



A Latent Profile Analysis of drinking motives among heavy drinking college students



Jennifer M. Cadigan*, Matthew P. Martens, Keith C. Herman

Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology, University of Missouri, United States

HIGHLIGHTS

- Positively (PR) and negatively reinforcing (Coping) drinking motives were used.
- Six-classes best fit the data. Classes with higher PR motives drank more.
- Classes with high coping/high PR drank more than high coping/low PR classes.
- Classes with high coping/high PR had the most alcohol related problems.
- Classes with high coping, with either high or low PR, were the most depressed.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Positively (Enhancement and Social) and negatively (Coping) reinforcing drinking motives have been shown to be associated with alcohol use, alcohol-related problems, and depression among college students. Although prior studies of drinking motives have mostly consisted of variable-centered analyses, the current study used a person-centered approach where individuals were grouped into categories based on shared characteristics using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). We investigated the utility of drinking motive profiles to determine how different profiles were associated with alcohol outcomes and depressive symptoms.

Method: Participants were 648 undergraduate students who had violated a university alcohol policy and who endorsed consuming alcohol in the past month. Social, Coping, and Enhancement subscales from the Drinking Motives Questionnaire were used as indicators.

Results: After examining one-through-eight class LPA solutions, the six-class solution provided the best empirical and clinically meaningful fit to the data. Classes with high coping and high positive reinforcing drinking motives consumed more alcohol than profiles of students with high coping and low positive reinforcing motives. Classes high on both coping and positively reinforcing motives reported the most alcohol related problems. Classes with higher levels of coping motives and either high or low positive reinforcing motives reported the highest depression symptoms.

Conclusions: Drinking motive profiles differ in terms of alcohol outcomes and depressive symptoms. We encourage researchers to explore motives for drinking with individuals, especially assessing the relationship between coping motives and depression in the presence or absence of positively reinforcing motives.

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1. Introduction

Excessive alcohol use among college students is widespread and associated with a variety of negative consequences. Approximately 40% of students report a heavy drinking episode in the preceding two weeks and 20% meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence (Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2004; White, Kraus, & Swartzwelder, 2006). A dose–response relationship has been established between

heavy drinking and problems, including poor academic performance, physical injury, and risky sexual behavior (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000; Wechsler et al., 2002). Students who have violated a university alcohol policy are particularly at-risk for negative alcohol-related outcomes (Caldwell, 2002). Epidemiological studies have established that at-risk alcohol use is associated with major depressive disorder (e.g., Grant et al., 2004), but such associations among college students may be more complex. For example, studies examining the association between alcohol use and depressive symptoms have yielded inconsistent findings (e.g., Geisner, Mallett, & Kilmer, 2012; Nagoshi, 1999; Park & Grant, 2005), whereas alcohol-related problems have been more consistently associated with depressive symptoms (e.g., Camatta

* Corresponding author at: Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology, 16 Hill Hall; University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, United States.
E-mail address: Jennifer.Cadigan@mail.missouri.edu (J.M. Cadigan).

& Nagoshi, 1995; Martens et al., 2008; Nagoshi, 1999). These findings point to the importance of continued efforts aimed at understanding risk factors for at-risk alcohol use and related consequences among college students.

1.1. Drinking motives

Motivational models of drinking (Cooper, 1994; Cox & Klinger, 1988) assert individuals engage in alcohol use to attain a valued outcome that is motivated by unique needs. A commonly used theoretical model to conceptualize drinking motives has identified enhancing positive affect and reducing negative affect as primary motivations behind alcohol use (Cox & Klinger, 1988). The Drinking Motives Questionnaire (DMQ-R; Cooper, Russell, Skinner, & Windle, 1992; Cooper, 1994) is the most popular measure used to assess positively (Social and Enhancement subscales) and negatively (Coping and Conformity subscales) reinforcing drinking motives. Positively reinforcing motives include using alcohol to obtain social rewards (Social subscale) and increasing positive affect (Enhancement subscale), while negatively reinforcing drinking motives include using alcohol to alleviate negative emotions (Coping subscale) and drinking to fit in with others (Conformity subscale). Research regarding the relationship between DMQ-R conformity motives and alcohol outcomes has been inconclusive, and there is evidence that higher levels of conformity are not associated with higher alcohol-related risks among college students (e.g., Grant, Stewart, O'Connor, Blackwell, & Conrod, 2007; LaBrie, Kenney, Mirza, & Lac, 2011; Müller & Kuntsche, 2011; but see Patrick, Lee, & Larimer, 2011, for contrary findings). Because conformity motives have not been consistently correlated with alcohol-related outcomes, the present study focused on three subscales of the DMQ-R: Social, Coping, and Enhancement.

