively associated with alcohol-related consequences during SB. Typical drinking moderated the relationship between SB drinking and lack of negative alcohol-related consequences.
Lee, Maggs, and Rankin (2006)	Determining alcohol use behaviors of SB travelers in comparison to their normal patterns	Ten continuous weekly interviews/multi-level modeling (hierarchical linear modeling)	During the school semester, men, participants in sororities/fraternities, students traveling on SB trips, and students with higher fun-social alcohol expectancies drank more than their counterparts. While SB travelers consumed 2.1 more drinks per week than students who did not go on a SB trip, gender, sorority/fraternity status, and fun-social expectancy status were not related with increased SB trip alcohol consumption.
Litvin (2009)	Comparison of ordinary and SB behaviors (alcohol and drug consumption, binge drinking, casual and unprotected sex) using the sensation-seeking framework	Post-SB survey and comparison with the Core Alcohol Drug Survey baseline data/descriptive statistics, Cochran's chi-square, <i>t</i> -tests	No significant differences were found between participants' "normal" and SB behaviors. Alcohol consumption and binge drinking was widespread regardless of SB destination, with fewer reports of drug consumption and casual and unprotected sex during SB. Sensation seeking traits during the rest of the school year were consistent with participants' behavioral decisions during SB.
Maticka-Tyndale and Herold (1997)	Exploring sexual scripts during SB participation	Focus groups; interviews, pre-SB questionnaire, on-site cross-sectional survey/factor analysis, discriminant function analyses, textual analysis	Guiding principles of the SB experience were described by participants including: (a) a group holiday traveled and shared with friends, (b) constant party atmosphere, (c) high alcohol consumption, (d) sexually suggestive displays, and (e) casual sex is common. In addition, rules described by participants were (a) have fun, (b) what happens here stays here, (c) reality and responsibility are suspended during SB, (d) no one gets hurt and don't hurt others, (e) many sexual partners are available, and (f) nothing that happens during SB is serious or long lasting. Some participants varied by gender or relationship status, but the pre-dominance of data suggested the singular script.
Maticka-Tyndale and Herold (1999)	Correlates of condom use during SB	On-site cross-sectional surveys, mail survey/multivariate analysis, covariance matrices, OLS regression path analysis	(a) Conditions (e.g., new sexual partner, pressure to have sex, conditions that facilitate condom use) were the strongest correlate of SB condom use, followed by (b) intention to use a condom, and (c) prior use of a condom.

Maticka-Tyndale et al. (1998)	Intentions and behaviors for casual sex during SB	Pre-SB survey, on-site cross-sectional survey/covariance matrices, OLS regression analysis	More men than women intended to have casual sex during SB, but similar percentages of men (15%) and women (13%) engaged in the act. Correlates of engaging in casual sex for men and women differed. Men were most influenced by intentions to have casual sex and prior sexual activity. Women were most influenced by agreements with friends about casual sex during SB and the number of friends who engaged in casual sex during SB.
Mattila et al. (2001)	Impact of gender and religion on SB behavior	Cross-sectional self-administration survey/semantic differential scale, ANOVA	When planning for SB, males placed a higher priority on party-related factors than females. This included participation in casual sex/drinking/drug use. During the SB experience, males participated in a higher frequency of casual sex/drinking/drug use than females. For religious groups, non-Catholic Christians were the least likely to place an emphasis on casual sex/drinking/drug use (i.e., compared to Catholic Christians and no religious affiliation).
Mewhinney et al. (1995)	Sexual scripts and risk taking during SB	Focus groups, questionnaires (control group only), pre- and post-SB questionnaires/descriptive statistics, grounded theory	A feeling of freedom from responsibilities and home constraints, a sense of anonymity, and drinking contribute to behavioral decisions made during SB. A cultural sense of vacation or "time out" from real life allows for more permissive norms and a broadened scope of interpersonal interactions eases involvement in sexual behavior. However, a double standard was perceived that it was more acceptable for males to have casual sex during SB than females.
Park and Kim (2009)	Using the concept of specialization to identify information search behaviors of college students' SB trips	In-class pre-SB survey/descriptive statistics, ANOVA, factor analysis, chi-square, correspondence analysis, Pearson correlation	Results supported the use of specialization theory to tourism marketing research using the SB market segment. There were significant differences among each specialization group in regard to value of information contents, value of information channels, and usage of information sources. Previous experience was the main source of information used by spring breakers.
Park and Kim (2010)	Compare four different constructs (past experience, prior knowledge, involvement, and specialization) to segment college students' information search behavior in regard to SB trips	In-class pre-SB survey/descriptive statistics, ANOVA, factor analysis, chi-square, correspondence analysis, principal component analysis	The constructs of involvement and specialization proved more adequate in characterizing the information search behaviors of SB travelers. Higher levels of involvement were positively associated with higher numbers of external information sources about SB trips.
Ribeiro and Yamal (2008)	Exploring the relationship between the SB experience, risky behaviors, and alcohol consumption	In-depth pre- and post-SB interviews/phenomenology, grounded theory	Many participants felt the availability of opportunities for alcohol and sex were not as prominent as they perceived prior to the trip. In reference to drinking, participants reported no increases in consumption during SB, suggesting that the trip may be a continuation of usual practices during the rest of the school year.

