

THE DISPARITY BETWEEN SOCIAL DRINKING MOTIVES AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGE STUDENT DRINKING

ALLISON M. GRANT

B. BRADFORD BROWN

MEGAN A. MORENO

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Students report drinking for social reasons, yet the social benefits of alcohol use are less understood. Associations between social drinking motives, drinking behaviors, and college friendships were examined via in-person interviews with 72 college freshmen from a large Midwestern University. Consistent with previous research, social drinking motives were significantly associated with drinking behaviors; however, drinking behaviors were not associated with the number of new casual or close friends students made at college. Drinking prevention campaigns might incorporate these findings in an effort to alter college freshmen's social alcohol expectancies.

Keywords: alcohol, motives, adolescent development, friendships, freshmen

College student drinking is a major public health concern (Centers for Disease Control, 2011). Approximately 80% of college students drink alcohol and 50% engage in binge drinking (National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2012). College student drinking is associated with increased risks of a myriad of consequences including academic problems, interpersonal violence, sexual assault, and unintentional death (Bondy, 1996; Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein & Weschler, 2002; Boyd, & Faden, 2005). Despite these risks, students continue to drink excessively. Innovative research is needed to elucidate the predictors of college student drinking and inform intervention programs to reduce excessive college drinking.

Drinking motives are a key point to consider because of their proximity and influence on decisions to drink alcohol (Cox & Klinger,

1988). Cox and Klinger's motivational model of alcohol use posits that drinking motives directly precede decisions to drink alcohol and are influenced by a variety of factors including past experiences with alcohol, availability of alcohol, and alcohol expectancies. Alcohol expectancies are "beliefs about the effects of drinking alcohol" (Fromme & D'Amico, 2000, p. 206). According to Cox and Klinger's (1988) model, individuals are motivated to drink based on the expected effects of drinking.

Cooper (1994) identified four drinking motives: social, coping, enhancement and conformity. Among college students, social motives are consistently rated more highly than any other drinking motive (Cooper, 1994; Mooney, Fromme, Kivlahan, & Marlatt, 1987; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel & Engels, 2005). Social drinking motives have also been

linked with excessive and problematic drinking among college students (Ham, Bonin, & Hope, 2007; Ham, Zamboanga, Bacon, & Garcia, 2009; Lyvers, Hasking, Hani, Rhodes, & Trew, 2010; Vaughan, Corbin & Fromme, 2009). Given the positive associations between social drinking motives and excessive drinking behaviors, it is important to consider the origins of social drinking motives.

The transition to college is a major life transition and is associated with increased alcohol consumption (Griffin, 2009). During this transition, freshmen face an important developmental task: establishing a new social network of friends (Griffin, 2009; Upcraft, 2002). Upcraft (2002) notes college freshmen are as concerned with finding new friends as they are with achieving academic success. Other work has confirmed the importance of creating new friends in the first year of college (Buote et al., 2007; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Woosely, 2003). Establishing a network of support at college is associated with positive outcomes including adaptation to college (Buote et al., 2007), psychological well-being (Hartup & Stevens, 1997), and degree completion (Woosley, 2003). As drinking motives are based, in part, on expectations of desired outcomes, social drinking motives may be related to a perception that drinking alcohol might contribute to positive social outcomes such as friendships (Maggs, 1997; Leeman, Toll, Taylor, & Volpicelli, 2009; Smith, Goldman, Greenbaum, & Christiansen, 1995).

Researchers have speculated that drinking behaviors are related to socializing on campus (Griffin, 2009; Vaughan et al., 2009; Harford, Wechsler, & Seibring, 2002). While some studies have shown that social drinking motives are related to more moderate drinking behaviors (for a review, see Kuntsche et al., 2005), several studies within the U.S. college population have shown positive associations between social drinking motives and risky drinking behaviors (Ham, et al., 2007;

Ham, et al., 2009; Hussong, 2003; Lewis et al., 2008; Lyvers et al., 2010; Maggs, 1997; O'Connor & Colder, 2005; Vaughan et al., 2009). Despite these associations, the relationships between drinking motives, behaviors, and the achievement of desired social outcomes within the college population have received little attention. More specifically, it is not clear how alcohol use is related to establishing new friendships in college. This gap in the literature may be critical given the prevalence of drinking-related problems in college populations and students' unique need to establish new friends. The examination of drinking motives and behaviors within the context of this developmentally relevant task may provide valuable insights into students' motivations for drinking (Griffin, 2009). This information may, in turn, inform effective binge drinking prevention campaigns.

The purpose of this study is to clarify these relationships by examining social drinking motives, drinking behaviors, and friendship outcomes within a sample of university freshmen. Given previous research linking social drinking motives and college student drinking, we hypothesized a positive association between social motives and recent alcohol use. Given the dearth of literature on drinking and positive social outcomes, these analyses will be exploratory.

Methods

Participants

A total of 101 college freshmen were recruited from within an ongoing study examining alcohol and social media use. Participants were invited via phone and email to participate in an hour-long interview with a trained graduate student and were offered \$50 as compensation. Details of recruitment methods for the larger study are reported elsewhere (Moreno, Grant, Kacvinsky, Egan & Fleming, 2012). The final sample included 72 freshmen (71% response rate). Similar to the Uni-

versity's records for this undergraduate class (University of Wisconsin Madison, 2010), participants reported an average age of 18.4 (SD=.49) years and about half (45.5%) were female. Participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian (91.7%), Asian (5.6%), Hispanic/Latino (1.4%) and multiethnic (1.4%).

