



Short Communication

The impact of campus traditions and event-specific drinking

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Campuses with specific celebratory traditions reported more intent to drink.
- Campuses with specific celebratory traditions expected peers to drink more.
- Campuses with specific celebratory traditions reported more actual drinking.
- Event-specific norms did not moderate the relation between event and drinking.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Specific events (e.g., Spring Break, holidays) are associated with greater college student drinking. However, the ways in which specific events are celebrated at specific campuses may impact students' beliefs about the social acceptability of drinking during these events, which may impact students' event-specific drinking. The present study investigated whether two campuses with different traditions regarding St. Patrick's Day and Mardi Gras differed on event-specific normative beliefs, intent to drink, and actual alcohol consumption.

Method: Undergraduate students at two campuses ($N = 570$, 59% female) were surveyed pre- and post-events. Campus 1 has specific campus-wide traditions regarding St. Patrick's Day whereas Campus 2 has specific campus-wide traditions regarding Mardi Gras. Prior to the events, participants were asked to indicate how much they expected their peers to drink and how much alcohol they intended to drink themselves during these events. After the events, students reported how much alcohol they actually consumed during the events.

Results: Campus 1 reported greater intent to drink and actual drinking during St. Patrick's Day than Campus 2, whereas Campus 2 reported greater intent to drink and actual drinking during Mardi Gras than Campus 1. Campus 1 reported greater norms during SPD than Campus 2, whereas Campus 2 reported greater norms during MG than Campus 1. Event-specific norms did not moderate the relation between event and student event-specific drinking.

Conclusion: Campuses with different event-specific traditions differed in intent to drink and actual event-specific drinking. Findings have important implications for campus-wide interventions and individual treatment.

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1. Introduction

Risky drinking and associated negative consequences among college students are more likely to occur during specific celebratory events (e.g., Spring Break, 21st birthday) (Del Boca, Darkes, Greenbaum, & Goldman, 2004; Greenbaum, Del Boca, Darkes, Wang, & Goldman, 2005; Neighbors et al., 2011). Yet, campuses may differ on drinking behaviors during specific events and campus differences may impact students' drinking during specific events. In fact, campus culture appears to impact some event-specific drinking (i.e., tail-gating parties and athletic events; Merlo, Ahmedani, Barondess, Bohnert, & Gold, 2011). Further,

although beliefs about other students' drinking (i.e., normative beliefs) are among the strongest predictors of college drinking (Borsari & Carey, 2001), few studies have investigated a possible interaction between event-specific normative beliefs and drinking during campus-specific celebratory events, specifically whether normative beliefs moderate the relationship between specific events and student drinking during specific events, such that students with greater event-specific normative beliefs would engage in more event-specific drinking (O'Grady, Cullum, Tennen, & Armeli, 2011). Although event-specific drinking may vary with regard to the event-specific normative beliefs and campus traditions regarding specific events, campus differences in normative beliefs regarding drinking during other specific events (i.e., events celebrated with different traditions across campuses) and the impact on event-specific drinking have not, to our knowledge, been examined.

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The current prospective study sought to extend prior work by comparing two campuses with different campus-wide traditions regarding St. Patrick's Day (SPD) and Mardi Gras (MG) (celebratory events that pose potential risk for heavy episodic college student drinking; Neighbors et al., 2007) on students' expectations regarding peers' intentions to drink (i.e., descriptive normative beliefs), students' intentions to drink, and students' drinking during these holidays. To test whether campuses drink more during campus-specific celebratory events than a universal celebratory event such as Spring Break (SB; Del Boca et al., 2004), SB was included as a within- and between-subjects holiday. We hypothesized that: (a) Campus 1 (C1), with strong SPD traditions, would intend to drink more per day during SPD than those at Campus 2 (C2), whereas students at C2, with strong MG traditions, would intend to drink more per day during MG than those at C1. The two campuses were not expected to differ on SB intentions; (b) C1 would actually drink more than C2 during SPD whereas C2 would actually drink more than C1 during MG; (c) C1 would report more drinking during SPD than MG or SB whereas C2 would report more drinking during MG than SPD or SB; (d) students at C1 would expect other students to drink more during SPD than those at C2, whereas students at C2 would expect students to drink more during MG than those at C1; and (e) event-specific normative beliefs would moderate the relationship between event and drinking such that students with greater event-specific normative beliefs would engage in more event-specific drinking.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The Institutional Review Boards at each campus approved this study. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

2.1.1. Campus 1 (C1)

Participants ($N = 265$) were undergraduate students from a Mid-west university (Table 1). This sample is representative of C1, which has a 3:1 male to female gender ratio and students are largely Caucasian.