continued

Table 1
Continued

Author(s) (Date)	Topic	Methods of Data Collection/Analysis	Findings
Smeaton et al. (1998)	Participation in binge drinking during SB	Focus group, on-site survey/descriptive statistics, independent <i>t</i> -tests	Men reported consuming 18 drinks per day while women reported consuming 10 drinks per day during SB. More men (20%) reported perpetual intoxication than women (3.4%) and more than half of all men and 40% of women reported drinking until they became sick or passed out.
Sönmez et al. (2006)	Binge drinking and casual sex during SB	Pre- and post-SB surveys; PDA-based on-site SB questionnaires/descriptive statistics, pairwise comparisons, correlation, path analysis using structural equation modeling	A high percentage of both males (68%) and females (72%) intended to drink; experiment with drugs (19%, 10%); and experiment sexually (42%, 18%). Strong predictors of intentions to binge drink and bingeing behavior included personal normative beliefs and situational expectations. Intention to have casual sex was predicted by attitudes, personal normative beliefs, situational expectations, and pacts, but actual engagement in casual sex was predicted by intention and prior experience.
Wirtz et al. (2003)	Predicted, on-line, and remembered SB experiences' role in determining future travel choices	Pre- and post-SB surveys/Chronbach's alpha, factor analysis, OLS regression	Path analyses indicated that remembering the SB travel experience was the only predictor of a desire to repeat the experience. However, on-line modules completed during the trip were most useful for constructing an objective measurement of the experience.

Spring Break: 30 Years of Scholarly Evidence, 1980–2010

After the analysis of the SB literature selected for review, the authors grouped the findings into three prevalent tracks or themes of SB research, namely the characterization of the SB travel market, SB motivations, and SB behaviors. What follows is a discussion of these thematic areas.

The Spring Break Travel Market

The present review highlighted the fact that early SB studies were concerned with identifying and characterizing what was then a budding market segment (Butts, Salazar, Sapio, & Thomas, 1996; Clements & Josiam, 1995; Hobson & Josiam, 1992, 1996; Josiam, Smeaton, & Clements, 1999). A pioneer study by Hobson and Josiam (1992) identified spring breakers as college undergraduates, with a larger percentage of males than females, who did not use travel services to book their SB trip, and who spent less than \$500 per trip. Factors such as destination characteristics (e.g., weather, image, etc.), and personal factors (e.g., involvement, friends) were found to contribute to the travel decision-making process of spring breakers (Josiam et al., 1999). These factors were then confirmed by later research (e.g., Klenosky, 2002; Park & Kim, 2010). Clements and Josiam's (1995) findings that college students who reported higher levels of emotional/experiential involvement were more likely to travel for SB (i.e., travel outside their normal environment) and were also more likely to travel to non-US destinations was corroborated in a later study by the same authors (Josiam et al., 1999). Moreover, situational factors such as disposable income and destination promotion efforts also contributed to sway spring breakers to particular destinations (Hobson & Josiam, 1996).

