

Parents Involved in Their Child's Life? I'll Drink to That!¹

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The purpose of this study was to discover whether alcohol consumption among college students is related to parent-student relationships. Data were collected through a survey administered to 33 college students. Variables included amount of alcohol consumed, parent-contact minutes per week, self-reported openness with parents, and academic year. The findings support the need for college campuses to be more involved in the drinking habits of resident students. In addition, the relationship between students who are emotionally closer to their parents and alcohol consumption was assessed. This study provides insight into the association between alcohol consumption patterns among college students and the parent-student relationships they enjoy in college.

Introduction

Excessive alcohol consumption has been a well-known problem with college students for a long time. This is an important topic on which to conduct research because over consumption of alcohol can have a negative effect on the lives of college students. There are many apparent reasons for college students to drink alcohol. These include stress, self-esteem, and peer pressure. Because excessive drinking in college can affect grades, relationships, and futures, it is important to understand why college students over indulge in alcohol in order to identify possible solutions to this problem. Although many direct causes for excessive drinking have been identified, including things such as self-esteem (Glindemann, Gellar, and Fortney, 1999), it is also important to research possible indirect causes.

The relationship between self-esteem and alcohol consumption in a college setting was examined by Glindemann et al (1999). The researchers measured the students' individual levels of intoxication at a fraternity party, and assessed their self-esteem at a later date. The alcohol was measured with a breathalyzer. In order to measure self-esteem, an inventory consisting of 12 questions, which were related to one's self-esteem, was used. The results showed that students with lower levels of self-esteem were significantly

more intoxicated than students with higher levels of self-esteem (Glindemann, et al., 1999).

Korn and Maggs (2004) examined the relationship between diffidence (high levels of loneliness and introversion and low levels of self-esteem) and alcohol consumption among undergraduate college students. College students with lower self-esteem were more likely to drink than students with higher self-esteem because they believed that the effects of alcohol would make them feel more comfortable in social situations and act with a more extroverted personality (Korn & Maggs, 2004).

Because alcohol use and self-esteem are related, it is likely that alcohol consumption may be related to other aspects that affect self-esteem. For example, if the quality of a parent-child relationship affects the self-esteem of the child, alcohol consumption of the child could also be affected.

Parker and Benson (2004) examined relationships between parents and adolescents and self-esteem, substance abuse, and delinquency. Four areas were examined: parental support, construct of parental monitoring, adolescent outcomes, and gender, race, and socioeconomic status were grouped into one area. The hypothesis was that support and monitoring would be associated with higher self-esteem and less risky

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behavior during adolescence (Parker & Benson, 2004). Parker and Benson (2004) found that parental support was associated with high self-esteem. Parental support was not as strongly related to more serious problems in adolescents like cocaine use, however, the relationship was still significant. In general, high parental support was associated with positive outcomes. The strongest relationship with high parental support was high self-esteem in adolescents. Also, high parental support was associated with less substance and alcohol abuse in the adolescents (Parker & Benson, 2004). It seems likely that the relationship between high parental support and high self-esteem continues on throughout adolescence, college experience, and into adulthood. The current study attempts to show support for the continuance of the negative correlation between parental support and substance abuse throughout college.

The current research was designed to examine whether. The research reviewed (Glindemann, et al., 1999) supports the hypothesis that people with lower self-esteem are likely to consume more alcohol than people with higher self-esteem. It was also shown that people with lower self-esteem drank more because it allowed them to feel more comfortable in social situations (Korn & Maggs, 2004). Research (Parker & Benson, 2004) also supports the hypothesis that parental support for young adults is positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with substance abuse. Therefore, it is expected that students who talk to their parents more often and who talk to their parents about their friends, classes, and what they do in their free time, will report consuming less alcohol than students who do not talk to their parents as often, or about these topics.

Method

Participants

In the present study, 33 college-aged students (16 women, 17 men) enrolled in an undergraduate psychology class at a small private university in western Pennsylvania participated for course credit.

Design

A correlational design was used to examine the relationship between emotional closeness to

parents and self-reported amount of alcohol consumed each week. These variables were measured using a self-report survey.

Materials

The surveys used in the current study consisted of three general demographic questions which included the sex of the participant, if they commuted to school, and their current year of college. In addition, eleven specific questions concerning the participants' relationships with their parents and the amount of alcohol they consumed were listed. See the appendix for a copy of the survey.

Procedure

The surveys were handed out to the participants at the beginning of class. They were asked to read the directions and fill out the survey as honestly as possible. Once the participants filled out the surveys, they returned them to the course instructor. The surveys took about five minutes to complete and all participants were informed that their responses to the surveys were anonymous.

