



Alcohol-related problems and life satisfaction predict motivation to change among mandated college students



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Life satisfaction and specific alcohol problems predicted motivation to change.
- Relationship between personal problems and motivation depends on social problems.
- Abuse/dependence symptoms and poor life satisfaction associated with motivation
- The nature of the relationship varies across levels of severity.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the role specific types of alcohol-related problems and life satisfaction play in predicting motivation to change alcohol use. Participants were 548 college students mandated to complete a brief intervention following an alcohol-related policy violation. Using hierarchical multiple regression, we tested for the presence of interaction and quadratic effects on baseline data collected prior to the intervention. A significant interaction indicated that the relationship between a respondent's personal consequences and his/her motivation to change differs depending upon the level of concurrent social consequences. Additionally quadratic effects for abuse/dependence symptoms and life satisfaction were found. The quadratic probes suggest that abuse/dependence symptoms and poor life satisfaction are both positively associated with motivation to change for a majority of the sample; however, the nature of these relationships changes for participants with more extreme scores. Results support the utility of using a multidimensional measure of alcohol related problems and assessing non-linear relationships when assessing predictors of motivation to change. The results also suggest that the best strategies for increasing motivation may vary depending on the types of alcohol-related problems and level of life satisfaction the student is experiencing and highlight potential directions for future research.

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1. Introduction

The majority of college students (64%) report consuming alcohol in the past month and nearly half (44%) report a binge episode during that time (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2009). Among college students who drink regularly, nearly half (47%) report experiencing five or more alcohol-related problems in the past year (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994). Research has focused on which factors lead to motivation to decrease alcohol consumption among college students, so that such factors can be incorporated into intervention efforts. Research on motivation to change has been influenced by the transtheoretical model (TTM), a theory introduced to explain how individuals progress toward behavior change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcorss, 1992). The TTM posits that motivation to change is an

important element of change; motivation is predictive of outcome, and different processes of change are hypothesized to be more appropriate or effective depending on the level of motivation. Motivation to change is hypothesized to increase when the perceived costs of a behavior outweigh the benefits.

Several studies have applied the TTM, and more specifically motivation to change, to college student drinking. Studies focusing on predictors of motivation to change have produced mixed results. For example, one study suggests that light drinkers who have experienced few problems report greater motivation to change (Barnett, Goldstein, Murphy, Colby, & Monti, 2006). However, a second study found that mandated students who experience more alcohol-related problems are more motivated to change their level of alcohol consumption (Shealy, Murphy, Borsari, & Correia, 2007); that study also indicated that motivation to change was related to low life satisfaction. Relatedly, life satisfaction has shown a consistent, negative relationship with alcohol-related problems (Molnar, Busseri, Perrier, & Sadava, 2009; Murphy, McDevitt-Murphy, & Barnett, 2005). These latter findings are

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consistent with the TTM's assertion that motivation to change increases as the costs of alcohol use increase, with costs operationalized in these specific studies as increased negative alcohol-related consequences and decreased life satisfaction.

The current study sought to further examine the relationship between alcohol-related problems, life satisfaction, and motivation to change patterns of alcohol use by replicating and extending the methodology used in Shealy et al. (2007). Two significant improvements have been implemented. First, Shealy et al. used single-factor measures to assess alcohol-related problems. However, several recent factor analytic studies using college student samples have shown that alcohol-related problems can be categorized into a number of dimensions (e.g., Maddock, Laforge, Rossi, O'Hare, 2001; Martens, Neighbors, Dams-O'Connor, Lee, & Larimer, 2007; Read, Kahler, Strong, & Colder, 2006). For example, the Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index, a commonly used measure of alcohol problems among college students, consists of three subscales: abuse/dependence symptoms, personal consequences, and social consequences (Martens, Neighbors, Dams-O'Connor, Lee, & Larimer, 2007). In addition, research suggests that college students do not perceive various alcohol-related problems to be equally aversive and that some outcomes labeled as problems by researchers may be perceived as neutral or even positive by college students (Mallett, Bachrach, & Turrissi, 2008; Mallett, Lee, Neighbors, Larimer, & Turrissi, 2006). Mallett et al. (2008) suggest that a student's perception of an alcohol-related problem likely influences the relationship between drinking outcomes and motivation to change. Stated more generally, the relationships between alcohol-related problems and motivation to change patterns of alcohol consumption may vary across types or categories of consequences. Indeed, a study of adults enrolled in treatment for alcohol use disorders reported that motivation to change was positively related to social and interpersonal consequences but inversely related to physical consequences (DiClemente, Doyle, & Donovan, 2009). The current study will explore similar relationships in a college student sample by using a multidimensional model of alcohol-related problems.

