Gender Differences between Hooking up and Alcohol

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Abstract

College student alcohol consumption has many associated risky behaviors. For example, one issue in the college community is alcohol's role in "hooking up" behaviors. Hooking up is defined as engaging in physically intimate behaviors, ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, with no committed relationship or expectation of a future relationship[1]. Additionally, alcohol use is consistently associated with hooking up behaviors for both males and females[1]. However, male and female college students experience the outcomes of hooking up (both positive and negative) differently. Whereas women experience more negative outcomes, men tend to experience more positive outcomes[2], and the role of alcohol in hooking up is more prevalent for women than men[2]. Although the previous literature has established the long-term relationship between alcohol consumption patterns and hooking up, it is unknown if recent hook up experiences were alcohol-involved. To replicate the previous literature, the current study sought to determine the behavior of college students with regards to alcohol and hooking up. To extend the previous literature, the current study sought to examine gender differences with the amount of alcohol consumption and hook up encounters in the past week. Data for this study were collected via an online survey. A total of 454 college students at a Midwestern university participated (72.2% female and 24.7% male). An independent-samples t-test compared the alcohol consumption and hook up encounters for males and females. There was a significant difference between males and females for alcohol consumption and hooking up. Males reported drinking more days per week and consuming more drinks in a typical drinking day than females. Males and females both reported hooking up at least once in a typical week, but males reported having more hook up encounters than females. However, the number of hook up partners for males and females was not significantly different. Future intervention efforts could potentially tailor materials to gender. Messages could address recent alcohol consumption and number of hook up encounters since recent behaviors are more predictive of future behavior, according to the health behavior change theory.

Keywords: Alcohol, Hooking Up, Gender

1. Introduction

Alcohol consumption at the collegiate level continues to be a problem across the nation, regardless of the size, location, and prestige of the institution. It is estimated that each year, approximately 1,825 students at the collegiate level die from drinking excessively[3]. Excessive alcohol use across the nation is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death[4]. In addition, universities spend a great deal of money covering costs for the effects from alcohol consumption. For example, hospitalization procedures from alcohol related blackouts cost universities approximately $500,000 per year[5]. Other expenses cover costs such as repairing damage done by students who were intoxicated, misconduct violations, and more. Furthermore, a large portion of college students are underage, so consuming alcohol puts many college students at risk of getting into legal trouble.

   Previous literature indicates that females and males differ in the amount of alcohol they consume from week to week[8]. Many studies suggest that males tend to drink more alcoholic beverages than females[8]. This is mainly

because males and females differ in their body composition, so males have a higher tolerance for alcohol, thus causing them to drink larger quantities[8]. Males drink more days of the week than females, and they drink more drinks on a typical drinking day than females[9]. Because of this, alcohol could have a bigger effect on males than females in terms of their behavior.

A method for examining alcohol consumption is readiness to change. Readiness to change your alcohol consumption is commonly assessed using the Transtheoretical Model. The Transtheoretical Model is an intentional health behavior change model that is used to describe behavior, predict behavior, and build health behavior change interventions. According to the Transtheoretical Model[7], there are five stages or readiness of change. The earliest stage, Precontemplation, is distinguished as not thinking about changing one's behavior. People in this stage might even deny that they have a problem. The next stage, Contemplation, is when you think about changing your drinking behavior some time far in the future (e.g., planning to stop binge drinking when you graduate). The third stage, Preparation, is thinking about stopping your drinking behavior in the near future. The time frame for Precontemplation is normally considering the change in the next month. The next stage, Action, consists of people who have recently changed their behavior (e.g., recently stopped drinking). Finally, those in Maintenance have changed their behavior long ago (classified as 6 months or longer).