Later studies showed that the SB market was not static; indeed, like much of the broader college youth travel market (Bai, Hu, Elsworth, & Countryman, 2004), spring breakers show an increased proclivity to plan and book their SB trips online (Chen, 2003; George & Yaoyuneyong, 2010). Nonetheless, word-of-mouth and friends' recommendations remain decisive factors when selecting a destination, along with the "party reputation" of the destination in question (Josiam et al.,

1999; Mattila et al., 2001; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). Moreover, computer literacy and technological expertise play a role in the SB experience, highlighting a growing trend across the tourism system concerning the relevance of online representations and tourist consumer behavior (Bai et al., 2004; cf. Xiang, Wöber, & Fesenmaier, 2008). While spring breakers are generally satisfied with planning their SB trips online, a study by Bai et al. (2004) showed that budget, computer skills, time spent online, and comfort when providing credit card information affected overall satisfaction with online travel planning experiences. Park and Kim (2009) point out that, for the participants in their study, previous experience was the main source of information for spring breakers when conducting online trip searches. It is also interesting to note that, for spring breakers, previous experience emerged as the most important predictor of future SB experiences and, consequently, of repeat visits to a destination (Park & Kim, 2009; Wirtz et al., 2003).

It should be noted that the overall characteristics of the SB travel market are not fundamentally different from those of the college youth travel market (Bywater, 1993; Kim, 2008; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2002, 2004). The motivation → involvement → satisfaction → loyalty model proposed by Kim (2008), which draws on classic travel marketing theory and begins with motivations as the starting point for travel behavior, applies to the SB travel market (indeed, much of the research used to develop said model used spring breakers as the sampling pool; Josiam et al., 1999; Klenosky, 2002; Mattila et al., 2001). Nonetheless, spring breakers possess a unique set of motivations and behaviors that are worth of careful study by travel researchers.

Spring Break Motivations

College students that go on SB do so primarily to escape school and school-related responsibilities (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). They go in search of warmer climates (Josiam et al., 1999); adventure (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002); fun and enjoyment (Klenosky, 2002); and opportunities for drinking, casual sex, and drug-taking (Sönmez et al., 2006). Many spring breakers travel to be with their friends and/or family (Josiam et al., 1994, 1998), and a small percentage also travel because going on SB is

“the thing to do” (Josiam et al., 1999). Above all else, spring breakers go on SB in order to “get away” (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). A review of the SB literature shows that spring breakers, by going on SB, are attempting to get away not only from school and its associated responsibilities and resulting stress (Gerlach, 1989; Mattila et al., 2001), but also from cold weather (Chen 2003) and boredom (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Sönmez et al., 2006). Furthermore, results from a number of studies that used both quantitative (e.g., Sönmez et al., 2006) and qualitative (e.g., Mewhinney, 1996) approaches have reinforced the notion that SB is more about “getting away” rather than “going towards” something, which is consonant with existing travel literature (Krippendorf, 1987; Pizam & Mansfield, 2000). For example, Clements, Hobson, Josiam, and Smeaton, who have conducted an extensive and consistent line of research on SB over a period of 10 years (Clements & Josiam, 1995; Hobson & Josiam, 1993, 1996; Josiam et al., 1994, 1998, 1999; Smeaton et al., 1998), found that “getting away” consistently ranked as a primary SB motivation (Josiam et al., 1999).