Measures

Social drinking motives were measured with the Drinking Motives Questionnaire (DMQ) (Cooper et al., 1992). Participants are asked how much they agree with five statements on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Never/Almost Never" to "Almost Always/Always". Example statements include, "I drink to be social" and "I drink because it is what most of my friends do when we get together." Responses are summed for a total social drinking motives score. The Cronbach alpha for social drinking motives within this sample was .82.

Recent college drinking was assessed with the 28-day Timeline Followback (TLFB) (Sobell & Sobell, 2000). For each of the past 28 days, participants were asked to recall the exact number of standard alcoholic drinks they had consumed. Then we calculated the exact quantity (number of drinks consumed) and frequency (number of days in which some alcohol was consumed) of students' drinking behaviors over the past 28 days.

To measure new college friendships, we followed the lead of Buote et al. (2007) and asked participants "How many casual and how many close friends have you made since coming to college?" To improve the validity and reliability of these measures, we defined casual and close friendships for all participants. A casual friend was defined as "Someone who you know and like and who knows and likes you as well." A close friend was defined as "Someone you spend more time with than your casual friends. Key features of close friendships include shared emotional

support, loyalty, trust, intimacy and fun." The definitions were based on work done by Berndt and McCandless (2009) and Hartup and Stevens (1997) and were pilot tested with a separate sample of college students for content validity.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 19 (IBM Corporation, Somers, NY).

Results

Social drinking motive scores ranged from 6 to 20 with an average of 12.9 (SD= 3.38). Past-month drinking was reported by 91.7% of participants. On average, participants consumed 33.4 (SD= 28.01) alcoholic beverages and engaged in six (SD= 3.51) drinking episodes in the past 28 days. Participants reported having made an average of 25.2 (SD= 18.6) casual and 5.4 (SD=28.05) close friendships since coming to college. For subsequent analysis, scores on the measures of friendships and alcohol use were transformed because of skewed distributions. Gender was controlled for in each of the linear regression models.

To test our first hypothesis, that social drinking motives would be positively associated with quantity and frequency of past month drinking, we regressed quantity and frequency, in separate models, on social drinking motives and gender. Social drinking motives and gender explained 38.3% of the variance in drinking quantity, $F(2,66) = 22.13, p < .001$, and 27.4% of the variance in drinking frequency, $F(2,66) = 13.86, p < .001$. Social motives significantly predicted both the quantity ($\beta = .63, p < .001$) and frequency ($\beta = .56, p < .001$) of past-month drinking.

To explore associations between past-month drinking and college friendship outcomes, we first regressed number of casual and close college friends, in separate models, on gender and quantity of past-month drinking. Next, we regressed number of casual and

close college friends, in separate models, on gender and frequency past-month drinking. Quantity of past-month drinking was not associated with the number of casual ($R^2=-.03$, $F(2,66)=.14$, $p = \text{n.s.}$) nor close ($R^2=-.01$, $F(2,66)=.542$, $p = \text{n.s.}$) friends reported by participants. Frequency of past-month drinking was also unrelated to the number of casual ($R^2=-.02$, $F(2,66)=.20$, $p = \text{n.s.}$) or close ($R^2=-.02$, $F(2,66)=.23$, $p = \text{n.s.}$) friends reported by participants.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research, our results indicate a positive relationship between social drinking motives and drinking behaviors. Notably, neither quantity nor frequency of past-month drinking was related to the number of casual or close friends freshmen reported having made since coming to college. Thus, while social drinking motives may encourage drinking behaviors, our results suggest that alcohol consumption may not impart positive social benefits.

Our findings differ from related work that found positive associations between drinking behaviors and social outcomes in middle school (Tucker et al., 2011) and high school students (Balsa, Homer, French & Norton, 2011). This may be due to differences in measures of social outcomes (perceived popularity vs. social network size) or differences in the social contexts of college and middle/high school students. Middle and high school students likely have established friendships and may use alcohol to move up within existing social networks. College freshmen, on the other hand, are creating new friendships, which may limit alcohol's influence on network size.

Limitations to the generalizability of this study include sample size and that it was derived from a single, Midwestern university. Similarities between the drinking rates reported within our sample and in national sam-

ples (Goldman et al., 2005) suggest that our sample may be representative. An additional limitation is that reciprocal confirmation of friendships was not required; thus, participants may have overestimated their network size. We chose this approach because older students are considered the best source for this information (Berndt & McCandless, 2009). Finally, the cross-sectional nature of our data make our causal inferences tentative.

Despite these limitations, our findings impart new information relevant to intervention and prevention efforts. The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism's call to action (2002) notes that challenging alcohol expectancies has been shown to effectively reduce college student drinking. This makes sense given that the motivations for and decisions to use alcohol are based on expected and desired outcomes (Cox & Klinger, 1988). Incoming freshmen could benefit from knowing that desired social outcomes, such as new friendships, are not necessarily related to drinking behaviors.

Author Note

Allison M. Grant and B. Bradford Brown, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Megan A. Moreno, Department of Pediatrics, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Allison Grant is now at the Department of Psychology, Colorado State University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Allison Grant, Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, 1876 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80523. Contact: allison.grant@colostate.edu

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