

Alcohol use, partner type, and risky sexual behavior among college students: Findings from an event-level study[☆]

Jennifer L. Brown¹, Peter A. Vanable^{*}

*Center for Health and Behavior, Department of Psychology, Syracuse University, 430 Huntington Hall,
Syracuse, New York 13244, United States*

Abstract

Alcohol use is prevalent among college students and may contribute to elevated rates of sexual risk taking. Using event-level data, the hypothesis that partner type would moderate the effect of alcohol consumption on condom use was tested. Sexually active college students ($N=330$; 67% female) reported on characteristics of their most recent sexual encounter, including partner type, alcohol use, and condom use, along with measures of sex-related alcohol expectancies, sensation seeking, and typical alcohol use. Unprotected vaginal sex (UVS) was reported by 39% of the sample and 32% reported alcohol use prior to sex. For the complete sample, UVS was just as likely for non-drinking events as for events involving alcohol use. However, for sexual encounters involving a non-steady partner, alcohol consumption was associated with an increase in UVS, whereas rates of UVS did not vary by drinking status for encounters involving a steady partner. These effects remained in analyses that controlled for sex-related alcohol expectancies, sensation seeking, and typical alcohol use. Findings confirm that the effects of alcohol vary according to the context in which it is used.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Alcohol; Partner type; Risky sexual behavior; Condom use; HIV

1. Introduction

Alcohol use is highly prevalent among college students and may contribute to elevated rates of sexual risk taking (Cerwonka, Isbell, & Hansen, 2000; Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002;

[☆] This work was supported in part by funds from a research development grant from Syracuse University, Department of Psychology and from NIMH grant R21-MH65865.

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 315 443 1210; fax: +1 315 443 4085.

E-mail addresses: jl brow03@syr.edu (J.L. Brown), pvanable@syr.edu (P.A. Vanable).

¹ Tel.: +1 315 443 1656; fax: +1 315 443 4085.

Perkins, 2002; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000). Indeed, an estimated 42% of college aged students engage in binge drinking (Wechsler et al., 2000), and as many as 400,000 college students have unprotected sex after drinking in a given year (Hingson et al., 2002). However, empirical research exploring the causal linkage of alcohol use to high risk sexual behavior has yielded mixed findings among college students (Anderson and Mathieu, 1998; Cooper, 2002) and other at-risk populations (Weinhardt and Carey, 2000). Global association studies that focus on overall patterns of alcohol use and high-risk sexual practices suggest a positive association between drinking and sexual risk behavior (for a review, see Dingle and Oei, 1997). In contrast, event-level studies that link alcohol use to sexual activity for specific encounters often show no difference in condom use for drinking versus non-drinking encounters (Desiderato and Crawford, 1995; Senf and Price, 1994; Temple and Leigh, 1992; Temple, Leigh, & Schafer, 1993). Clarifying the alcohol-risky sex linkage among young adults is of considerable public health importance. Approximately 12% of newly diagnosed cases of HIV in the United States occur among young adults between the ages of 15 and 24 (CDC, 2003). Furthermore, of the twelve million cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) diagnosed yearly, approximately four million cases are diagnosed in college-aged individuals (CDC, 2002; Rimsza, 2005). On college campuses in particular, date rape, sexual harassment, and unintended pregnancy are also pressing concerns, and alcohol use in sexual contexts may contribute to each of these outcomes (Abbey, 2002; Adams-Curtis and Forbes, 2004; Menard, Hall, Phung, Ghebrial, & Martin, 2003; O'Sullivan, Byers, & Finkelman, 1998; Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005).

To clarify the linkage of alcohol use to sexual risk taking, both laboratory and survey-based studies have sought to characterize the influence of individual and situational factors on alcohol use and sexual decision making. For example, beliefs about how alcohol affects sexual behavior, as well individual differences in a person's motivation to satisfy sensation seeking needs have been shown to influence the alcohol-risky sex relationship (for reviews, see Cooper, 2002, 2006; Dingle and Oei, 1997; George and Stoner, 2000; Kaly, Heesacker, & Frost, 2002; Weinhardt and Carey, 2000). The primary focus for the present study is to characterize the role of *partner type* as a potential moderator of the alcohol-risky sex association. Several studies suggest that the association of alcohol use to high risk sexual behavior may vary as a function of relationship characteristics (Cooper and Orcutt, 2000; Corbin and Fromme, 2002; Fortenberry, Orr, Katz, Brizendine, & Blythe, 1997; Seage et al., 1998; Testa and Collins, 1997). For example, Corbin and Fromme (2002) found that *relationship duration* moderated the effect of alcohol use on condom use among college students, with alcohol effects observed for first time sexual encounters, but not for encounters that occurred with the same partner later in the relationship. Similarly, in a within-subjects comparison of two sexual encounters, women were more likely to report having sex with new partners after drinking, relative to encounters that did not involve alcohol use (Testa and Collins, 1997). Other studies indicate that *partner type*, defined in terms of whether a partner is identified as "steady" versus "non-steady", influences the degree to which alcohol is associated with risky sex (Seage et al., 1998; Vanable et al., 2004). In an event level study involving men who have sex with men (MSM) from three U.S. cities, alcohol use prior to sex was strongly associated with unsafe sex, but only for heavy drinking encounters involving non-steady partners (Venable et al., 2004). Rates of risk behavior were identical for drinking and non-drinking occasions involving partners who were identified as primary partners (Venable et al., 2004). Of note, decisions about whether to drink or not were also found to be associated with partner type in the Venable et al. (2004) study, with alcohol use being nearly three times more prevalent for occasions involving a non-steady partner.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/900042>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/900042>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)