Variable-centered approaches examining the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol outcomes have generally shown differential effects between specific motives and alcohol outcomes (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005). Some have shown enhancement motives to be associated with drinking in situations considered conducive to heavy alcohol use, social motives with light, nonproblematic alcohol use and in social settings, and coping motives with problematic alcohol use and related problems (Carey & Correia, 1997; Cooper, 1994; Cooper et al., 1992; Kuntsche et al., 2005). However, other prospective studies have found no relationship between coping motives and alcohol use and that coping motives did not predict alcohol-related problems (Bradizza, Reifman, & Barnes, 1999; Read, Wood, Kahler, Maddock, & Palfai, 2003). A more recent prospective study found that coping motives predicted alcohol problems but not alcohol use (Merrill, Wardell, & Read, 2014). The degree to which study design (i.e., cross-sectional versus prospective) impacts the relationship between motives and alcohol outcomes remains unclear.

Several studies have examined the relationship between different types of drinking motives and depressive symptoms. Coping motives have been found to be positively associated with depressive symptoms, as those who endorsed using alcohol to cope were more likely to report depressed mood (e.g., Kuntsche et al., 2005; Martens et al., 2008; Park & Levenson, 2002; Stewart & Devine, 2000). In contrast, social and enhancement motives do not have a relationship with depression (see Kuntsche et al., 2005).

1.2. Drinking motives and person-centered analyses

The relationship between motives and alcohol outcomes has usually been examined using variable-level analysis rather than person-centered analysis, such as Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). Person-centered analyses enable researchers to categorize individuals into different groups based on similar characteristics and then examine the degree to which groups differ on external criterion (Muthén & Muthén, 2002). Person-centered analyses of drinking motives could

be used to identify classes of individuals who are at-risk for negative alcohol-related outcomes and candidates for targeted intervention efforts.

The handful of studies that have examined drinking motives in the context of person-centered analyses have important limitations to consider. First, studies have explicitly examined only two-class solutions of drinking motives (i.e., “enhancement” or “coping” drinkers), with one study supporting such a categorization (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Engels, & Gmel, 2010) and another refuting it (Littlefield, Vergés, Rosinski, Steinley, & Sher, 2013). It is possible that a larger number of classes would more accurately classify college students in terms of their motivation for drinking. Second, some have attempted to identify latent drinking classes using measures with unknown psychometric properties (e.g., Coffman, Patrick, Palen, Rhoades, & Ventura, 2007). Finally, some studies have conducted person-centered analyses that combined drinking motives with other psychosocial indicators to establish latent classes (e.g., Holt et al., 2013; Patrick & Maggs, 2010), while other studies have used drinking motives as criterion variables and alcohol outcomes as indicators to establish classes (e.g., O'Connor & Colder, 2005). Although valuable, these latter studies do not provide information on drinking motives-specific latent classes and their relationship to relevant criterion variables.

Using a sample of mandated college students who violated a university alcohol policy, the purpose of the current study was twofold. First, we used a person-centered approach to determine both the number and types of drinking motives profiles among mandated college students as measured by the DMQ-R. Rather than establishing a set number of classes to examine (e.g., a 2-class solution), we estimated an unconstrained model to establish the optimal number of classes. Second, we investigated the utility of drinking motive profiles to determine how different classes were associated with alcohol outcomes and depressive symptoms.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 648 undergraduate students from a large, north-eastern public university who violated a university alcohol policy and were participating in a study examining the efficacy of group based alcohol interventions (see Cimini et al., 2009). All students who violated an alcohol policy were eligible to participate in the study and were given the option of enrolling in the study and participating in a group intervention or participating in an alternative program through the university counseling center. The research protocol underwent ethical review and was approved by the university IRB. Participants in the present study were those who reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days. The majority of the sample was male (62.1%) and White (83.2%), and the mean age was 18.82 years ($SD = 0.81$).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised (DMQ-R)

The DMQ-R (Cooper, 1994) is a 20 item measure used to assess positively and negatively reinforcing drinking motives. For the current study three subscales were examined: Social (e.g. “Because it improves parties and celebrations”), Coping (e.g. “To forget about your problems”), and Enhancement (e.g. “Because it gives you a pleasant feeling”). Each subscale consists of five items and participants were asked to respond to how frequently they consume alcohol for various motives. Responses are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *Almost Never/ Never* to *Almost Always/Always* and subscale scores are then averaged. The DMQ-R has been shown to be a reliable and valid indicator of drinking motives among college students (Kuntsche, Stewart, & Cooper, 2008). Internal consistency estimates (α) for this sample were: .79

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