

The Relationship Between Undergraduate Gender, Drinking Motives, Alcohol Involvement, and Neuroticism

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Introduction

The transition to college marks a milestone anticipated by young adults and parents alike. College is a time when most students are living apart from family members for the first time and are given tastes of freedom, independence, and autonomy. However, with this newfound freedom, college also marks a time where young adults face increased risk for initiation and continuation of problem drinking behaviors (Ichiyama et al, 2018). Undergraduates choose to drink for various reasons; however, it is of interest for colleges and parents to more thoroughly understand what factors place undergraduates at increased risk for dangerous alcohol use.

Drinking Motives

Variation in drinking motive provides meaningful insight into what causes distinct drinking outcomes for male and female students. Numerous motives have been cited for undergraduate drinking, including social, coping, conformity, and enhancement (Cooper, 1994). These motives are observed differentially across gender; female adolescents report negative affect or depressed mood as a primary drinking motive, whereas males are more likely to report "drinking to feel high" (Harrell & Karem, 2008).

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is defined as a tendency toward negative affect including anxiety, moodiness, worry, fear, anger, and depressed mood. During the anxiety inducing transition to college, it can play a large role in shaping behavioral outcomes for undergraduate students. Females report higher base rates of neuroticism than males, which may result in different drinking motives (Jorm, 1987). Further, increased depressed mood or depressive symptoms are positively associated with drinking across gender (Foster et al, 2014). As such, neuroticism is interesting to researchers to as a potential predictor for undergraduate alcohol consumption.

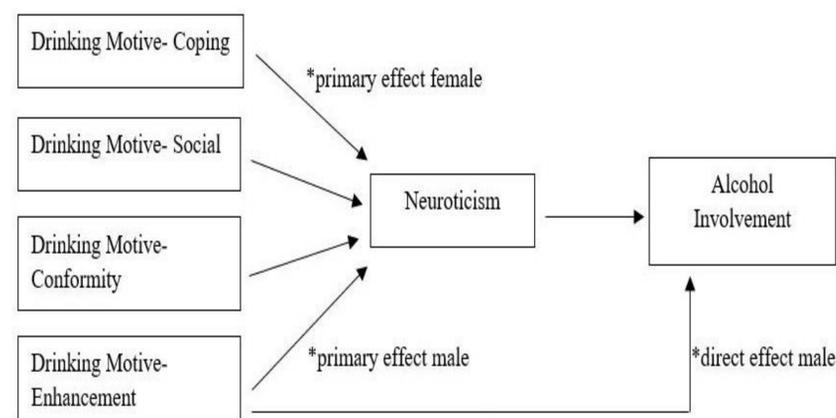
The Proposed Study

The proposed study aspires to evaluate the relationship between undergraduate alcohol involvement by considering the interaction between drinking motives, gender, and neuroticism. I hypothesize that neuroticism will produce a mediated effect such that drinking motive will impact alcohol involvement more if neuroticism is high. I also predict this mediated path will only be present in female undergraduates because of their higher levels of neuroticism. Neurotic males will not present the same effect because cultural norms in place discourage male expressions of emotion, thus lessening the way men exhibit neuroticism.



Proposed Relationships

Figure 1. Proposed Mediated Path Model



Note. Model would be analyzed separately by gender.

Note. Secondary effects for males and females are predicted for Drinking Motive- Social.

Method

- Participants: Undergraduate students at the University of San Diego and San Diego State; (n= 150) will participate for experimental credit in an undergraduate psychology course.

- Survey Instrument: 50 items, 10-15 minutes to complete

• 5 Scales:

Alcohol Related Problems Scale
Binge Drinking Frequency Scale
Drunk in the Past 30 Days Scale
Neuroticism Scale (NEO)
Drinking Motives Scale (Cooper)

Discussion

- Given that females face greater stigma surrounding alcohol consumption, I predict the mediated impact of neuroticism to be a product of females' higher probability to use drinking as a coping mechanism.
- Due to societal standards more accepting of male alcohol consumption, males will be less likely to report drinking for emotional reasons and as such are less likely to present the mediated effect.
- Although males will have higher overall rates of alcohol involvement, neuroticism will have higher covariance with alcohol involvement for females because they are more likely to drink for relief from negative moods.
- The direct effect between enhancement and alcohol involvement reflects positive drinking expectations present in non-neurotic men. It is likely that non-neurotic men expect enhancement to positively impact their alcohol experience due to societal cues that normalize and glorify male drinking behaviors.

Limitations

- On sensitive topics such as alcohol consumption, self-reported survey data is subject to considerable participant bias and thus may be less objective than other data collection methods. Further, there may be significant report bias across gender as males and females differentially report their alcohol involvement and neuroticism. Due to stigma surrounding female drinking and male expression of emotion, it is likely self-preservation biases will arise in such data.

Implications

- Given the predicted difference between males and females in drinking motives and outcomes, this study provides insight that may generate new approaches to alcohol education for college undergraduates.

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