The aforementioned findings resonate with what is known about travel motivations in general (e.g., Carr, 2002; Cohen, 1996; Fodness, 1994; Krippendorf, 1987) and the travel motivations of college students in particular (e.g., Field, 1999; Kim, Oh, & Jugaratnam, 2007). Most travel researchers concur that at the root of travel is the desire to escape something, rather than going in search of something else (Krippendorf, 1987), and SB is for many college students the perfect opportunity to do so (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1999; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). Furthermore, due to the complexity of the travel decision-making process (Pizam & Mansfield, 2000), while one motivation may be dominant (e.g., “going away”), all other motives (e.g., climate, adventure, fun and excitement, friends, alcohol, sex) must be considered as well. As Kim et al. (2007) argue, motivation should be regarded as a multidimensional construct, particularly in the case of college students’ travel patterns (Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008).

Other SB motivations evident in our review of SB literature included seeking rest and relaxation (e.g., Josiam et al., 1994, 1999) and, paradoxically, going in search of excitement, adventure, and fun

(Klenosky, 2002; Mattila et al. 2001). For example, in two distinct studies, Josiam et al. (1994, 1999) found that going in search of “sun, surf, and sand” and “relaxing” were both mentioned as motivations behind spring breakers’ travel decisions. Interestingly, the weight given by spring breakers to these two SB motives appears to have shifted over a period of only 5 years (cf. Josiam et al., 1994, 1999). Josiam and colleagues (1994) reported that 11% of their participants mentioned “sun, surf, and sand” as a SB motivation, whereas 10% of the same participants mentioned the desire to “relax” as the reason behind their SB vacation. In a subsequent study, conducted 5 years later (Josiam et al., 1999), “sun, surf, and sand” was mentioned by 38% of the participants, and “relaxing” by only 5%.

The influence of spring breakers’ peers and friends has also been mentioned as a determinant motive behind SB travel, particularly in the choice of a given SB destination (Butts et al., 1996). While only a small percentage of college students go on SB because they feel pressured by their peers to do so because “it’s the thing to do” (Josiam et al., 1994, 1999), a number of studies have reported that, when confronted with a number of possible SB destinations to choose from, spring breakers tend to rely heavily on friends’ opinions when making their decisions (Butts et al., 1996; Josiam et al., 1998). Interestingly, our review did not uncover any studies that focused on media influences in SB destination selection, although some scholars have nonetheless acknowledged that destination promotion efforts play a role in spring breakers’ decision-making process (Hobson & Josiam, 1996).

Finally, some scholars argue that motivations to go on SB have not remained constant, but have evolved across time (Josiam et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Josiam et al. (1998) posited that motivations to go on SB in the 1990s were markedly different from those of previous years, stating that: “the initial attraction of spring break was about getting away from college and the ‘winter blues’ . . . in more recent times spring break has become known for more extreme behaviour such as binge drinking, drug taking and sexual promiscuity” (p. 502).

Spring Break Behavior

A majority of the articles reviewed in this study have attributed spring breakers’ extreme behavior

to the peculiar situational character of SB (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Mewhinney, Herold, & Matika-Tyndale, 1995; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006), deeming it a case of *situational disinhibition* (Eiser & Ford, 1995). Some scholars argue that because SB constitutes a transitory, out-of-the-ordinary, anonymous experience (Lee et al., 2006; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Neighbors et al., 2007; Smeaton et al., 1998), where binge drinking, drug-taking, and casual and unprotected sexual encounters are viewed as an integral part of the SB experience (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Mewhinney et al., 1995; Sönmez et al., 2006), spring breakers tend to feel that during SB, “the usual rules and moral codes did not apply” (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998, p. 262). This has led researchers to conclude that it is the very atmosphere and environment of SB (particularly in such hot spots as Daytona Beach, Panama City Beach, or Cancun) that are primarily at fault for the aforementioned risky behaviors that occur during SB (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006).

