Research has indicated that college students who experience alcohol-related problems may reduce their alcohol consumption without treatment (Alexander & Bowen, 2004; Barnett et al., 2006; Blume, Marlatt, & Schmaling, 2000; McNally & Palfai, 2001). However, the literature regarding their overall experience before, during, and after this self-initiated change process is limited. This qualitative study investigated the lived experience of eight college students between the ages of 18 and 25 who reduced their alcohol consumption for a period of at least 30 days after experiencing alcohol-related problems. Participants had never met the diagnostic criteria for a “severe” substance use disorder, had never been in treatment, and did not consider themselves to have an addiction to any substance. A phenomenological approach was utilized for the study. Participants were able to share their lived experiences and the meaning thereof through in-
depth, semi-structured interviews. Initial and follow-up phone interviews were conducted with each participant. With the permission of the participants, each interview was digitally recorded. Each digital recording was submitted to a professional transcriptionist to be transcribed.

As a result of this process, an understanding of the benefits and challenges of excessive alcohol use, as well as the benefits and negative effects of alcohol reduction, was developed. Six broad themes were identified from the phenomenological data analysis, including, (a) Benefits of Excessive Drinking, (b) Experiencing Negative Effects Leading to Change, (c) Benefits of Reducing Alcohol Consumption, (d) Challenges of Reducing Alcohol Consumption, (e) How Reduction was Maintained, and (f) Insights After Change. Discussion of findings includes comparison with existing research, implications for mental health providers, limitations and strengths, and directions for future research. These findings may be of benefit for mental health providers and professionals, and may add to the literature on the experience of alcohol consumption reduction among college students.