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## **Introduction**

Alcohol abuse on college campuses is a growing concern in which many studies have been conducted in order to find connections between alcohol abuse and various factors that play a role. Our study looks at four distinct variables that we aim to uncover whether or not they have an effect on alcohol abuse on college students. The variables we look at are, peer pressure, pleasure, self-image, and stress and how they relate to attitude. Secondary research aided our study asfor it was able to help us define the variables and understand what studies have previously been done on the topic. Moreover, this study looks to find a correlation between the mentioned variables and college alcohol consumption.

## **Literature Review**

### **Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure is the influence from members of one's peer group. One's peer group is your friends, peers who are people of your age or close to it who have experiences and interests similar to yours (Lyness). Peer pressure it is also referred to as peer influence or social influence, in these situations you adopt a type of behavior, dress, or attitude in order to be accepted in the group of your equals. Peer pressure can be both a negative or positive thing depending on several factors. Positive influence can come from those around you if that is the type of group you associate with. On the other side of things negative influences can also come from those around you. It depends on that person's decisions and what they think is good and bad for them.

Peer pressure often times occurs when you may not want or consider doing something because you don't want to feel left out or alone. Instead of doing what you want you go along with the crowd to avoid being an outlier. There are several different forms of peer pressure that can occur, direct, indirect or individually. If someone is directly peer pressuring you they are

simply telling you what to do. Indirect peer pressure may occur when you are with a group of friends and they are doing something that you would rather not do, but you do it anyways. Lastly, individual peer pressure is within yourself. If you are altering yourself to try and fit into a group of people you are pressuring yourself to fit in (ReachOut).

Alcohol and peer pressure have had an ongoing correlation with each other since the beginning of time. Peer pressure has a major influence on alcohol among adolescents and young adults. Increased exposure to peers who encourage antisocial, risky and unhealthy behaviors usually participate in behaviors such as alcohol use. Even though this negative pressure can influence alcohol use, susceptibility to these influences differ between each and every person. These susceptibilities vary based on the individual's characteristics and genetics. Someone who has high self-esteem with genetics that do not include an alcoholic background may be less susceptible to these negative influences. Compared to someone who has low self-esteem, participates in risky behavior or has a family history of alcoholics. Peer influence can also occur through active and passive pressure. Active pressure happens when you are offered an opportunity to participate in. Passive pressure is when your peers are behaving in a role model way that you feel the need to participate in (Griffin).

Our hypothesis is that peer pressure has a direct relationship with alcohol consumption. All of these examples are ways in which peer pressure affects people's decisions on consuming alcohol. When an individual has a group of peers that they socialize with often times they conform to what the group does. Even if the group is not directly forcing or telling the individual to consume alcohol they feel passively pressured to do so. If not they are the outlier of the group and will feel alone or left out. For these reasons peer pressure is a large part as to why so many college students participate in this kind of behavior.

## **Pleasure**

Pleasure is a feeling of happiness or satisfaction that occurs when someone is doing something for their enjoyment. There are many different ways people can achieve pleasure and the feeling itself can be different for each person. Pleasure may be searched for by a person for many different reasons. The phenomenon is based around many different aspects that differ from person to person depending on the likes and dislikes of each individual. Many people have different interests which in turn lead to different ways of finding pleasure. Since there are so many differences between what some people may find pleasurable compared to others it can be broken into categories.

These categories range from simple pleasures to value pleasures in which some start out as small moments of happiness and escalate to larger more valued pleasures. These smaller moments can come from scenarios such as seeing your favorite sports team score while a more valued pleasure comes overtime after working towards a goal. Small pleasures happen more frequently, but don't reach the same measure as valued pleasures, which happen less often. Valued pleasure come from achieving a goal that was set in the past and finally fulfilled through completing tasks (Flicke, 2013).

Alcohol and pleasure can be seen to have a strong correlation as there are many scenarios in which the two connect. The feeling achieved by consumption of alcohol has been described as pleasure many times and those who do drink are sometimes seen as pleasure seekers. This search for pleasure through alcohol can come from being in either a good or a bad mood making it a more common scenario. Having a good time with friends and including alcohol to enhance the overall experience is an example of being in a good mood and still searching for pleasure. When a person or group is going through a rough time they may consume alcohol to worry less about

their misfortune is an example of seeking pleasure while in a bad mood. This correlation can be seen in many different scenarios as described making it stronger and more relevant (Hollinger, 2008).

Pleasure seeking is the search for amusement or enjoyment, but can also be seen as a self-empowering search. This relates to alcohol because not only do people search for pleasure through consuming alcohol, but also in the events of which they do when under the influence. The care-free attitude that often comes along with the consumption of alcohol can be seen to lead people to act in numerous ways. These acts are normally conducted in order to seek out a certain pleasure or amusement, which looks more into the pleasure seeking phenomenon.