Alcohol consumption has several associated risky behaviors, such as hooking up. Hooking up is defined as engaging in physically intimate behaviors, ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, with no committed relationship or expectation of a future relationship[1]. Amongst students between the ages of 18 and 24, an estimated 400,000 students have had unprotected sex, and of these students, 100,000 reported being too intoxicated to know if they gave consent to sexual intercourse[6]. Alcohol use is consistently associated with hooking up behaviors for both males and females[1]. However, male and female college students experience the outcomes of hooking up (both positive and negative) differently. Whereas women experience more negative outcomes, men tend to experience more positive outcomes, and the role of alcohol in hooking up is more prevalent for women than men[2].

Additionally, previous literature suggests that males and females obtain different reputations for their hookup encounters[10]. Typically, males are seen positively if they hook up with more than one female in a week while females are seen negatively if they hook up with more than one male in a week[7]. Females are seen as promiscuous if they sleep around while males are seen as alphas[11]. In a study that interviewed fraternity men on their hookup experiences, the males acknowledged the difference in reputations for males and females[11]. Furthermore, the men interviewed viewed sex as a game and used words such as "home run" and "score" to describe it and saw themselves as "winners" if they had sexual encounters with females[11].

To replicate the previous literature, the current study sought to determine how many drinks college students have on a typical drinking day and how many days a week college students consume alcohol. It also sought to determine how many hookup encounters college students have had in the past week and with how many partners. By interpreting these results, the questions posed in this study can be answered. To extend the previous literature, the current study sought to examine gender differences with the amount of alcohol consumption and hook up encounters in the past week. By seeing the gender differences, it can be determined who future interventions should be tailored to. It is expected that alcohol plays a larger role in hooking up for females than males, and it is also expected that males will be less ready to change their alcohol consumption and hook up behaviors. The current study had the following research questions: 1. Do males and females differ in their amount of alcohol consumption and hook up encounters in the past week, and 2. Do males and females differ across their readiness to change their alcohol consumption.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The current study surveyed college males and females ($n = 454$, 74.2% female); most reported being Caucasian (87.0%). The students were from a Midwestern university, and the mean age was 20.63 ($SD = 1.38$). Approximately 78.0% of those surveyed came from homes where their parents were still married. The participants also came from high-income families, with 17.8% having an income of above $200,000. Most reported being completely heterosexual (87.4%), and 68.7% reported having had sexual intercourse before (vaginal or anal).

2.2 Procedure

The authors' Institutional Review Board at Miami University approved all procedures before the start of the study. Data was collected via an online survey in the Fall of 2010. Participants were invited to take the survey by email via the snowball method. The survey used Prezza Checkbox via the university's firewall.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 alcohol consumption

Using standard measures in the alcohol literature, the survey provided the definition of a standard drink and asked the following questions: Have you ever had an alcoholic beverage to drink (more than a sip or taste)? (response options: yes or no); At what age did you have your first drink?; In a typical week, on how many days did you have at least one drink containing alcohol?; How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking? During the last 30 days, what is the highest number of drinks that you consumed on any one occasion?; Think back to the last month. How many times have you consumed 5 or more drinks in one day? (response options: never, once, 2-3 times, 4-6 times, 7 or more times).

2.3.2 stages of change for drinking behavior

To determine the readiness to change, a single question was asked based on the Transtheoretical Model[7]. The question was: In the last month have you had 5 or more (for males) or 4 or more (for females) drinks in a row? The responses showed how ready the participant was to modify their drinking habits. "Yes, and I do not intend to stop drinking 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row" reflected Precontempation, "Yes, but I intend to stop drinking 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row during the next 6 months" reflected Contemplation. "Yes, but I intend to stop drinking 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row in the next 30 days" reflects the Preparation stage. "No, but I have had 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row in the past 6 months" reflects the Action stage. "No, and I have not had 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row in the past 6 months" reflects the maintenance stage. "No, I have never had 5 or more (4 or more) drinks in a row" reflects someone who is not a binge drinker.

