



## Day-to-day variations in high-intensity drinking, expectancies, and positive and negative alcohol-related consequences



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Positive and negative expectancies predicted extreme binge drinking that day.
- Days with high-intensity drinking had more positive and negative consequences.
- Positive consequences were rated more favorably on high-intensity drinking days.
- Negative consequences were rated less favorably on high-intensity drinking days.

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### ABSTRACT

High-intensity drinking (i.e., women/men consuming 8+/10+ drinks in a day) is prevalent and associated with negative consequences. Occasions of high-intensity drinking have markedly high risk; however, previous research has not examined the predictors of these high-risk drinking days. The current study was designed to examine to what extent positive and negative alcohol expectancies predict high-intensity drinking and whether high-intensity drinking on a given day was associated with drinking consequences and their evaluations that day. Frequently drinking college students ( $N = 342$ ) participated in an intensive longitudinal study of drinking behaviors ( $N = 4645$  drinking days). Days with greater positive and negative expectancies were associated with high-intensity drinking. Days with high-intensity drinking were associated with reporting more positive and negative consequences and with evaluating positive consequences more favorably and evaluating negative consequences less favorably, compared to drinking days without high-intensity drinking. Given this, prevention and intervention efforts may consider specifically targeting high-intensity drinking events as a unique phenomenon.

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Approximately 35% of college students report binge drinking, defined as consuming five or more drinks (5+) on a single occasion in the past 2 weeks (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, Schulenberg, & Miech, 2014). Frequency of binge (heavy drinking) episodes is an important indicator of risk and is positively correlated with negative consequences like injury, unplanned sex, and blackouts (Perkins, 2002; Wechsler, Dowdall, Maenner, Gledhill-Hoyt, & Lee, 1998). Research has now begun to explore the occurrence and impact of high-intensity drinking (Patrick et al., 2013; Read, Beattie, Chamberlain, & Merrill, 2008), defined as consuming at least twice the standard cutoff level for binge drinking, thus 10+ drinks or a sex-specific 8+/10+ drinks for women/men (Patrick et al., 2013; Patrick, 2016). Over half of high

school seniors who reported binge drinking at the 5+ level also reported at least one occasion of consuming 10+ drinks in the last 2 weeks, the latter reported by 10.5% of high school seniors in the U.S. (Patrick et al., 2013). About 20% of male first-year college students met the 10+ cutoff, and 8% of female first-year college students reported 8+ drinks (White, Kraus, & Swartzwelder, 2006). The 10+ drinking threshold has been shown to have the greatest prediction of hangover symptoms, compared to other thresholds (Jackson, 2008). High-intensity drinking significantly increases the likelihood of alcohol-related negative outcomes (Read et al., 2008), and may especially raise the risk of serious consequences like severe injury or overdose (Hingson & White, 2013).

Most research has made between-person comparisons. Previous research has not yet examined how occasions of high-intensity drinking may differ from occasions of less extreme drinking for a given individual. Understanding when students are more likely to engage in high-intensity drinking and how factors such as alcohol

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expectancies, experienced consequences, and drinking contexts may be associated with high-intensity drinking occasions may be crucial to intervention efforts.

Alcohol outcome expectancies are beliefs about the positive and negative consequences that will result from drinking, such as increased sociability or aggression. Expectancies reliably predict drinking frequency, quantity, and the experience of alcohol-related consequences (Jones, Corbin, & Fromme, 2001). These beliefs are typically treated as stable traits (Brown, Christiansen, & Goldman, 1987; Fromme, Stroot, & Kaplan, 1993), rather than fluctuating products of past and present experiences, in both research and college drinking interventions (Darkes & Goldman, 1993; Darkes & Goldman, 1998). However, research (Armeli et al., 2005; Butler, Dodge, & Faurote, 2010; Lee, Atkins, Crouce, Walter, & Leigh, 2015) has shown that expectancies have significant within- and between-person variability, and they may serve as important proximal predictors of drinking behavior on a particular day. Given evidence of this variability, it is important to examine whether positive and negative expectancies predict high-intensity drinking and the experience of positive and negative consequences on a given day.

Like expectancies, the extent to which consequences are considered desirable or undesirable is not consistent across students or stable within a given individual (McKee, Hinson, Wall, & Spriel, 1998; Patrick & Maggs, 2011). Some consequences may be more problematic in certain situations (e.g., a hangover on a weekday) or more rewarding in certain situations (e.g., more fun with friends). Viewing negative alcohol-related consequences as less aversive is predictive of increased drinking and greater consequences (Gaher & Simons, 2007; Mallett, Bachrach, & Turrisi, 2008; Neighbors, Walker, & Larimer, 2003). When examined at the individual level, more positive evaluations of increased fun/sociability predict greater alcohol use the following week, and less negative evaluations of physical/behavioral consequences of alcohol use predict greater alcohol consequences the following week (Patrick & Maggs, 2011). The current study examines the extent to which occasions of high-intensity drinking are associated with positive and negative consequences and the ways these consequences are evaluated, after controlling for expectancies. The current study will help address critical unanswered questions about high-intensity drinking (Patrick, 2016), the ways in which drinkers perceive these events, and potential targets for intervention.

