



The Drinking-Induced Disinhibition Scale (DIDS): A measure of three types of disinhibiting effects[☆]

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Abstract

Links between trait disinhibition and high-risk drinking are well established. It is also known that alcohol has disinhibiting effects. Nonetheless, there is no measure in the literature devoted exclusively to assessing disinhibiting effects of alcohol. The multidimensional Drinking-Induced Disinhibition Scale (DIDS) was developed as part of Study I, a prospective survey conducted with undergraduates ($N=337$). Study II, a cross-sectional survey ($N=260$), allowed for a confirmatory factor analysis and further validation of the measure through comparisons with an expectancies scale. The nine-item DIDS is comprised of three subscales assessing euphoric/social, dysphoric and sexual disinhibition. All three subscales had good internal consistency and adequate test–retest reliability. Convergent and discriminant validity were established in both studies. The subscales had different associations with high-risk drinking: sexual disinhibition predicted heavy episodic drinking; dysphoric disinhibition predicted alcohol-related problems and euphoric/social had associations with both. A cluster analysis revealed four distinct disinhibition profiles (i.e., low effect drinker; high euphoric/social only; high euphoric social and dysphoric; high euphoric/social and sexual), which predicted likelihood of high-risk drinking. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Trait disinhibition, typically sensation seeking, has been associated repeatedly with alcohol-related problems among undergraduates. For instance, [Justus, Finn, and Steinmetz \(2000\)](#) found that sensation seeking was correlated with both alcohol consumption and with risky sexual behavior. [Simons, Gaher, Correia, Hansen, and Christopher \(2005\)](#) found that sensation seeking correlated with alcohol-related problems although this association was mediated by enhancement motives (i.e., to experience pleasurable effects) for drinking. Longitudinally, tendencies toward disinhibition during childhood predict college-aged substance use ([Clark, Cornelius, Kirisci, & Tarter, 2005](#)).

It has been well established that addictive substances have disinhibiting effects in that they increase the salience of substance-related reinforcers and decrease ability to inhibit impulses ([Goldstein & Volkow, 2002](#); [Jentsch & Taylor, 1999](#); [Lyvers, 2000](#)). Findings from several studies suggest that alcohol-induced disinhibition is particularly relevant to undergraduate drinking behavior ([Leeman & Wapner, 2001](#); [Nagoshi, Noll, & Wood, 1992](#); [Wood, Nagoshi, & Dennis, 1992](#)). Unlike research on trait disinhibition, there has been little work that attempts to identify different types of disinhibiting effects or to relate disinhibiting effects to high-risk drinking patterns (e.g., alcohol-related problems, heavy episodic drinking). However, the expectancy of disinhibition has been positively correlated with frequency of intoxication ([Nagoshi et al., 1992](#)) and alcohol-related problems ([Wood et al., 1992](#)). Also, reports of drinking for the purpose of disinhibition have been found to have moderate associations with alcohol-related problems ([Labouvie & Bates, 2002](#)). These findings suggest that disinhibiting effects may be associated with high-risk drinking.

To date, no scales devoted exclusively to measuring alcohol-induced disinhibition have been published. Thus, there is also currently no means of assessing different types of alcohol-induced disinhibition. In a report from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism ([NIAAA, 1998](#)), behavioral disinhibition was identified as a topic requiring further research. In this same report, Finn urged researchers specifically “to capture the multidimensional nature of behavioral disinhibition.” The development of a scale to assess multiple types of alcohol-induced disinhibition would represent a step toward accomplishing this goal. Also, subscales assessing different types of disinhibition would allow for an examination of specific associations with alcohol-related problems and heavy episodic drinking.

Taking into consideration these gaps in the literature, we set out to develop the Drinking-Induced Disinhibition Scale (DIDS) with the intention that the novel measure would assess multiple types of disinhibiting effects of alcohol. In the present research, drinking-induced disinhibition was defined as behaviors, thoughts or feelings occurring while drinking that are typically restricted in one’s everyday, non-drinking life. Thus, a state of drinking-induced disinhibition should differ noticeably from one’s regular experiences and items for this measure were written in such a way as to make this contrast explicit.

Based on a review of the literature, four potential types of disinhibition were considered in the process of developing items for this novel measure. Items were created to assess disinhibition as euphoric or excitatory as it is traditionally considered (e.g., [Justus et al., 2000](#); [Wood et al., 1992](#)) and in contrast, items relating to dysphoric effects were also written to capture the experience of the “sad drunk”, who tends to express negative affect to a greater extent while drinking than in everyday life. Providing empirical support for the notion of the “sad drunk”, [Young, Laword, Feeney, Ritchie, and Noble \(2004\)](#) identified a subset of alcohol dependent patients who reported relatively strong expectancies of negative affect resulting from their drinking. According to a number of findings in the literature, heavy drinkers have been found to endorse expectancies that they will be more assertive after consuming alcohol (e.g., [Connors, O’Farrell, Cutter, &](#)

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