Our hypothesis on this topic is that the relationship between alcohol and pleasure will be strong and clear. Through the questions that will be asked on our survey finding this correlation will be easier to understand and discover. Our research will ask important questions to distinguish this correlation and look at what may be the source of it. There are many different examples where these two topics relate, but through the research the hope is to clarify and gain a better understanding of how the two may or may not connect.

### **Self-Image**

Self-image is the way in which individuals view themselves and how they perceive others view them. Being aware of one's self-image is important because it allows us to understand our attitudes and behaviors. Both internal and external factors play large roles in the development of one's self-image. Internal factors include feelings that the individual has towards people, things, and themselves. External factors are based on cues from the environment around the individual. One's self-image is subject to change based on experiences and encouragement from others. It is possible for one's attitude to be changed if there is suggestions from others for them to change

their behaviors (Greenbert & Murphy, 2016). Moreover, self-image is first based on the individual's feelings, however, self-image is subject to changed based on both internal and external factors.

The study discussed in the article *Drinking and Desired Self-Images: Path Models of Self-Image Goals, Coping Motives, Heavy-Episodic Drinking, and Alcohol Problems* by Scott Moeller and Jennifer Crocker aimed to find a connection between an individual's self-image goals and alcohol consumption. The article specifically states that it "investigated whether two interpersonal goals, self-image goals and compassionate goals, relate to drinking motives, heavy-episodic drinking, and alcohol-related problems" (Moeller & Crocker, 2009). In this study, self-image goals related to individual's hoping to maintain positive self-images. More specifically, these goals could be academically related or socially related. The study aimed to find whether or not those who are more self conscious of their image become heavy alcohol drinkers. This research was conducted on 359 undergrad students from a large Midwestern University. The study asked participants specifically about their self-image in relation to both academics and social life. Common answers included getting into the business school and making many friends. These two factors were the most important when it came to the self-image goals of the participants. The study found that self-image goals, such as the ones mentioned, are related to alcohol-related problems. The study used a model to show the relationship of image-goals to coping methods, to heavy episodic drinking, finally to alcohol-related problems. Overall, the study found that the model is accurate and sometimes there is even a direct path from image-goals to alcohol-related problems (Moeller & Crocker, 2009).

This is just one example of one study that shows the correlation between self-image and alcohol abuse. Unfortunately, it is clear that factors such as academic goals and social goals play

a large role in one's self-image and causes many individuals to develop alcohol-related problems. Our study aims to look deeper into how self-image has an effect on alcohol abuse in college students. To find any correlation, we will have participants fill out a questionnaire that will directly ask questions that relate to their self-image and drinking. Our study hopes to draw further conclusions as to why many college students decide to drink alcohol.

### **Stress**

Stress is a response humans have when responding to pressure or threat. In response to stress our bodies trigger a response in the form of adrenaline that affects our nervous system. Stress can be triggered by everyday struggles like school and work, or can be triggered through a response to danger, called a fight-or-flight response (Lyness, 2016).

Stress is a common trigger that people deal with on a day to day basis. This fits in with alcohol abuse in more ways than one. As a reaction to stress, people can often turn to alcohol in order to hinder their senses, making them temporarily forget about the stress that they are experiencing. This can be very common amongst college students because the stress to succeed can be very overwhelming to some students, this is one of the many reasons why college students in particular may turn to alcohol as a dependency. If an addiction is built up over time from drinking alcohol, stress can also be a factor. While alcoholism affects different people in different ways, stress is a common side effect people generally receive when they do not consume alcohol over a given period of time. These are just a few reasons as to why alcohol and stress have a close relationship with people (Mphele, 2013).

Another factor among stress as it relates to alcohol abuse is the age and year of the college student. As a college student progresses in school the workload and assignments for that student generally get more extensive and more difficult. As the students work load increases,

chances of the students stress level are also prone to increase. As the students stress increases, the chance of using alcohol as a coping method for the stress also increases. In extreme cases this can cause an addiction to alcohol (Mphele, 2013). Our study aims to look deeper into the correlation of stress as it relates to alcohol abuse in order to create a well rounded study surrounding all aspects of alcohol abuse among college students. Through our questionnaire and data collection we aim to see how stress affects college students.

### **Attitude**

Attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something normally through a person's behavior. How and why people act the way they do can be seen as a person's attitude. There are a couple components that make up each individual's attitude. These components are cognitive, affective and conative, which all have their own part in someone's attitude.

Cognitive is what represents a person's thoughts, beliefs and ideas about anything. These are normally more often seen as stereotypes such as "all babies are cute". Affective deals with one's emotions or feelings that arise to the surfacing of something. This would relate to the first example by meaning a person would have the attitude of love towards babies because they are all cute. Conative, also known as the behavioral component, looks at how one acts towards any given thing. In the case of the last example a person would want to hold the baby because it is cute. All of these components are extremely different, but they can work together to impact our attitudes. (Wengryzn, n.d.)