2.3.3 hooking up behavior

With regards to hooking up behavior, the survey asked the following questions: During the past week (past 7 days), how many different sexual encounters did you have?; During this week (past 7 days), did you "hook up" with anyone? (response options: yes or no), and if yes, how many times?; How many different hookup partners did you have in the past 7 days?; How do you define "hooking up"?; Have you ever had sexual intercourse (vaginal or anal)? (response options: yes or no); How many sex partners have you had?

3. Results

In a sample of males and females from a Midwestern mid-sized university, the drinking levels and hookup behaviors of students were examined. Additionally, their readiness to change their behavior was observed. By performing an independent-samples t-test, alcohol consumption and hook up behaviors for males and females were compared. It was found that there was a significant difference between males and females for alcohol consumption and hooking up. Males reported drinking more days per week and consuming more drinks in a typical drinking day than females. Males and females both reported hooking up at least once in a typical week, but males reported having more hook up encounters than females. However, the number of hook up partners for males and females was not significantly different.

It was found that the average number of females that had a hookup encounter in the past week was 1.67 ($SD = 0.47$) and the average number of males was 1.63 ($SD = 0.49$), t(454)=2.55, p=0.11. Of that, females reported hooking up an average of 1.57 different times ($SD = 2.23$) while males reported 2.21 ($SD = 2.63$) different times,

t(454)=4.88, p=0.03. Females also reported an average of 0.61 (*SD* = 0.52) different partners while males had an average of 0.72 (*SD* = 0.66) different partners, t(454)=1.82, p=0.18.

The average number of days per week that females reported drinking was 1.74 (*SD* = 1.19) and for males was 2.42 (*SD* = 1.58), t(454)=13.7, p<0.001. The average number of drinks on a drinking occasion reported for females was 3.65 (*SD* = 2.56) and for males was 5.57 (*SD* = 3.94), t(454)=37.5, p<0.001. The average peak drinking occasion in the past 30 days was reported to be 6.27 (*SD* = 6.70) for females and 10.83 (*SD* = 6.56) for males, t(454)=8.17, p<0.001.

It was also found that the majority of the participants were at the Precontemplation stage for readiness to change. 46.5% (*SD* = 2.11) of the participants indicated that they have practiced behaviors that reflect binge drinking and do not intend to stop binge drinking.

4. Discussion

This study was designed to show the gender differences between hooking up and alcohol. While previous studies have found that alcohol does indeed play a role in hooking up amongst college students, this study sought to extend the previous literature by looking at the differences between male and female alcohol consumption and hook up behaviors as well as their readiness to change their alcohol consumption behavior. This study is unique because few studies have used the Transtheoretical Model[7] to look at college students' readiness to change their behavior.

In analyzing the data and results, it can be seen that our findings are consistent with previous literature. College students who reported drinking alcoholic beverages also reported hooking up in the past week. It furthered previous literature by finding that both males and females reported hooking up at least once in a typical week, but males reported having more hook up encounters than females. However, the number of hook up partners for males and females was not significantly different.

As in any study, there were limitations. Since the method of the study was a survey, the students might not have answered the questions truthfully in fear of getting into legal trouble. Additionally, the students might not have correctly remembered the answers to the questions, so the data could have been falsified. The survey only looked at hook up behaviors amongst college students from the past week. This is a limitation because one week may not have reflected the typical behavior of the students. The population that was surveyed was rather homogeneous in ethnicity and race. This is a limitation because the data was not obtained from a wide variety of students. Lastly, there was an unequal distribution of males and females in the data, thus causing the data to be skewed.

Overall, this study imitated and extended previous literature. It showed that males and females differ in their alcohol consumption and hook up behaviors. Also, it showed that most college students, regardless of gender, are not ready to change their behavior. Because of the results, future interventions could be tailored to male college students. Future interventions could target hooking up behaviors in males since the males in the current study tended to hook up more frequently than the women in the study. Future interventions could also target both male and female college students' unwillingness to change their drinking behaviors. It is important to understand these results in order to decrease the negative consequences that alcohol brings, such as death. These results can help lessen the issue of alcohol consumption amongst college students.

5. Acknowledgements

6. Cite References

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