Further, whereas the Shealy et al. (2007) study investigated linear bivariate relationships among alcohol-related problems, life satisfaction, and motivation to change, the current study used a significantly larger sample than Shealy et al. (2007), which allowed for a more detailed analysis of the relationships among the variables. More specifically, interactions among alcohol-related problems and life satisfaction were probed to identify and describe moderation, and both linear and quadratic relationships were tested and described. Based on previous studies, we hypothesized that alcohol-related problems would be positively related to motivation to change, and that life satisfaction would be negatively related to motivation to change. The extant empirical literature does not allow for specific hypotheses regarding interactions and the potential for linear versus non-linear relationships.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were 548 students (78% male; M age = 20; 98% White) from a large southeastern university who were referred to participate in a brief alcohol intervention in response to a violation of the university's alcohol policy. All measures were collected as part of the intervention process, and the use of the data for the current research was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

2.2. Measures

Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins, Parks, & Marlatt, 1985) is an open-ended calendar in which participants report the average number of drinks they have consumed for each day of the week for the past 28 days, in addition to the amount of time they spent drinking on those

days. The DDQ was also used to measure the number of binge drinking episodes the student engaged in during the past 28 days. A binge episode was defined as five or more drinks for males and four or more drinks for females (Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Rimm, 1995). The DDQ has been shown to be reliable and valid among college students (Collins et al., 1985). In the current study the DDQ was used for descriptive purposes.

Rutgers Alcohol Problems Index (RAPI, White & Labouvie, 1989) is a 23-item screening measure that assesses the frequency of alcohol related problems among adolescents and young adults in the past 28 days. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from none (0) to over 10 times (4). Previous research with the RAPI has identified the scale as containing three distinct subscales: abuse/dependence symptoms (12 items; $\alpha = .65$) consist of severe consequences reflecting tolerance, personal changes and familial problems (e.g., *Had withdrawal symptoms, that is, felt sick because you stopped or cut down on drinking*); personal consequences (7 items; $\alpha = .63$) are negative outcomes that only affect the student drinking (e.g., *Neglected your responsibilities*); and social consequences (4 items; $\alpha = .68$) consist of consequences that affect the drinker, as well as those around him or her (e.g., *Got into fights, acted bad or did mean things*; Martens et al., 2007).

Readiness to Change Questionnaire (RTCQ; Rollnick, Heather, Gold, & Hall, 1992) is a 12-item questionnaire based on the transtheoretical model stages of change that measure motivation among alcohol users. All responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Principal component analysis has confirmed a three-factor structure corresponding to pre-contemplation, contemplation, and action among the 12 items (Rollnick et al., 1992). However, the current study treated the measure as a unitary scale that makes use of all 12 items. Previous studies have used the unitary scales with college students (Collins, Carey, & Otto, 2009; McNally & Palfai, 2001) and other populations of drinkers (Budd & Rollnick, 1996). The unitary scale had acceptable internal consistency with the current sample ($\alpha = .75$).

Temporal Satisfaction With Life Scale (TSWLS; Pavot, Diener, & Suh, 1998) is a self-report measure that was used to assess current life satisfaction. Participants endorsed their degree of life satisfaction on five items using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The TSWLS has demonstrated good psychometric properties among college populations (Murphy et al., 2005; Shealy et al., 2007). The internal consistency of this measure in the current study was adequate ($\alpha = .87$).

2.3. Data editing

A series of preliminary analyses were run to screen for missing data as well as potential outliers. We began with an initial sample of 590, and 42 subjects had missing values on one or more variables of interest. Independent sample t-tests suggested that there were no statistically significant differences between subjects with missing values and subjects with no missing values. Therefore, the subjects with missing values were deleted from the sample. The final sample size of data analyzed was 548. There were no outliers on the variables of interest.

2.4. Data analytic procedure

The present investigation was concerned with whether alcohol-related problems and life satisfaction were related to motivation to change alcohol-related behaviors, whether those relationships were interactive, and whether those relationships were constant at all levels of the variables (i.e., linear). To address these questions, a hierarchical multiple regression approach was employed. Following guidance from Aiken and West (1991), all predictor variables were initially centered at their means, quadratic terms were then created by squaring each of these centered variables, and six interaction terms were created by computing the products of all possible centered predictor pairs.

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