



Short Communication

Drinking identity as a mediator of the relationship between drinking motives and weekly alcohol consumption among heavy drinking undergraduate students



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Drinking identity and motives are important in drinking.
- We evaluated drinking identity as a mediator of drinking.
- Drinking identity mediated the effect of motives on drinking.

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The present study assessed relationships among social, coping, enhancement, and conformity drinking motives and weekly alcohol consumption by considering drinking identity as a mediator of this relationship.

Methods: Participants were 260 heavy drinking undergraduate students (81% female; $M_{age} = 23.45$; $SD = 5.39$) who completed a web-based survey.

Results: Consistent with expectations, findings revealed significant direct effects of motives on drinking identity for all four models. Further, significant direct effects emerged for drinking identity on weekly drinking. Results partially supported predictions that motives would have direct effects on drinks per week; total effects of motives on drinking emerged for all models but direct effects of motives on weekly drinking emerged for only enhancement motives. There were significant indirect effects of motives on weekly drinking through drinking identity for all four models.

Conclusions: The findings supported the hypotheses that drinking identity would mediate the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol consumption. These examinations have practical utility and may inform development and implementation of interventions and programs targeting alcohol misuse among heavy drinking undergraduate students.

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1. Introduction

Drinking can be examined from a motivational perspective (Cooper, 1994; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005; Read, Wood, Kahler, Maddock, & Palfai, 2003) which suggests that individuals drink to enhance or mitigate outcomes (Cox & Klinger, 1988). Health behavior theory indicates that motives are important precursors to behavior (e.g., Edwards, 1954; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972) and four common drinking motives include: social, coping, enhancement, and conformity (Cooper, 1994). Motives are strongly linked with college drinking (e.g., Abbey, Smith, & Scott, 1993; Foster & Neighbors, 2013; Foster, Neighbors, & Prokhorov, 2014; Maggs & Schulenberg, 1998; Mohr

et al., 2005; Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, Wadsworth, & Johnston, 1996). Undergraduates frequently endorse enhancement and social motives, and these are often linked with heavier drinking (LaBrie, Hummer, & Pedersen, 2007; Lewis, Phillippi, & Neighbors, 2007). Conformity and coping motives are less frequently reported, but are consistently and more strongly associated with alcohol problems compared to social and enhancement motives (Kuntsche et al., 2005). Motives mediate the effect of alcohol expectancies on use (Williams & Clark, 1998), the effect of social anxiety on negative alcohol consequences (Villarosa, Madson, Zeigler-Hill, Noble, & Mohn, 2014), and the effect of bullying on drinking (Archimi & Kuntsche, 2014). Further, motives moderate the effect of ambivalence on drinking (Foster, Neighbors, & Prokhorov, 2014; Foster, Neighbors, & Young, 2014; Foster, Yeung, & Quist, 2014; Foster, Young, & Barnighausen, 2014) and the effect of posttraumatic stress disorder on drinking (Simpson,

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Stappenbeck, Luterek, Lehavot, & Kaysen, 2014). These associations and strengths thereof depend on motives. Thus, motives are strongly linked with increased drinking, and it is important to better understand this relationship and influencing factors.

One such factor is drinking identity (DI), described as the extent to which alcohol is viewed as a central part of the self (Conner, Warren, Close, & Sparks, 1999). The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that alcohol-related attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control conjointly impact intention to drink, which in turn influence alcohol behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Collins & Carey, 2007; Huchting, Lac, & LaBrie, 2008). Predictive validity improves with the incorporation of self-identity (e.g., Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988; Fekadu & Kraft, 2001; Pierro, Mannetti, & Livi, 2003; Smith et al., 2007), conceptualized as the salient part of the self related to a behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Individuals are motivated to maintain consistent self-views (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Steele, 1988), and engaging in identity-relevant behavior facilitates maintenance thereof. As such, alcohol-related identity may be a useful predictor of drinking.

DI has been linked with college drinking (Casey & Dollinger, 2007). Implicitly measured DI reliably and consistently predicts drinking (Foster, Neighbors, & Young, 2014; Gray, LaPlante, Bannon, Ambady, & Shaffer, 2011; Lindgren, Foster, Westgate, & Neighbors, 2013; Lindgren, Neighbors, et al., 2013). Explicit alcohol identity has also been linked with increased drinking (e.g., Reed, Wang, Shillington, Clapp, & Lange, 2007), which in turn is linked with more alcohol problems (e.g., Lindgren, Foster, et al., 2013). DI moderates the effect of individualism on alcohol problems (Foster, Yeung, et al., 2014), and also the effect of self-control on drinking (Foster, Young, et al., 2014). Thus, DI is linked with increased drinking, and likely increases the availability of alcohol in considering from a range of possible behaviors.

