



Acculturative stress as a moderator of the effect of drinking motives on alcohol use and problems among young adults



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined acculturative stress (AS) and alcohol outcomes among college students.
- Drinking motives (DM) were associated with elevated alcohol use and problems.
- Alcohol problems were greater for Asian and Hispanic students reporting higher AS.
- Coping and conformity DM predicted alcohol use for Black students reporting low AS.
- Greater AS weakened the relationship between coping and conformity DM and drinking in Black students.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between drinking motives and alcohol use among young adult populations. Further, there is substantial evidence of the association between psychosocial stressors and greater alcohol consumption. In the present study, we examined whether acculturative stress would moderate the relationship between major drinking motives and alcohol use behaviors and alcohol-related problems, and whether this relationship differs by racial/ethnic group.

Method: Six hundred diverse undergraduate students (mean age = 21.50, SD = 2.46; 82.8% female; 40.2% White/Caucasian) completed a series of measures, including demographic information, alcohol use/alcohol problems, and acculturative stress.

Results: Findings showed varying patterns in the moderating effect of acculturative stress on the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, particularly for self-identified Hispanic, Black, and Asian students. Stronger drinking motives were associated with greater alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, and this relationship was stronger among Asian and Hispanic students who reported higher levels of acculturative stress. For Black students, greater acculturative stress was observed to weaken the relationship between coping, enhancement, and conformity motives and alcohol drinking frequency.

Conclusions: Results are discussed in terms of incorporating acculturative stress in the development of tailored alcohol use interventions for vulnerable young adults, such as certain ethnic minority and immigrant groups. Clinical implications include screening for acculturative stress in primary care and counseling centers and early intervention programs to identify young adults who may be at-risk for or currently experiencing alcohol problems.

1. Introduction

Alcohol abuse is recognized as a major public health concern and a serious risk behavior among young adults in the United States (Bacio, Lau, & Mays, 2013; White & Hingson, 2014), associated with a range of

adverse outcomes including alcohol poisoning, drunk driving, unsafe sexual practices, and academic disengagement (Townshend, Kambouropoulos, Griffin, Hunt, & Milani, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; White & Hingson, 2014). Despite being a target of intervention, the persistence of problematic young

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adult drinking highlights the importance of this issue (Tanner-Smith & Lipsey, 2015). For instance, in 2013, the prevalence of binge drinking (five or more drinking in one sitting on at least one occasion in the past month) and driving under the influence among young adults was 37.9% and approximately 20%, respectively; estimates that remained relatively unchanged from the previous year (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2012).

Young adults who are already vulnerable due to stress related to developmental and life role transitions (Schwartz, 2016; Taylor & Baxter Magolda, 2015) and who may lack positive coping skills. Such individuals may turn to maladaptive coping strategies, including alcohol use (Corbin, Farmer, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2013), especially within the context of increased peer normalization and approval of alcohol consumption (Byrd, 2016). The literature provides growing support for the connections between the emerging adulthood developmental transition and risky behaviors, as well as the ensuing implications for academic success (Borsari, Murphy, & Barnett, 2007; Read, Wood, Davidoff, McLacken, & Campbell, 2002; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). However, there remains a paucity of research on the impact of alcohol use among young adults who are at increased due to specific social stresses related to acculturation and adaptation, particularly within ethnic minority groups (Ehlers, Gilder, Criado, & Caetano, 2009).

1.1. Acculturative stress

Acculturation is a process by which an ethnic minority individual or group (with values, beliefs, and practices from their area of origin) experiences changes in their cultural patterns as a consequence of contact and interaction with the ethnic majority (Berry, 2003). This process is at times wrought with stress due to conflicting or incompatible cultural systems, which may lead an individual to utilize various strategies in an attempt to cope (Crockett et al., 2007). Acculturative stress is described as the impact of psychological adjustment to a new culture, generally observed in immigrant and ethnic minority communities (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Based on hypothesized stressors associated with acculturating or “adapting” within a new country or culture, acculturative stress has been found to be associated with myriad negative health outcomes, including increased risk for mental health problems and substance abuse among adolescents and young adults (Walker, Wingate, Obasi, & Joiner, 2008).

