



Friend or foe: Personal use and friends' use of protective behavioral strategies and spring break drinking☆



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HIGHLIGHTS

- SHR and LS strategies were associated with increased use and consequences.
- Participants using MD strategies drank less and had fewer consequences.
- Friends' use of SHR strategies was related to increased participant drinking.
- Friends' use of SHR strategies was related to greater participant SHR strategy use.

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined associations between use of protective behavioral strategies (PBS) by college students and their friends and drinking-related outcomes during Spring Break (SB). Moreover, this study examined the influence of friends' own PBS use on participants' PBS use during SB. Participants included college students ($N = 694$) and their nominated friends ($N = 131$) who were part of a larger study of SB drinking. Data were collected via web-based surveys that participants and friends took after SB, which assessed SB PBS, drinking, and related negative consequences. Results indicated that higher levels of Serious Harm Reduction (SHR) strategies and Limiting/Stopping (LS) strategies were associated with increased consumption, higher likelihood of experiencing any consequences, and an increased number of consequences. A different pattern emerged for Manner of Drinking (MD) strategy use; participants utilizing higher levels of MD strategies drank less and had fewer consequences. LS and MD strategies used by the participant's friends appeared to have less of an impact on the participant's drinking outcomes. However, greater friends' use of SHR strategies was associated with increased alcohol use by the participant, but not with consequences. Greater friends' use of SHR strategies was associated with greater SHR strategy use by the participant. Friends' LS and MD strategies were not associated with participant drinking, consequences, or PBS. These findings highlight the potential utility of interventions that focus on drinking behaviors on specific high-risk occasions for those at risk as well as for their friends.

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1. Introduction

Social influences are among the strongest factors associated with college student drinking (Borsari & Carey, 2001). While findings suggest that friends may negatively impact an individual's drinking behavior, friends may also exert positive influences by reducing one's risks

from drinking. Protective behavioral strategies (PBS) are cognitive-behavioral strategies used to reduce or limit alcohol consumption and/or minimize related negative consequences (Martens et al., 2005). Many PBS inherently include or rely on friends to be a positive influence (e.g., having a friend let you know when you have had enough) or to help avoid situations that may have negative consequences (e.g., having a designated driver). The purpose of the present study was to examine whether PBS use by both participants and their friends on a given day of Spring Break (SB) influenced participants' drinking-related outcomes during SB, as well as the influence of friends' PBS use on participants' PBS use during SB.

College student SB is a weeklong vacation from classes and normal school responsibilities. SB is an event associated with high levels of alcohol use among college students (Beets et al., 2009; Goldman,

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Greenbaum, Darkes, Brandon, & Del Boca, 2011). In particular, students who go on SB trips with their friends drink more alcohol than those who do not go on trips with their friends during SB (Grekin, Sher, & Krull, 2007; Lee, Maggs, & Rankin, 2006; Patrick & Lee, 2012). During SB, friends can have an important influence on behavior. Furthermore, friends often discuss their SB drinking behavior in advance, and those who agree to engage in safer behavior do so, while those who agree to get drunk consume more alcohol (Patrick, Morgan, Maggs, & Lefkowitz, 2011).

College students use PBS to reduce or limit alcohol consumption and/or minimize related negative consequences. Over the past decade, a wealth of literature presenting cross-sectional findings has suggested that greater use of PBS is associated with lower alcohol consumption and fewer negative consequences (for a review see Pearson, 2013). More recently, a handful of studies have examined within-person associations between three types of PBS and drinking behavior. Lewis et al. (2012) examined the within-person association between PBS and 21st birthday drinking behavior and found that students used more limiting/stopping (LS) strategies (i.e., limiting number of drinks) and serious harm reduction (SHR) strategies (i.e., using a designated driver), and fewer manner of drinking (MD) strategies (i.e., drink slowly rather than gulp or chug) than usual on days they also engaged in heavier drinking and experienced more subsequent consequences. Findings also indicated that the most common PBS were all SHR strategies and that, for 21st birthday celebrations, students were motivated to use PBS that were likely to reduce the most severe consequences rather than those that reduced or limited their drinking. Another study conducted by Pearson, D'Lima, and Kelley (2013) used a daily diary approach and found significant within-person variation in PBS use over time. Findings indicated that within-person variation in SHR strategies predicted increased daily alcohol use, negative consequences, and positive consequences. Relatedly, within-person increases in LS strategies predicted increased daily alcohol use and positive consequences. However, on days when participants used more MD strategies than usual, they consumed less alcohol and experienced fewer positive consequences. Thus, both studies found within-person associations such that SHR and LS strategies were positively associated with alcohol consumption and related consequences whereas MD strategies were negatively associated with these outcomes.