It stands to reason that the extent to which alcohol is viewed as part of the self is influenced by motivations for drinking. Moreover, individuals motivated to drink for various reasons may also be likely to drink as a function of viewing alcohol as part of the self. Put simply, it is likely that motives and DI intersect with respect to alcohol outcomes. The importance of drinking motives and DI with respect to alcohol use is clear, particularly among heavy drinking undergraduate populations which are at great risk for undesired or harmful alcohol consequences. As such, DI was examined as a mediator of the relationship between drinking motives and alcohol consumption. Hypotheses were: 1) Motives were expected to have direct effects on DI; 2) Motives were expected to have direct effects on alcohol use; and 3) Motives were expected to have indirect effects on alcohol use via DI.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants included 260 heavy drinking undergraduates (81% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 23.45$; $SD = 5.39$). Racial and ethnic distributions were as follows: 49.80% White/Caucasian; 1.19% Native American/American Indian; 13.04% Black/African American; 12.25% Asian; 0.79% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 7.51% multi-ethnic; and 15.42% 'other.' Further, 34.36% of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino. Participants had to be at least 18 years of age to be eligible, and met heavy drinking criteria if they reported having consumed four (if female) or five (if male) alcoholic beverages on one occasion in the past month. Recruitment occurred via email and classroom presentations. Participants accessed the survey online and received course extra credit as compensation. All study procedures were conducted in compliance with ethical standards of the American Psychological Association, and the protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the study site.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographics

Participants reported race/ethnicity, age, and gender.

2.2.2. Alcohol consumption

The Daily Drinking Questionnaire (Collins, Parks, & Marlatt, 1985; Kivlahan, Marlatt, Fromme, Coppel, & Williams, 1990), measures the number of drinks consumed on each day of the week in the past month. Scores represent the number of drinks consumed each week. Relative to other drinking indices, weekly drinking is a reliable index of problems among undergraduates (Borsari, Neal, Collins, & Carey, 2001). Cronbach's alpha was 0.71. The Quantity/Frequency Scale (Baer, 1993; Marlatt, Baer, & Larimer, 1995), a 5-item scale, provided an index of heavy drinking and asked respondents to indicate the number of drinks and hours spent drinking on a peak drinking event within the past month. Participants were asked to "Think of the occasion you drank the most this past month" and responded on a scale from 0 to 25+ drinks. Females reporting 4+, and males reporting 5+ drinks were considered heavy drinkers.

2.2.3. Drinking motives

The Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised (Cooper, 1994) was utilized to assess drinking motives. Respondents provided ratings on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never/Almost Never*) to 5 (*Almost Always/Always*) regarding 20 reasons why people drink. The measure yields four sub-scales: social (e.g., "Because it helps you enjoy a party"; $\alpha = .89$), coping (e.g., "To forget your worries"; $\alpha = .86$), enhancement (e.g., "Because you like the feeling"; $\alpha = .86$), and conformity (e.g., "Because your friends pressure you to drink"; $\alpha = .86$).

2.2.4. Drinking identity

DI was assessed using a 5-item measure adapted from the Smoker Self-Concept Scale (Shadel & Mermelstein, 1996) and assessed the degree to which alcohol was integrated with the self-concept via a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). An example item is "drinking is a part of 'who I am.'" Higher mean scores indicated a stronger belief that drinking was part of the self (Lindgren, Foster, et al., 2013). The scale was reliable (Lindgren, Neighbors, et al., 2013) and Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

3. Results

Analyses were conducted using SAS 9.3. The variable for gender was dummy-coded such that females received a 0 and males a 1.

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among major variables

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations. Weekly drinking was marginally correlated with social ($r = .12$, $p < .10$) and conformity motives ($r = .12$, $p < .10$), but significantly correlated with coping motives ($r = .13$, $p < .05$), enhancement motives ($r = .27$, $p < .001$), DI ($r = .33$, $p < .001$), and gender ($r = .24$, $p < .001$). DI was correlated with gender ($r = .16$, $p < .05$) and all of drinking motives: social ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), coping ($r = .34$, $p < .001$), enhancement ($r = .33$, $p < .001$), and conformity ($r = .22$, $p < .001$). All motives were correlated with each other (all p 's $< .001$).

3.2. Primary analysis

The PROCESS macro, model 4 (Hayes, 2012, 2013) was utilized with 10,000 bootstrap estimates for the construction of 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs; significant if not containing zero). Separate mediation models were constructed for each motive wherein motives influenced weekly drinking directly, as well as indirectly through identity (Fig. 1).

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