During young adulthood, because of the additional stressors associated with increased autonomy, responsibility, and role transitions, experiencing acculturative stress may particularly increase risk for maladjustment, engaging in negative coping behaviors, and lower levels of active coping (Driscoll & Torres, 2013; Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Tafoya, 2011). Previous research has identified different approaches to coping with stressful events and that certain coping strategies were associated with either more or less alcohol consumption among ethnically-diverse young adults (Aldridge-Gerry et al., 2011). Further, Ehlers et al. (2009) identified that elevations in acculturative stress were associated with alcohol dependence and other mental health diagnoses among a sample of Mexican-American young adults. The present study aims to extend the literature in examining how young adults' experiences of acculturative stress and motives for alcohol consumption may relate to actual alcohol use behavior.

1.2. Drinking motives

Cooper's seminal four-factor model of alcohol drinking motives has found consistent evidentiary support for the association between these motives and alcohol use behavior (Cooper, 1994). These motives are defined as: social (anticipating favorable social outcomes, such as having fun at a party); conformity (avoiding social rejection or gaining acceptance peers); coping (alleviating negative affect, such as to forget one's problems); and enhancement (increasing positive affect or

experiencing a pleasant feeling) motives (Cooper, 1994; MacLean & Lecci, 2000). Further, research has provided a framework that conceptualizes these drinking motives as strong factors in alcohol consumption (e.g., Piasecki et al., 2014; Wahesh, Lewis, Wyrick, & Ackerman, 2015), even remaining relatively invariant during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Anderson, Briggs, & White, 2013).

Not surprisingly, there is a plethora of evidence that drinking motives are strongly associated with alcohol behaviors among young adult populations (Foster & Neighbors, 2013; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005; Mohr et al., 2005). Research indicates that among young adult college students, enhancement and social motives are the most frequently endorsed, and that these motives are often linked with heavier alcohol consumption (Armeli, Conner, Cullum, & Tennen, 2010; Cadigan, Martens, & Herman, 2015) as compared to other motives. While conformity and coping motives are less frequently endorsed, they are consistently and more strongly linked with alcohol-related problems compared with enhancement and social motives (Kuntsche et al., 2005; Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007). Research suggests that enhancement drinking motives in particular mediate the relationship between psychosocial antecedents (e.g., impulsivity-sensation seeking, negative affect) and drinking outcomes among young adult college students (Read, Wood, Kahler, Maddock, & Palfai, 2003). More recently, Doumas and Midgett (2015) found that while there were no differences in drinking motives among White and ethnic minority college athletes; White athletes reported greater alcohol use whereas, ethnic minority athletes reported higher levels of alcohol-related problems. Furthermore, ethnic minority athletes who endorsed higher levels of coping and conformity motives reported greater alcohol-related problems.

1.3. Current study

Given growing evidence that the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol use/problems varies among ethnic/racial groups (e.g., Koyama & Belli, 2011), we aimed to examine acculturative stress as a potential moderator that may influence alcohol-related behavior or problems for diverse young adults based on their drinking motives. Ethnic identity and acculturation have been linked to heavy alcohol use among young adults (e.g., Zamboanga, Rafaelli, & Horton, 2006); however, to our knowledge the moderating influence of acculturative stress on the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol use and alcohol-related problems has yet to be examined. We aimed to first examine and confirm previous findings on the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol use within our sample. Previously, race and ethnicity have been viewed as biological rather than social constructs and utilized as explanatory variables in examining group differences (Committee on Pediatric Research, 2000). Given previous literature examining acculturation and various health outcomes, including substance use (Schwartz et al., 2011), the present study examined these relationships separately by racial/ethnic group. We also aimed to further the literature by examining the influence of acculturative stress on this relationship between drinking motives and alcohol behavior. Our research hypotheses were three-fold:

1. We hypothesized that drinking motives would be associated with greater frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, particularly among individuals reporting higher levels of acculturative stress compared to those reporting lower levels of acculturative stress.
2. Based on previous literature (e.g., Walker et al., 2008), we hypothesized that the moderating influence of acculturative stress would be significant among ethnic minority participants and less so among their White peers.
3. Finally, we hypothesized that acculturative stress would differentially influence the relationship between certain drinking motives

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