Attitudes correlation with alcohol abuse can be seen through lots of examples and broken into numerous categories. These categories are for the different types of drinkers, which can show a lot about people in these groups including things such as motivations or personalities. The three main categories of drinkers are nondrinkers, moderate drinkers and binge drinkers.



Nondrinkers are those who never touch alcohol and binge drinkers are those who abuse alcohol while moderate ones are in between. Each type of drinker has a relatively common attitude because of their common motivations and personalities. A nondrinker in most cases will only have the motivation of conformity to drink as they see no other pleasure in it. The motivation of most moderate drinkers would root from a social aspect of wanting to meet new people and being more confident. Binge drinkers may have multiple motivations, but most will drink to help them cope with something. These motivations are often similar from person to person and shows how common an attitude can be between each type of drinker. (Lac, 2016)

There are many factors that make up an individual's attitude and our study hopes to discover which of these factors are most common between those who abuse alcohol. Gaining a better understanding of this information could help better diagnose this problem. Finding these common factors could help discover it quicker and more effectively in order to better assist those who may need help. Our research hopes to take a deeper look into what motivates and personifies an alcohol abuser.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

Our group began our data collection by creating a survey that included 24 questions based on our four factors and two variables. These questions were formatted on a likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As a group we handed out 100 surveys to solely Southern New Hampshire University students. We attempted to get a wide variety of students on campus and went about handing out the surveys randomly.

## **Data Analysis**

Once all 100 surveys were collected, we went about analyzing the data by inputting it in excel. We organized the data by variables and sorted out the answers for each question. In addition, we organized the demographic information and found percentages for this data. In order to know if the factors were indeed connected to the variable (attitude), we ran regression tests on each of the factors. Factors with a high regression score were stress, image, and peer-pressure. The only factor that scored low on the regression test was pleasure and this means that there was not a strong enough correlation between the factor and the variable. Next, we ran another regression test on the variable (attitude) to see if there is a relation between attitude and behavior. This resulted in a high regression score proving that there is a connection between the two. Overall, through our data analysis, we were able to find correlations between most of the factors and variables.

## **Results**

Beginning with demographics, we had 47% male participants and 53% female participants. In addition, we had 47% of participants over the age of 21 and 53% under the age of 21. 66% of participants live on campus, while 44% are commuters. In relation to majors, 26% are business majors, 19% are marketing majors, 13% other, along with many other majors with smaller percentages. Overall, we were able to include a relatively wide variety of individuals for our research.

Before getting to the results of the factors and variables, it is important to discuss the results of the reliability scores. The reliability scores show whether or not our questions were well understood by participants. Fortunately, all factors and variables scored between .5 and 1 which means that our questions were in fact well worded and understood by participants.

Peer pressure showed to have the highest correlation as to why college students drink. Some of our findings include that more than half of the participants said they drink more with friends, over 60% said that they have witnessed others be peer pressured and over 50% have felt peer pressured themselves to drink. Overall, our hypothesis of peer pressure being a factor as to why college students drink is correct. Both image and stress factors also proved to be reasons as to why college students drink, proving these hypothesis correct as well. Pleasure was not directly related to why college students drink and, therefore, our hypothesis was incorrect for this factor. We found that fewer than half of the participants said that they find pleasure in drinking and only 44% of participants said that they hang out with more people when they are drinking compared to when they are not.

Lastly, attitudes towards drinking is highly affected by the four factors and behavior of college students is affected by the attitudes. Our hypotheses for these variables were correct. Because peer pressure, stress, and image all scored high on the regression test, they show a direct relation to attitude. In addition, 46% of participants said that drinking makes it easier for them to talk to others and 33% said that drinking makes them more confident. In relation to behavior, 55% of surveyed students said that they can be a different person when they drink and the majority of participants tend to worry less when they drink. In short, we were able to prove all but one of our hypotheses through our research.

## **Conclusion**

### **Limitations**

Limitations within our research included that we only handed out 100 surveys, while there are over 3,000 students that attend SNHU's day program. While we were able to get a decent variety of students, we could have gained more information by getting more participants.

In addition, because we only surveyed SNHU students, we cannot be sure that the results are relevant to other college campuses. Lastly, because we were under a time constraint, we had limited time to hand out our surveys. If we had more time we would have again been able to get a larger representation of the campus and get more exact results.

## **Discussion**

Peer pressure, stress and image all met our expectations for making an impact on attitude. Pleasure surprisingly did not have a strong effect on attitude. The connection between attitude and behavior was strong however, meaning that the behavior of college students can be impacted by drinking. Overall, we were satisfied with our findings and were able to gain a better understanding as to why college students drink alcohol.

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