While many of the PBS are to be used solely by the drinker, there are a number of strategies that include friends or peers (e.g., having a friend let you know when you have had enough, making sure you go home with a friend, avoiding drinking games, avoiding trying to keep up or out-drink others). Thus, several PBS either incorporate friends as a positive influence or involve avoiding situations when friends may have a negative influence, such as during drinking games. Qualitative research has also shown that friends can positively and negatively influence drinking by influencing responsible or irresponsible drinking (Barry & Goodson, 2012). The aim of this study was to examine whether PBS use by both participants and their friends on a given day during SB was associated with participants' drinking-related outcomes on the same day. We also aimed to examine the influence of friends' PBS use on participants' PBS use during SB.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedures

Participants for the present manuscript consisted of 694 undergraduate college students who intended to go on a SB trip, intended to drink heavily on at least one day during SB, and nominated at least one friend (up to three) to potentially participate in the study. Further, for a subsample of analyses (described below), there were 131 participant–friend dyads.

Participants were all part of a larger study examining the efficacy of multiple conditions of a SB-related brief alcohol intervention (Lee et al.,

2014); participants completed online screening and baseline surveys prior to SB, and an online survey of their drinking behavior one week after SB. Upon completion of the screening survey, participants were automatically randomized to one of six conditions: (1) in-person SB BASICS, (2) web-based SB BASICS, (3) in-person SB BASICS plus Friend Intervention, (4) web-based SB BASICS plus Friend Intervention, (5) General BASICS, or (6) Assessment-only Control (see Lee et al., 2014 for further details about interventions and primary study results). In brief, the design for the larger intervention study was a 2 (SB BASICS In-Person or Web-Based) \times 2 (Friend Intervention or No Friend Intervention) + 1 (General BASICS (not specific to SB)) + 1 (Control) design. All interventions were based on the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS), a personalized feedback intervention in which information from the baseline survey is piped into feedback (Dimeff, Baer, Kivlahan, & Marlatt, 1999). All Friend Interventions were web-based SB BASICS interventions, that is each friend received personalized web-based feedback about their own intended SB alcohol use. More detailed information about the friend interventions can be found in Lee et al. (2014).

Contact information for the initial random sample was provided by the Registrar's office and initial recruitment of 11,462 students was by a letter and email to complete an online screening survey to determine eligibility for the larger study. 783 students were eligible and invited to complete the baseline survey via the web, after which they were randomly assigned to either a control (no intervention) condition or to one of five intervention groups as described above. Students completed an additional survey one week post Spring Break. Students were compensated \$10 for screening and \$30 for baseline and 1 week follow-up surveys. The university Institutional Review Board approved all procedures.

The sample for the present analyses came from 797 undergraduate college students who reported on their daily SB alcohol use. For present analyses, we restricted the data set to focus only on drinking days (and thus days in which PBS are possible) between the Friday of the last day of classes through the Saturday prior to classes resuming for a total of 3517 participant-days across 694 participants. The final study sample of participants for this study was 57.1% female and included students between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 20.5$ years, $SD = 1.3$). Racial composition of the final sample was 68% White, 19% Asian American, 7% multiracial, and 6% other.

Participants who were randomized to the friend conditions (In-Person SB BASICS plus Friend Intervention, Web-Based SB BASICS plus Friend Intervention) had their friends contacted prior to SB. Friends that were previously listed at screening were invited to complete a survey and receive general tips about how to have a safe and fun SB. Friends of participants were contacted via email, completed a baseline and post-SB survey online and were compensated \$20 for each survey. More detailed information about study design, participant sample, interventions, and procedures can be found in Lee et al. (2014).

To examine the association between friends' use of PBS with participants' PBS use and alcohol outcomes, we utilized data in which we had reports from both participants and their friends, thus analyses examining friends' PBS use were restricted to a subsample of 131 (18.8%) participants with a total of 538 participant-days. This subset of participants was similar to the overall sample of participants with respect to each baseline characteristic (e.g., sex, age, typical drinking habits, intended PBS use), and SB behaviors with one exception—drinking tended to be slightly higher among the subgroup of participants (5.5 vs. 6.1 drinks on average per day per participant between the overall sample vs. the subset of participants). The intervention (all interventions vs. control) was controlled for in all analyses.

The following protocol was used to link data from participants and friends each day. We considered data linked if: (1) The participant answered yes to “Were you with friends?” on a given day, and (2) the participant's friend answered yes to “Were you with friends?” on the same day. If more than one (of up to three) friend was with the

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