



# Momentary affect and risky behavior correlates of prescription drug misuse among young adult dating couples: An experience sampling study



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Young adult couples who engaged in recent prescription misuse were sampled.
- Experience sampling methods documented misuse and outcomes in daily life.
- Misuse was associated with males' and females' problematic affect and behavior correlates.
- Couples' amount of time together emerged as a modifying contextual factor.

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## ABSTRACT

Although published research based on retrospective survey designs has established prescription drug misuse as a serious health issue for individuals and society, misuse behavior has not been investigated as it occurs in daily life and important relationships. To address this gap, young adult romantic couples were recruited from the community to participate in an experience sampling study. Participants were identified through phone screen procedures as having engaged in recent prescription drug misuse behavior. Participants ( $n = 46$  couples) completed electronic diary reports throughout the day for 10 days, tapping momentary affect, sexual experiences, prescription drug misuse, and alcohol and other drug use. Dyadic multilevel modeling revealed a more consistent pattern of associations between prescription drug misuse and problematic affective and behavioral outcomes for female partners than male partners. Specifically, during epochs of females' prescription drug misuse, they experienced relatively higher levels of negative affect and sexual regret. Also, females who misused prescriptions more during the study period evidenced lower levels of sexual enjoyment and engaged in more unprotected sex, alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use in daily life. Males' in-the-moment prescription drug misuse was not associated with their concurrent outcomes, though males with relatively more misuse across the reporting period were more likely to engage in heavy drinking. Couples' time together emerged as a moderator of prescription drug misuse in daily life: Females who spent relatively more time with their partner across the study were less likely to engage in misuse, and proportion of time spent together moderated several of the momentary misuse–outcome linkages. This study supports the use of ecologically-valid sampling methods for characterizing young adults' prescription drug misuse in daily life and relationship contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

The nonmedical use of prescription medications is a pressing health concern (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2014) and has emerged as

the defining drug problem of a generation (DuPont, 2010). Young adults aged 18–25 exhibit a higher misuse prevalence than other age groups (Lessenger & Feinberg, 2008), and this misuse is associated with increased risk for serious consequences such as problematic drinking (McCabe, Cranford, & Boyd, 2006), illicit drug use (Arria & DuPont, 2010), more sexual partners and unprotected sex (Benotsch, Koester, Luckman, Martin, & Cejka, 2011), and overdose deaths (Warner, Chen, & Makuc, 2009). An imperative next step for guiding targeted prevention and treatment efforts is to understand how misuse occurs and is experienced in the contexts of individuals' daily life and close relationships with others (Nargiso, Ballard, & Skeer, 2015).

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Available research has largely ignored interpersonal contexts of prescription drug misuse, despite accumulating evidence that romantic partners demonstrate within-dyad similarities and influences along various indicators of alcohol and other drug use (Graham & Braun, 1999; Homish, Leonard, & Cornelius, 2007; Leonard & Homish, 2008). These findings to date have been based primarily on married couples. Few studies have investigated substance use in relational contexts during young adulthood, when individuals' time and effort shift from managing peer relationships to establishing and maintaining romantic partnerships (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). Indeed, the scant available evidence from this period has indicated that substance use of individuals is more closely linked to their partners' norms and behaviors than their friends' (Etcheverry & Agnew, 2008). A previous study by Papp (2010) was based on survey assessments of prescription drug misuse and indicated that males and females were significantly more likely to report past-year (but not lifetime) misuse if their partner also did, and that the recent misuse held negative implications for romantic relationship adjustment, further encouraging investigations in relational contexts.

Models of co-occurring clinical problems (McGovern, Xie, Segal, Siembab, & Drake, 2006; Merikangas et al., 1998) encourage the examination of implications of misuse of prescription medication for multiple emotional and behavioral outcomes. Along these lines, survey-based research has demonstrated positive links between prescription drug misuse and affective distress, particularly among women (Ford, Reckdenwald, & Marquardt, 2014; Jamison, Butler, Budman, Edwards, & Wasan, 2010). Additionally, research on non-partnered individuals has documented associations between retrospectively-endorsed nonmedical use of medications and elevated sexual risk behaviors (i.e., unprotected sex; Benotsch et al., 2011). In contexts of committed relationships in which partners engage in safer sexual practices (Kaestle & Halpern, 2005), feelings about the sexual activity are posited as important indicators of functioning (Hensel & Sorge, 2014; Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005). Furthermore, young adults' alcohol co-ingestion, binge drinking, and illicit drug use have been uniquely linked to greater survey-reported prescription drug misuse in large samples of U.S. college students (McCabe et al., 2006; McCauley et al., 2011), and warrant investigation in relation to naturally-occurring misuse of prescription medication in young adults' daily life environments.

