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Tea talk centers on alcohol awareness

By Elizabeth Berke

Program Coordinator for Barnard Health Services Giselle Harrington called for increased awareness of the risks associated with alcoholism as part of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week (NCAAW) at Barnard at yesterday's Tea and Topics discussion.

Harrington spoke at the Deanery in the Centennial Quad to a group of about 15 people, which mostly comprised of Barnard's resident directors. She addressed the issues of alcoholism on college campuses and said alcoholism contributes to dangerous behavior among college students.

"The use of alcohol makes it more likely that people will engage in high risk behavior," Harrington said.

Harrington quoted several statistics from a survey regarding alcohol use that said 50 percent of all rapes, 85 percent of date rapes, 50 percent of homicides, and 75 percent of suicides were alcohol-related.

There is a notable increase in promiscuous sexual behavior among people under the influence of alcohol because it lowers people's inhibitions, said Harrington.

"I have spoken to students who have said to me, 'Oh shit. If I hadn't been drinking I wouldn't have done

that,” said Harrington. Having sexual relations under the influence of alcohol makes people feel “angry, dirty, and guilty,” she added.

Although students admit they often regret what takes place when they are drunk, such experiences do not stop them from drinking again.

People who have sex under the influence of alcohol are not as careful as those who have sex while sober, she said. People are less likely to use condoms when drunk, which can lead to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS, Harrington said.

“The problem with drinking is that people often pick up people at bars that they wouldn’t normally approach,” said Harrington.

Another dangerous aspect of alcohol consumption is that more people are willing to try other drugs when drunk.

“People are much more likely to try other drugs when they’ve been drinking, and it can be very dangerous, even deadly, to combine two drugs,” she said.

Co-Coordinator of NCAAW Pete Libman, the resident director of Brooks, Hewitt, and Centennial Tower, said he thought alcohol abuse has increased dramatically in the last 10 years, but Harrington disagreed.

“Our definition of alcoholism has changed,” she said. “Now we

know the different kinds of alcoholics. We don't just consider bums as alcoholics."

"Just because you have good grades doesn't mean you aren't an alcoholic," Amanda Brooks, BC '92 said.

The different drinking habits among students at private and state schools, and between minorities and non-minorities, was discussed.

"When I went to college, minority students couldn't afford alcohol and didn't need it," said Resident Director of 49 Claremont Angela Conley. "They went to parties to dance and sweat."

The acceptance of drinking in today's society adds to the magnitude of the problem, Harrington said.

Libman added that, "bars that offer happy hours and all-you-can-drink encourage student drinking."

Barnard Dean of Student Life Ione Gatch, who seemed to be trying to spark discussion, questioned the consequences of occasional drinking among college students.

"What's the harm of drinking on Friday and Saturday nights?" she asked.

Harrington answered, "It only takes six months for a college-age person to become an alcoholic, and drinking leaves emotional scars, and encourages the transmittance of sexual transmitted diseases."