Results

Correlational analyses were performed on the variables Sex of student; Number of times speaking with parents per week; Number of minutes speaking to parents; Number of alcoholic beverages consumed in a typical night; Number of alcoholic beverages consumed in a typical week; Number of days the student drinks per week typical week; How well parents know students'; Likelihood of student speaking to parents about friends; Likelihood of student speaking with parents about school; How often the student tells parents about daily plans; and How likely the student will go to a bar or party where alcohol will be served per typical weekend.

As can be seen in Table 1, with few exceptions, the analyses resulted in non-significant relationships (all p 's > .05). The only significant findings were those that have already been identified in the literature or that do not seem very surprising. For example, males were found to drink more per night than females, $r(31) = .38, p < .05$, and females spoke with their parents for longer amounts of time than males, $r(31) = -.45, p < .05$.

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Table 1. Correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	1.0											
2	.06	1.0										
3	-.45	-.08	1.0									
4	-.18	.75	.34	1.0								
5	.38	.25	-.03	.17	1.0							
6	.43	.06	-.22	-.01	.80	1.0						
7	.27	.13	-.16	.10	.55	.75	1.0					
8	-.14	.04	.33	.20	.22	.13	.01	1.0				
9	-.27	.21	.30	.29	.23	.09	.09	.79	1.0			
10	-.20	.29	.25	.32	-.09	-.16	-.16	.21	.24	1.0		
11	-.41	.33	.37	.39	-.10	-.23	.05	.34	.38	.42	1.0	
12	-.06	.16	-.08	.18	.56	.55	.62	-.05	.13	-.07	.19	1.0

(1=Sex, 2=Spk w/ Parents, 3=Convo lasts, 4=Min/Wk, 5=#/ night, 6=#/ wk, 7=# days, 8=Par know friends, 9=Spk w/ par abt friends, 10=Spk w/ Par about sch, 11=Tell par plans for day, 12=Go to bar >1/wknd)

Discussion

Research has shown support for the positive correlation between lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of alcohol consumption in college students (Glindemann, et al., 1999). A positive correlation between diffidence and alcohol consumption has also been supported by past research (Korn & Maggs, 2004). Finally, a positive correlation between high self-esteem and high parental support in adolescents. Because of this research, I hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between emotional closeness with parents and the amount of alcohol consumed by college students.

The data collected for the present study do not significantly support my original hypothesis that college students who are emotionally closer to their parents consume less alcohol than students who are not as emotionally close to their parents. The only significant relationships supported by the current study have either been shown in previous research or seem straightforward (unsurprising).

One possible weakness of the present study that should be addressed is to acquire data from a much larger sample. Considering some of the responses written on the surveys, it seems likely that some participants had not taken the study seriously enough, since the responses seemed extremely unlikely in certain cases (e.g., talking to parents for 40 hours a week). A larger sample would likely decrease the extent to which such outlier responses affect the predicted relationships, assuming any actually exist.

Therefore, future research on this topic should use a much larger sample of participants. It might also be helpful to consider a different setting for participants to take part in the survey (i.e., classroom groups might not be the ideal setting for students to reveal personal behaviors). Also, the researcher might encounter more cooperative participants if they are asked to come on their own time to complete the survey, as opposed to taking it during class. However, this could also affect the study if the researcher wanted to survey all types of college students as not all types of students are likely to be willing to take time to complete a survey outside of class.

References

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- Korn, M.E., & Maggs, J. L. (2004). Why drink less? Diffidence, self-presentation styles, and alcohol use among university students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33*(3), 201-211.
- Parker, J. S., & Benson, M. J. (2004). Parent-adolescent relations and adolescent functioning: Self-esteem, substance abuse, and delinquency. *Adolescence, 39*(155), 519-531.

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Appendix

THIS SURVEY IS FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY.

ALL RESPONSES WILL BE COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.

For each of the following three questions, please circle the word that best describes you:

1- **Sex:** Male Female

2- **Living Arrangements:** Commuter Resident

3- **Academic Year:** Frsh Sph Jr Sr

Read the following statements and fill in the blank spaces with a number that best completes each statement regarding your life.

4. In a typical week, I speak with my parents ____ times.

5. When I speak with my parents, our conversations last, on average, ____ minutes.

6. On a night that I am drinking, I usually consume about ____ alcoholic beverages.

7. In a typical week, I consume ____ alcoholic beverages.

8. Typically, I would consume alcohol ____ days out of the week.

9. Circle all the days you would consume alcohol in a typical week:

Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri Sat Sun

Read the following statements and circle a number on the scale to the right that most accurately reflects how true the statement is regarding your life. 1 means not accurate and 5 means very accurate.

10. My parents know most of my friends.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Accurate Very Accurate

11. I speak with my parents about my friends.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Accurate Very Accurate

12. I speak with my parents about school.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Accurate Very Accurate

13. Most of the time, I tell my parents my plans for the day.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Accurate Very Accurate

14. I try to go to the bar or party where there will be alcohol at least once a weekend.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Accurate Very Accurate