The current study also includes contextual variables (i.e., where and with whom one drinks alcohol), as extant research has not examined associations between context and whether or not students engaged in high-intensity drinking and experienced consequences on a given day. Drinking contexts are potentially very important for understanding high-intensity drinking, as factors such as drinking with others and bar specials are associated with higher levels of alcohol use (Clapp et al., 2007; Clapp, Min, Shillington, Reed, & Croff, 2008; Clapp & Shillington, 2001; Hennessy & Saltz, 1993), and weekends are associated with more drinking than weekdays (Hoeppe et al., 2012; Tremblay et al., 2010). Thus, contextual variables for drinking with others, drinking at a bar or party, and drinking on weekend days are specifically examined.

Overall, the current study is designed to examine day-to-day variations in high-intensity drinking (8+/10+ drinks for women/men) among college students to determine (1) to what extent expectancies about drinking reported on a given day predict whether or not college students will engage in high-intensity drinking later that day; and (2) if high-intensity drinking on a given day increases the number of alcohol-related consequences on that day, and how high-intensity drinking is associated with the evaluations of consequences as positive or negative. It was hypothesized that greater positive expectancies and greater negative expectancies on a given day would be associated with high-intensity drinking; that high-intensity drinking would be associated with an increase in positive and negative consequences; and that those consequences would be perceived as more extreme

(i.e., more favorable positive consequences and less favorable negative consequences).

## 1. Method

### 1.1. Participants

Participants included 342 undergraduate college students from a large, public university in the Northwest U.S. who were engaged in a larger study examining a daily process model of alcohol use, alcohol expectancies, and consequences (for details see Lee et al., 2015). Participants reported an average age of 20.1 years ( $SD = 1.4$ ) and 51% were women. Most participants were white (75.2%), with 8.6% reporting being Asian American, 11.2% multiracial, and 5% other race/ethnicity.

### 1.2. Procedures

Students ages 18–24, of freshman, sophomore, or junior standing, were randomly selected from the university registrar's list ( $N = 8,923$ ). To be eligible for the larger study, students needed to complete the screening survey (compensation: \$10), own a mobile phone with a service contract and text messaging, and have consumed alcohol at least twice a week over the past month. Of the students who completed the screening survey, 16.8% met all criteria; 95.7% of those eligible then completed the baseline survey (compensation: \$30). The baseline survey was followed by an in-person training session (completed by 352 students; 68.2% of those eligible) on the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system participants used to complete daily interviews three times a day for 14 days in each of the next four quarters. Daily IVR interviews of 10 min or less included a morning interview (9 am–noon), afternoon interview (3 pm–6 pm) and evening interview (9 pm–midnight). Students were compensated \$2 for each complete interview, plus a bonus of \$16 if they completed 36 of the 42 possible interviews for each 14-day period. Students received a text message at the start of an assessment window and again 30 min prior to the close of an assessment window if they had not yet completed the IVR interview. Data for the current analyses come from the afternoon and morning interviews. All procedures were approved by the University IRB.

Overall, there was a total of 15,103 daily reports, of which 36.2% ( $n = 5,467$ ) were drinking days. Due to the lagged nature of the data coming from the afternoon assessment (reporting on expectancies for that evening) and the morning assessment (reporting on alcohol use and consequences the prior day), the present analyses include 342 people with data for at least one assessment completed in the afternoon and one the following morning. The number of days analyzed to examine each aim varied in accordance with study design and the nature of the outcome. Of the 5467 drinking days, data on covariates (e.g., expectancies) were available for 4645 days predicting high-intensity drinking and for 4622 days predicting positive and negative consequences. There were 4041 days with reports for evaluations of positive consequences experienced and 2028 days with reports for evaluations of negative consequences experienced.

### 1.3. Measures

#### 1.3.1. Demographics

Sex (0 = woman, 1 = man), age at baseline, and membership in a fraternity or sorority (0 = no, 1 = yes).

#### 1.3.2. Alcohol expectancies

Each afternoon, participants were asked, "If you were to drink tonight, how likely would you be to feel or do the following things?" (Lee et al., 2015). Six positive expectancies (e.g., be more sociable) and seven negative expectancies (e.g., feel nauseated or vomit) were assessed. Responses ranged from 1 = very unlikely to 9 = very likely.

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