For example, Sönmez et al. (2006) conducted a pre- and post-SB study of college students’ health-risk behaviors during SB and found that not only were drinking and sexual opportunities motives for going on SB (particularly for males), but that significant percentages of males and females reported ample opportunities for drinking (86%, 79%), sex (66%, 63%), and drug use (39%, 27%). Out of 532 undergraduate students from two US universities, 68% reported consuming more alcohol during SB than at home, and 49% of males and 38% of females reported “having sex as a direct result of drinking” (p. 907). Furthermore, out of the smaller sample of participants who responded to the post-SB survey, 52% of males and 40% of females reported getting drunk, with somewhat similar percentages for binge drinking (40% and 28% respectively; p. 910).

Although most studies show that nearly all spring breakers consume alcohol during SB, we found low to moderate agreement regarding the extent of that consumption across the SB literature (cf. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Grekin et al., 2007; Josiam et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). Specifically, the frequency at which spring breakers engaged in binge drinking, or “got drunk” during SB, varied widely in the articles we reviewed (cf. Gonzalez, 1986; Grekin et al., 2007; Mattila et

al., 2001; Smeaton et al., 1998). Furthermore, the degree to which alcohol consumption during SB differs from alcohol consumption during the rest of the year remains unclear (cf. Cronin, 1996; Lee et al., 2006; Litvin, 2009; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008; Sönmez et al., 2006), and is likely to be affected by factors such as gender (Grekin et al., 2007; Josiam et al., 1998; Lee et al., 2006; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999), fraternity/sorority membership (Lee et al., 2006), year in school (Grekin et al., 2007; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008), travel motivations (Josiam et al., 1998), and personal beliefs (Mattila et al., 2001; Sönmez et al., 2006). Lastly, a few studies (Cronin, 1996; Sönmez et al., 2006; Smeaton et al., 1998) revealed no significant differences between male and female patterns of alcohol consumption during SB.

While alcohol consumption and sexual behavior during SB were found to be significantly correlated (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mewhinney et al., 1995), SB research has been thus far unable to identify any significant differences between male and female risky sexual behavior during SB (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mattila et al., 2001). For example, Maticka-Tyndale and Herold (1997) found that “some gender differences that are commonly documented in research on sexual interaction were absent in the spring break environment” (p. 324). These authors found similar percentages in regard to sexual activity during SB (i.e., no sexual activity, “fooling around,” and actual sexual intercourse) for both male and female spring breakers (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997).

A possible explanation for these findings may reside in the *sexual scripts* of SB (Mewhinney et al., 1995); that is to say, the “cultural narrative about what sexuality is and the rules that organize it” (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997, p. 317). Thus, if SB sexual scripts are known and accepted by most spring breakers then it should not come as a surprise that other studies have shown similar results in regard to male and female sexual behavior during SB, even accounting for the possibility of over/underreporting (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mewhinney et al., 1995; cf. Litvin, 2009). However, a great deal more of research, particularly of a qualitative nature, is needed to verify this

hypothesis. Furthermore, the role the media play in creating/disseminating the aforementioned SB sexual scripts should not be overlooked, and would perhaps be worthy of a study in itself. Future research should take a critical look at image and body representations of young people as spring breakers (females in particular), and contrast such critical analysis with actual spring breaker behavior.

Conclusion

The majority of the SB articles reviewed in this study paint a bleak picture of the SB vacation. Behaviors such as heavy alcohol consumption, underage drinking, casual and unprotected sex, sexual promiscuity, illegal drug-taking, and a number of other health-risk behaviors are posited by the majority of SB researchers as the norm. That is to say, such extreme behaviors are regarded as expected and widespread behavior during this college vacation period (e.g., Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997, 1999; Smeaton et al., 1999).

Conversely, we also found that other researchers have found the opposite; that is, that such health-risk behaviors did *not* increase during SB, but were on par with behaviors exhibited during the rest of the year (Lee et al., 2006; Litvin, 2009; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). To further complicate matters, there seems to be little agreement among scholars as to which variables impact SB behavior (cf. Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Cronin, 1996; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997, 1999; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Mattila et al., 2001; Mewhinney et al., 1995; Smeaton et al. 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). A number of distinct variables, ranging from intrapersonal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, previous intentions, religious beliefs) to interpersonal factors (e.g., peer influences, fraternity/sorority membership, social determinants, SB pacts with friends), and contextual variables [e.g., alcohol availability and consumption at SB destination(s), SB atmosphere, corporate and media influence] have been studied in connection with SB, but thus far neither causal relationships nor generalizable and/or comparable results have been established.

