



## Event-specific risk and ecological factors associated with prepartying among heavier drinking college students<sup>☆</sup>

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Examines drinking outcomes on occasions where prepartying did and did not occur
- ▶ Students drank more and experienced more consequences during preparty events.
- ▶ Prepartiers who played drinking games had higher BALs and more consequences.
- ▶ Students reported more consequences when prepartying in a coed setting.
- ▶ Interventions can use BAL education to emphasize the impact of preparty drinking.

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### ABSTRACT

Using event-specific data, the present study sought to identify relevant risk factors and risky drinking patterns associated with prepartying. Analyses focused on drinking outcomes as a function of drinking game playing and the social context on occasions where prepartying did and did not occur. This research utilized a representative two-site sample of prepartiers who also reported a heavy episodic drinking event in the past month ( $n = 988$ ). Results revealed that during a preparty event, participants drank significantly more, reached higher blood alcohol levels (BALs), and experienced significantly more negative consequences compared to the last occasion that they drank but did not preparty. Students who played drinking games when they prepartied had higher BALs and experienced more negative consequences than those who did not play drinking games. Whether females prepartied in a single-sex or coed setting had little effect on their BALs. For males, however, their BALs were greater when they prepartied in a coed setting compared to a single sex setting. Moreover, participants reported more negative consequences when they prepartied in a coed setting than in a single-sex setting. Finally, regression analyses demonstrated that participants' BAL, frequency of prepartying, and the interaction between BAL and frequency of prepartying all uniquely contributed to the prediction of event-specific alcohol-related negative consequences. As BAL increased, the number of negative consequences increased more sharply for those who prepartied infrequently, compared to those who prepartied frequently. Analyses were examined as a function of gender which revealed important gender effects and interactions. Interventions can be designed to intervene with high-risk prepartiers by using BAL education emphasizing the impact of time-limited prepartying drinking.

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### 1. Introduction

Alcohol use remains an enduring concern among college students with nearly two-thirds of the college population reporting drinking in the past month (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002). As part of efforts to better address problematic drinking within college students, researchers have

begun to target specific, high-risk drinking behaviors. One such factor receiving increased attention is "prepartying." Prepartying (aka, pregaming, frontloading, prebaring, etc.) is defined as "the consumption of alcohol prior to attending an event or activity (e.g., party, bar, concert) at which more alcohol may be consumed" (Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007, p. 238). Prepartying likely originated from tailgating parties (i.e., drinking before sporting events; Vicary & Karshin, 2002). However, this practice has expanded in the college environment, with 64% to 75% of drinkers reporting participating in prepartying and prepartying preceding up to 45% of all drinking events (DeJong, DeRicco, & Schneider, 2010; LaBrie & Pedersen, 2008; Pedersen, LaBrie, & Kilmer, 2009; Pedersen, LaBrie, & Lac, 2008). Prepartying has also been shown to mediate the relationship between positive alcohol expectancies and risky

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drinking behaviors (Zamboanga, Schwartz, Ham, Borsari, & Van Tyne, 2010). These statistics are quite concerning as preparty drinking is distinct and more risky than non-preparty drinking, with preparty drinking being linked to higher overall alcohol consumption and increased negative alcohol-related consequences (Kenney, Hummer, & LaBrie, 2010).

### 1.1. Preparty drinking

Preparty drinking is markedly different from students' typical drinking patterns. As such, it is necessary to understand how specific, event-level preparty behaviors differ from more general drinking behaviors. Alcohol research typically assesses aggregate drinking data, using measures such as the Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins, Parks, & Marlatt, 1985) to assess consumption over time. While indices such as the DDQ may be appropriate for understanding general drinking patterns and tendencies, they cannot capture specific behaviors of interest such as preparty. For example, aggregate measures may be able to offer conclusions such as "individuals who engage in preparty typically experience more consequences," however, general measures would not be able to conclude that "on days that a student engages in preparty, he or she experiences more consequences" (for review of the merits of event-level data in alcohol research, see Neal et al., 2006). Previous studies have successfully utilized event-level data to document increased risk during specific drinking events such as holidays (e.g., New Years; Neighbors et al., 2011), school breaks (e.g., Spring Break; Lee, Lewis, & Neighbors, 2009), sporting events (e.g., football tailgating; Neighbors, Oster-Aaland, Bergstrom, & Lewis, 2006) and other traditionally heavy drinking events (e.g., 21st birthdays; Brister, Sher, & Fromme, 2011; Neighbors et al., 2006).