Together, these findings confirm affective and behavioral correlates of prescription drug misuse among young adults, and encourage systematic examination of the substance behavior in individuals' natural and spontaneous contexts. Ecologically-based methods that rely less on participants' memories and other biases have been established as especially valuable in research on substance use behaviors and disorders (Ferguson & Shiffman, 2011; Shiffman, Stone, & Hufford, 2008). Recent experience sampling studies with young adult samples have yielded important insights into individual and relationship factors that co-vary with alcohol use, including alcohol motivation (Maggs, Williams, & Lee, 2011) and health-threatening sexual activity (Kiene, Barta, Tennen, & Armeli, 2009). Thus, extending a literature overwhelmingly based on retrospective survey designs and samples of individuals, we employed experience sampling to investigate prescription drug misuse and momentary correlates of affective and behavioral risk outcomes in romantic couples' daily lives. Given survey evidence that suggests young adults in romantic relationships are protected from risky behaviors compared to their non-partnered peers (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010), we also examined whether couples' spending more time together (which may reflect a more salient relationship context for in-the-moment misuse behavior) modified males' and females' likelihood of engaging in prescription drug misuse or experiencing momentary correlates of misuse in daily life.

Consistent with recent work (e.g., McCauley et al., 2011), we adopted a broad operationalization that reflected the multiple ways prescription drug misuse could occur, such as using medication for a reason other than intended or using medication prescribed to others.

Building on the survey-based findings (e.g. Benotsch et al., 2011, Ford et al., 2014), we specifically hypothesized that males' and females' misuse of prescription medication would be associated with their (a) evidencing lower positivity and higher negativity; (b) reporting more problematic sexual experiences, including lower sexual enjoyment, higher regret, and more unprotected sex; and (c) engaging in greater alcohol and other substance use (e.g., co-ingestion of alcohol, heavy drinking) in daily life. We tentatively predicted that males and females who reported spending relatively more time with their partner would be less likely to engage in and experience negative correlates of prescription drug misuse in daily life. Finally, in light of a previous study that showed negative associations between relationship length and young adults' drinking, marijuana use, and cigarette smoking (Fleming, White, & Catalano, 2010), we accounted for the duration of the couples' relationships in all of our analyses.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants and procedures

Dating couples were recruited from a medium-sized town in the Midwestern U.S. via multiple strategies (e.g., campus newspaper and email advertisements, flyers posted in campus health centers and in stores and restaurants throughout the local community). Advertisements sought young adults who were dating exclusively for a research study on "the connections between close relationships and daily feelings and behaviors." The ads also stated, "This research is particularly focused on capturing how people use prescription medication." Couples were recruited into the study following a brief phone screen, completed when each member could speak privately to a trained research assistant. The phone screening involved the research assistant stating an interest in behaviors that might occur in daily life, and assuring the participant that their responses would remain confidential. Participants indicated (Yes/No) whether they had used any of four standard medication classes (i.e., sleeping, sedative or anxiety, stimulant, and pain, with example commercial names provided; McCabe, 2008) either for a different reason than intended, or more frequently or in a greater amount than prescribed to them, or without a physician's order. To increase the likelihood that experience sampling would capture the substance behavior of interest (Mermelstein, Hedeker, Flay, & Shiffman, 2007), one or both partners needed to self-endorse misuse of prescription drugs within the past three months. Participants were informed of their eligibility status after both partners completed the phone screen, and eligible couples were invited to schedule a laboratory session.

Phone screen procedures with 605 contacts identified 73 eligible couples; 49 couples enrolled in the study. One same-sex couple was removed from the present analysis due to statistical procedures that relied on distinguishable dyads (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). In order to conduct dyadic data analysis (see 2.3 Data Analysis Plan), our analysis included only couples with partners who provided at least 1 matched momentary report (from the same daily epoch of morning, afternoon, or evening) during their 10-day experience sampling period. The resulting 46 couples had an average relationship length of 18.2 months ( $SD = 20.2$  months, range: 1–80 months). Males' mean age was 22.1 years ( $SD = 2.7$  years, range: 18–30), and females' mean age was 20.8 years ( $SD = 2.4$  years, range: 18–28). Most dyad members (83.7%) identified as European American, with 6.5% identifying as Asian American or Pacific Islander, 8.7% as Biracial or "Other", and 1.1% as Hispanic. Eighty-six percent indicated current student status.

Prior to the study, university Institutional Review Board approval and a National Institute of Health Certificate of Confidentiality were obtained. Between September 2013 and October 2014, participating couples attended two lab sessions scheduled an average of 16 days apart, and completed 10 days of momentary reporting between sessions. During their first session, participants were trained in the use of an iPod Touch, which included an application designed specifically for the

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