

“I’m Just Using Everything at My Disposal”: A Qualitative Analysis of the Narratives Surrounding Prescription Stimulant Misuse on College Campuses

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BACKGROUND

- Stimulants are a category of psychoactive drugs that are intended to “induce temporary improvement in either mental or physical function”. Stimulants are widely prescribed today by health professionals to treat depression, anxiety, ADHD, obesity, and hypotension, among other conditions.
- According to Dr. Marc Lener, a clinical researcher in Bethesda, Maryland, the use and abuse of stimulant drugs has experienced a recent spike in popularity in both social and academic settings. Lener attributes this growth to an increasing number of prescriptions being distributed, as well as other individuals turning from street drugs (such as methamphetamines and cocaine) to prescription medications they consider more “white-collar.”
- This surge in consumption has also been linked to more prescribed users selling their prescription stimulant medication to peers, who then consume them illegally. Because the FDA regulates drugs like Ritalin and Adderall, individuals often fall into the misconception that they are safer than other substances.
- As with other drugs that are taken sans prescriptions, they can inflict harm on the user and eventually lead to coma or death. Adolescents taking stimulants were found to be almost five times more likely to experience unexplained death than those who refrained from consumption (Gould, 2009).

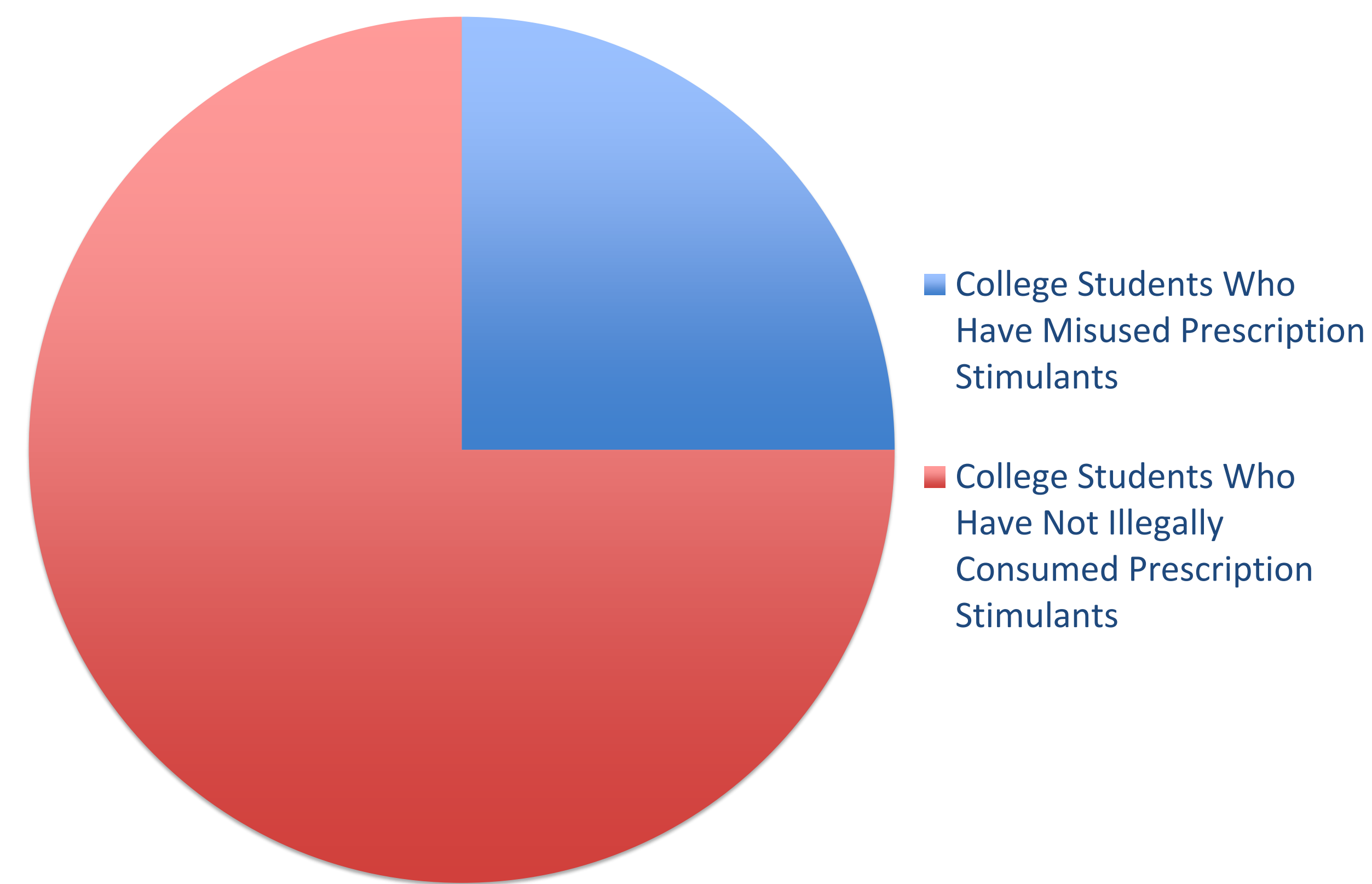
RESEARCH QUESTION

How do students interpret the interpersonal communication surrounding the misuse of prescription stimulants that is present on college campuses?