C1 officially begins celebrating SPD 10 days prior to March 17th. Further, in October students begin selling SPD memorabilia (e.g., t-shirts) on campus, across from a life-size statue of St. Patrick, next to a sign counting down the “daze” until SPD (“days” appears intentionally misspelled). Classes are suspended for the two days prior to SPD but not for MG.

2.1.2. Campus 2 (C2)

Participants ($N = 305$) were undergraduate students from a large public university in southern Louisiana (Table 1). This sample is representative of psychology students at C2, the majority of whom are female and Caucasian.

Mardi Gras (French for “Fat Tuesday”) season includes a series of carnival celebrations (characterized by parades, parties, King Cakes, etc.) that take place between the Christian holidays Epiphany (January

6) and MG day (47 days before Easter). The school colors are thought to have derived from the purple, gold, and green that characterize MG. Celebrations in the region in which C2 is located culminate during the last week of the MG season. As a result, C2 suspends classes for 2.5 days on the week of MG but does not suspend classes for SPD.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses with research participation components. Participants completed two 30-minute sessions: Time 1 [T1] (1/30–2/10/12) occurred prior to MG (2/21/12), SPD (3/17/12), and Spring Break [SB] (at C1, 3/24–3/31/12; at C2, 4/7–4/14/12) and Time 2 [T2] occurred after these events (conducted 4/2–4/20/12). Participants earned 1/2 h of research participation credit for each time point. Participants who completed both sessions were entered into a \$100 cash prize raffle.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. The timeline followback (TLFB; Sobell & Sobell, 1992)

At T1, data were collected using a three month, prospective calendar similar to the standard retrospective TFLB: one assessed students' intent to drink, and one assessed expectations of how much students at their university would drink. At T2, a three month, retrospective TLFB assessed students' self-reported actual drinking during SPD, MG, and SB. Each campus received versions of the TLFB on which general events (e.g., Super Bowl), specific campus events (e.g., Career Fair day, university closures), and local events specific to each campus (e.g., parades) were labeled. The TLFB is a widely used, reliable, and valid measure of alcohol use (e.g., Sobell, Sobell, Klajner, Paven, & Basian, 1986).

2.3.2. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT; Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, & Grant, 2001)

The AUDIT is a 10-item questionnaire that assesses drinking frequency, quantity, and related problems during the past year. It has good validity and reliability among undergraduates (Fleming, Barry, & MacDonald, 1991; Kokotailo et al., 2004). Internal consistency in this sample was good ($\alpha = .80$). Total AUDIT score was used to compare groups at baseline. Item 3 on the AUDIT was used to assess frequency of consuming six or more drinks on an occasion (0 = *never*, 4 = *daily or almost daily*).

2.4. Data analytic strategy

Given that the celebratory periods for SPD and MG may vary by region, but that SB is typically a week-long event, we computed the average number of drinks per day over the 8-day period leading up to each event, including the event day. The 8-day period for SB was determined per campus calendar, beginning and ending on a Saturday.

First, independent sample *t*-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between campuses at Time 1. Given between-campus differences in gender and baseline heavy drinking (Table 1), these variables were included as covariates in all analyses.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for students at each campus.

	Campus 1	Campus 2	<i>F</i> or χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> or Cramer's phi
Six or more drinks ^a	1.51 (1.09)	1.17 (1.03)	3.26	.001	.32
Gender (% male)	67.55	16.72	152.63	<.001	.51
Drinking frequency	1.81 (1.24)	1.94 (1.07)	10.56	.212	.36
AUDIT score	8.08 (5.51)	7.10 (4.98)	2.78	.056	.19
Greek (% fraternity/sorority)	27.19	27.88	0.04	.852	.01
Race (% Caucasian)	73.58	79.34	2.63	.105	.07
Age	20.14 (2.67)	20.44 (4.14)	0.54	.322	1.18

^a Self-reported frequency of alcohol use as measured by Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) item #3 in which a score of 1 + indicates past-year heavy drinking (i.e., drinking six or more drinks on one occasion).

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