The present study showed that, while we may already know how spring breakers behave in

certain situations/destinations (e.g., Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Grekin et al., 2007; Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1999; Sönmez et al., 2006) and why spring breakers travel during SB in the first place (e.g., Josiam et al., 1999), we don't know *why* spring breakers behave the way they do, nor do we know the unwritten rules that guide such behaviors. As some authors have posited (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002), a great deal more research, particularly of an ethnographic nature, is necessary in order to fully understand the SB phenomenon. In addition, few studies have sought to describe the SB experience from the spring breakers' perspective (Maticka-Tyndale & Herold, 1997; Mewhinney et al., 1995; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008). A more extensive use of focus groups, qualitative interviews, diaries, and photo elicitation techniques would add a much needed depth to existing SB research, as would the use of other innovative methodologies (e.g., Ribeiro, 2012).

Furthermore, the predominance of survey-based research methods in the SB literature, which ordinarily allow for the collection of recall data only, should prompt scholars to revisit a longstanding problem in the social sciences, namely the validity of retrospective behavioral data (Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld, & Sailer, 1984). This problem is compounded in the SB literature reviewed in the present study because of the possibility of overreporting by males and underreporting by females in regard to alcohol consumption and sexual behavior in the SB context (Josiam et al., 1998; Litvin, 2009; Sönmez et al., 2006), in what appears to constitute a clear case of social desirability bias. Perhaps scholars can devise ways to record and contrast not only self-reported SB behavior, but objective (i.e., other than self-reported) SB behavior as well, as some scholars have done in other leisure settings (Roberts & Chick, 1984). Lastly, given the changing nature of the SB experience across the years (Gianoulis, 2000), we encourage scholars to look at its latest developments, be it the apparent geographic displacement towards non-US destinations (Moore, 1998), or the growing popularity of alternative SB experiences (Rhoads & Neururer, 1998). Doing so would add another dimension to academic research on a most interesting and complex leisure phenomenon.

Lastly, we would like to point out that SB is by no means culturally distinctive: other youth

phenomena across the globe share many of its characteristics, particularly in regard to the predominance of risky health behaviors such as alcohol and drug consumption and casual and unprotected sex. Phenomena such as the Australian Schoolies Week (Gleeson, 2003; Winchester, Mcguirk, & Everett, 1999; Zinkiewicz, Davey, & Curd, 1999) are remarkably similar to SB; cross-cultural comparisons would be of the utmost interest, particularly in regard to the potentially transformative character of the SB experience (Gianoulis, 2000; Josiam et al., 1994, 1998; Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2008; Russell, 2004; Smeaton et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006; cf. Zinkiewicz et al., 1999). Thus, cross-cultural comparisons of phenomena similar to SB would be most welcome, as would cross-cultural comparisons of similar instances when out-of-the-ordinary, risky behaviors are widespread among young people, exploring the luminal/liminoid character (Turner, 1982) of the vacation period.

In conclusion, our review highlighted the fact that scholars are not unanimous in their appraisal of the SB experience. In our integrative review of extant SB literature, we found evidence of disagreement among researchers in regard to spring breakers' motivations, behavior, involvement in the SB experience, previous intentions, and factors affecting SB behavior. Nevertheless, our analysis of SB literature revealed a concerted scholarly interest in documenting this important travel experience that shows no signs of slowing down (Patrick, Morgan, Maggs, & Lefkowitz, 2011; Scott-Halsell & Saiprasert, 2011). We trust that the present study will be of service for scholars with an interest not only on SB, but on the youth travel phenomenon in general.

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