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Examining daily variability in willingness to drink in relation to underage young adult alcohol use

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Findings suggest substantial differences from day-to-day in willingness to drink.
- Participants drank more on days when feeling more willingness than their own average level across the two weeks.
- Daily process level mechanisms allow insight into factors contributing to increased risk in-the-moment.
- Interventions focusing on young adults' abilities to make healthier choices in moments of risk are needed.

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ABSTRACT

A key component of the Prototype Willingness Model is willingness, which reflects an openness to opportunity to perform a behavior in situations that are conducive to that behavior. Willingness has traditionally been tested using global, hypothetical assessments, and has not been examined at the daily level. We expected to find within-person variability in willingness to drink, such that on days with greater willingness, individuals would report greater drinking. A national sample ($N = 288$) of young adults aged 18 to 20 (31.60% female) completed a Web-based survey that was comprised of measures of drinking and sexual behavior, including the Timeline Follow-Back (Sobell & Sobell, 1992). Findings show daily variability in willingness to drink (ICC = 0.54), which suggests that there are substantial differences from day-to-day in this drinking-related cognition. Participants drank more on days when individuals also reported feeling more willing to drink than their own average level across the two weeks. Daily process level mechanisms allow greater insight into factors contributing to increased risk in-the-moment, which may point to targets for interventions aimed at improving adolescents' and young adults' abilities to make healthier choices in moments when they may be at greater risk for engaging in risky behaviors.

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1. Introduction

Alcohol use is a public health concern that often initiates during adolescence and young adulthood (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2014; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2014). Because adolescents and young adults experience alcohol-related consequences (White, Macinnes, Hingson, & Pan, 2013), testing models with a focus on drinking during this developmental period is of critical importance. This study will provide the first daily-level test of the effects of willingness to drink on alcohol use among underage young adults (age 18–20), which will enhance our knowledge of a critical pathway in the Prototype Willingness Model (PWM; Gibbons, Gerrard, & Lane, 2003).

Dual-processing models posit two different modes of information processing in decision making: one that is based on heuristics and one that is based on more analytic reasoning (e.g., Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Epstein, 1973). Like most dual-process models, the PWM suggests that the reasoned and social reaction processes can, and often do, operate simultaneously (Gibbons et al., 2003). Thus, the PWM may improve prediction of adolescent and young adult health-risk outcomes more than other models as it addresses intentional behavior as well as volitional behavior that is reactive to risk-conducive situations (i.e., circumstances that facilitate but do not require or demand risky behaviors) involving social situations and peers. The PWM assumes two pathways to health risk (see Fig. 1, Gibbons et al., 2003). The reasoned pathway relies on reasoned processing as seen in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; i.e., based on intentions, which vary as a function of attitudes and injunctive norms). Intentions are goals that

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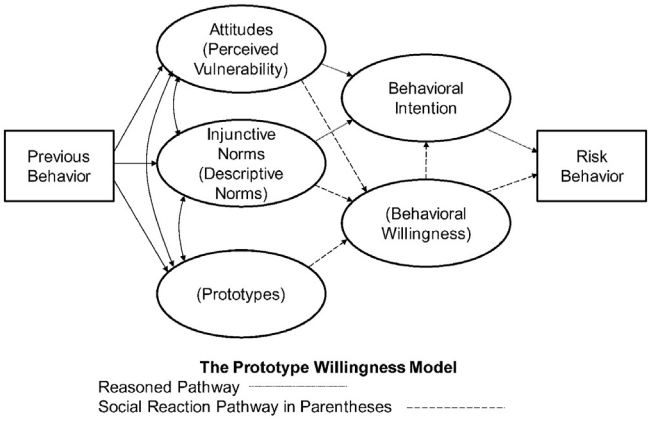

Fig. 1. The Prototype Willingness Model.

are formulated after deliberation. The social reaction pathway relies on willingness, which varies as a function of perceived vulnerability, descriptive norms, and prototypes. Willingness reflects an openness to opportunity to perform a behavior in situations that are conducive to that behavior (Gibbons et al., 2003; Gerrard, Gibbons, Houlihan, Stock, & Pomery, 2008). It is important to note that although there may appear to be conceptual overlap among model components, these variables have been demonstrated to only influence particular pathways – i.e., reasoned or social pathway (Gibbons et al., 2003; Hukkelberg & Dykstra, 2009). For example, the model (and pathways within the model) have been tested numerous times and support the notion that intentions and willingness are unique constructs and have differential impact on behavior (Gibbons, Gerrard, Blanton, & Russell, 1998; Gerrard et al., 2008). The present study extends prior work with the PWM, specifically with the social reaction pathway, to more fully understand the relationships between willingness in predicting drinking by examining associations between willingness and alcohol use at the daily level.