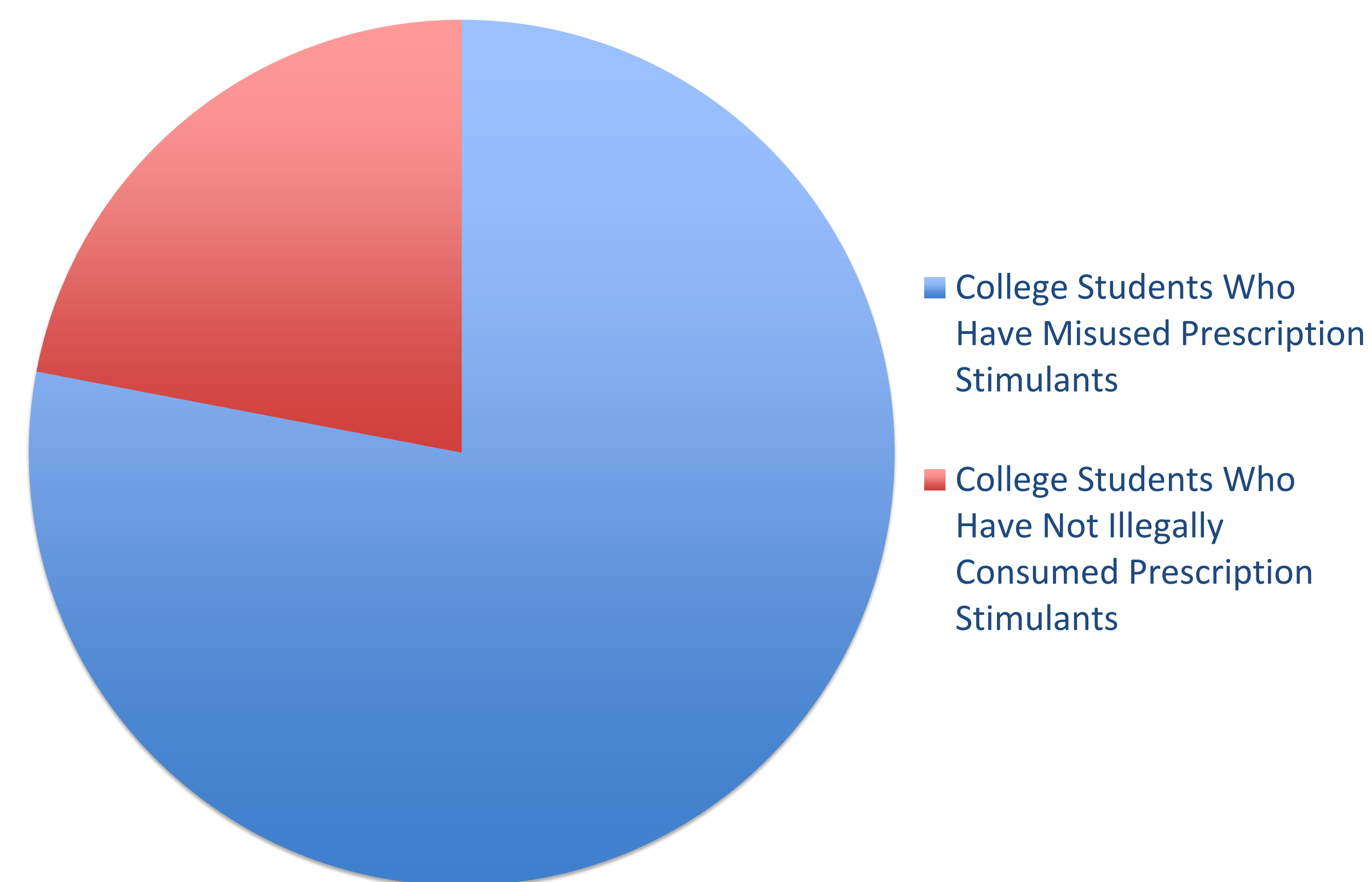
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According to Research in Public Health...



According to Perceived Social Norms...



KEY FINDINGS

Respondents used the ease of accessibility to prescription stimulants on campus as a means for justifying consumption as the social norm.

Students validated the illegal consumption of stimulants if this behavior was a coping mechanism to manage academic pressure, stress, and poor time management; challenges prescribed users related to.

Prescribed users and illegal users developed alternative narratives to substantiate their stimulant consumption, each group illustrating experiential differences through distinct terminology.

METHODOLOGY

- Two focus groups: legally prescribed stimulant users and individuals who had never consumed any type of prescription stimulant.
- Three illegal users were interviewed privately, in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity considering the illicit nature of their consumption.
- The study included male and female participants between the ages of 18 and 22.
- Students attended both private and public institutions, situated in different regions of the United States.
- Interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately forty-five minutes.
- Sample items included: “If individuals consume prescription stimulants for academic motives, why do you think they obtain drugs illegally instead of seeking their own prescriptions?”, as well as, “Do you believe illegal stimulant users should face any consequences for their behaviors?”

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