### 1.2. Event-level research on preparty

Preliminary event-level research has begun to shed light on the heightened risks associated with preparty. As the preparty duration is limited due to the need to leave to the primary event for which prepartiers are preparing to attend, students typically consume 2 to 6 drinks on average (LaBrie, Hummer, Kenney, Lac, & Pedersen, 2011) in short periods of time (50% less than 1 h, 90% less than 2 h; Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007). This heavy and rapid drinking style has been credited with the elevated risk of preparty. Three studies have found that blood alcohol levels (BALs) of both men and women at preparty events approach or surpass the legal limit of .08 (LaBrie & Pedersen, 2008; Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007; Pedersen et al., 2009). This is particularly concerning as drinking commonly continues after the preparty (DeJong et al., 2010; Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007), further elevating intoxication levels, which in turn decreases perception of risk (Fromme, Katz, & D'Amico, 1997). Preparty drinking has been linked to increased general (LaBrie & Pedersen, 2008) and specific alcohol-related consequences such as neglecting responsibilities, feeling sick, and passing out (Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007). One study found that 25% of prepartiers had experienced a blackout (i.e., a temporary period of memory loss during drinking) on a preparty night in the past month (LaBrie et al., 2011).

Women may be at elevated risk during preparty events. Both male and female college students participate equally often in preparty (Borsari et al., 2007) but despite consuming fewer drinks than their male counterparts, women reach comparable or higher BALs when preparty than males (LaBrie & Pedersen, 2008; Read, Merrill, & Bytschkow, 2010), due to the differential impact of alcohol on the sexes (Frezza et al., 1990; Jones & Jones, 1976). Moreover, some studies have found no significant gender differences on both general past month consequences (Pedersen et al., 2009) and event-specific consequences (LaBrie & Pedersen, 2008) between males and females. Yet even a comparable level of consequences between men and women marks a change in drinking behavior, since women generally drink less

and experience fewer consequences than men (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2010; Reed et al., 2011; Wilsnack, Vogelant, Wilsnack, & Harris, 2000). Further research is needed to explicate these differences using validated measures of consequences at the event-level and examining how other factors may contribute to this differential risk.

### 1.3. Ecological perspectives

Just as event-specific perspectives of preparty events can contribute to a richer understanding of the nuances connected to this behavior, so too can ecological perspectives yield unique insight into factors that may affect the relative risks associated with participation in a preparty event. Are there certain activities that take place during preparty events that further heighten the likelihood for increased drinking and/or negative alcohol-related outcomes (i.e., consequences)? Does the social context of the preparty event play a role in the type of drinking and risk that is incurred?

#### 1.3.1. Co-occurrence of preparty and drinking games

One observed trend that requires further research attention is the co-occurrence of playing drinking games while preparty. Drinking games have become a staple characteristic of the college drinking culture with over half of large college student samples reporting playing at least one of over 500 different types of drinking games in the past month (Borsari, 2004; Borsari, Bergen-Cico, & Carey, 2003). Such a high prevalence rate has been a cause for growing concern as drinking games primarily serve to quickly intoxicate participants, commonly leading to increased negative alcohol-related consequences (e.g., Borsari, 2004; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005). Given this shared feature with preparty, several studies have begun to assess the prevalence of game playing while preparty.

Although preparty and drinking games are distinct high-risk drinking activities, they are not mutually exclusive and qualitative research has suggested that drinking games are frequently played for the purpose of preparty (DeJong et al., 2010). Early quantitative research on preparty revealed that a substantial portion of participants (approximately 45% of the sample) reported typically playing drinking games while preparty (Pedersen & LaBrie, 2007). A follow-up study indicated a similar rate of approximately 52% of males and 40% of females who said they typically played drinking games while preparty (Pedersen et al., 2009). Furthermore, Read et al. (2010) utilized a more specific assessment to illustrate that among a sample of 108 prepartiers, drinking games were *often* ( $n = 44$ , 41%) or *sometimes* ( $n = 38$ , 35%) part of preparty. However, Borsari et al. (2007) found that only 12% of a sample of at-risk college students participated in both preparty and drinking games in the same event. The slightly discrepant findings yet relatively high co-occurrence of these two risky behaviors necessitates research examining whether a differential impact on alcohol-related outcomes exists as a function of drinking game involvement while preparty.

Two studies have looked at this. Using logistic regression, the first (LaBrie et al., 2011) showed that playing drinking games while preparty was uniquely associated with experiencing a blackout during a preparty event. The study posited that the relationship between the two was due to the possibility that some students may be unfamiliar with the acute effects of alcohol. By engaging in drinking games within the short period of the "preparty," students may not realize the intoxication levels that will be reached following time-delayed absorption. Second, playing drinking games while preparty was found to be common among a sample of intercollegiate athletes (42% of males and 31% of females) and was linked to both increased preparty consumption levels and general negative consequences, relative to athletes who did not report playing drinking games while preparty (Hummer, LaBrie, & Lac, 2011).

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