The predictive utility and validity of the PWM has been well supported, with research showing that components of the social reaction pathway explain additional variance above reasoned pathway components (or traditional pathways of the TRA) when examining substance use, including alcohol, among both adolescent and young adult samples (e.g., Gerrard, Gibbons, Gano, & Vande Lune, 2005; Gibbons et al., 1998; Gibbons et al., 2004; Rivis, Sheeran, & Armitage, 2006; Litt et al., 2014; Pomery, Gibbons, Reis-Bergan, & Gerrard, 2009; Spijkerman, van den Eijnden, Vitale, & Engels, 2004; Zimmermann & Sieverding, 2010). Thus, research has demonstrated the predictive utility of the PWM, across both pathways, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. However, this research establishes the need for a more refined examination of the model. Examining the PWM, or pathways within the model, at the daily level may further enhance the predictive utility of the PWM given the ability to examine characteristics of natural drinking environments and increase its potential to develop or refine interventions.

1.1. Need to examine the Prototype Willingness Model at the daily level

Central to the PWM, social reactions to risk-conducive situations are captured by willingness, defined as an openness to risk opportunity, and measured by questions about what individuals would be willing to do in hypothetical situations. Because research on the PWM focuses largely on the global, hypothetical assessment of willingness, little is known about whether willingness translates to naturally occurring drinking situations or how this relates to behavior on individual occasions. Hypothetical scenarios do not allow for the examination of variability in willingness that results from real-world contexts, as well as from variability in willingness due to fluctuations in perceived vulnerability, descriptive norms, and prototypes. Because the PWM suggests that drinking is a reaction to risk-conducive circumstances, the proposed study extends research by assessing willingness using Timeline Follow Back (TLFB) methodology to examine naturally occurring within-person variation in willingness and the association with drinking at the daily level aligning more directly with the theoretical basis of the PWM. Based on the social reaction pathway of the PWM, we expect on days with greater willingness, individuals will report a greater likelihood and amount of drinking.

1.2. The present study

The purpose of the present study was to empirically test the utility of the social reaction pathway of the PWM (i.e., willingness to drink to drinking behavior) in the prediction of drinking behavior at the daily level. Specifically, we expected on days with greater willingness, individuals will be both more likely to drink and to drink more. Moreover, we expected to observe individual differences in this association, such that this connection would be stronger in some individuals than others.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants and procedures

Participants for this study were recruited nationally through various methods and asked to complete a brief, five-minute web-based screening survey to determine if they met inclusion criteria for a one-time web-based survey. Please see Fig. 2 for participant recruitment flow

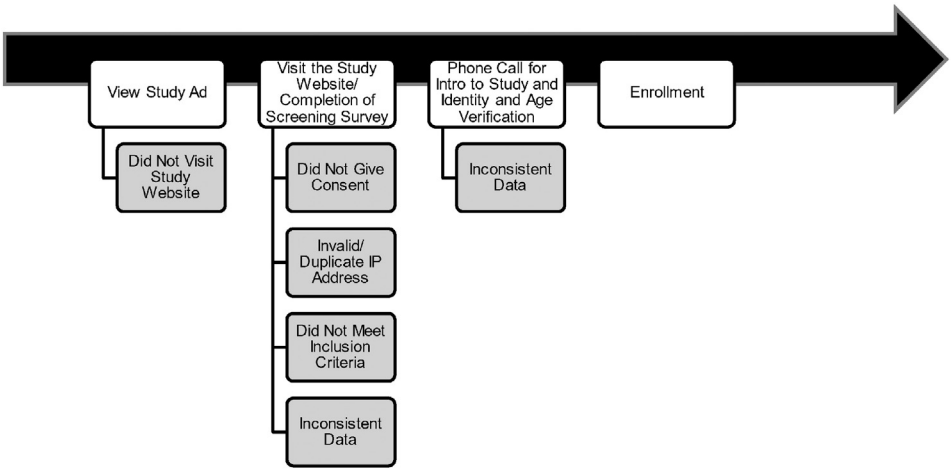

Fig. 2. Study participant recruitment flow chart.

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