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Alcohol Cues, Expectancies, and the Working Self-Concept

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Introduction

•Self-concept: the set of attributes that one uses to define himself or herself – Answers the question "*Who am I*?"

•Given the wealth of self-knowledge individuals possess, it is believed that only a limited amount of self-relevant information can be present in awareness at any given time (Jones & Gerard, 1967; Markus & Kunda, 1986).

• Self-knowledge that is consciously available has been referred to as the phenomenal self, or the working self-concept (Jones & Gerard, 1967; Markus & Kunda, 1986).

• Situational factors have been shown to make certain aspects of the self salient.

- e.g., Individuals view themselves more favorably after being instructed to present a positive image of themselves (Jones, Rhodewalt, Berglas, & Skelton, 1981)

• Is it possible that alcohol related cues influence individuals' self-perceptions?

•Research has suggested that alcohol consumption can influence self-concept ratings (e.g., Banaji & Steele, 1989).

•Moreover, recent findings have shown that the activation of alcohol outcome expectancies in long term memory, via exposure to alcohol-related cues, influences perceptions of others and non-consumptive behaviors (Friedman, McCarthy, Förster, & Denzler, 2005; Friedman, McCarthy, Bartholow, & Hicks, 2006).

Purpose of the Present Study

•To examine whether exposure to alcohol cues interact with alcohol expectancies to similarly influence self-concept ratings.

Predictions

• Exposure to alcohol related cues will interact with alcohol expectancies to predict self-concept ratings.

•Specifically, sociability related alcohol expectancies will be associated with sociability self-concept ratings for participants who are exposed to alcohol related primes, but not for those in the control condition.

Method

Participants

- Seventy-two introductory to psychology students (43 women) participated in the study for course credit. Ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old (M = 18.38, SD = .75).

Materials and Procedure

- ***Pretest Items: Alcohol Expectancies***

- At the beginning of the semester, participants completed a mass pretest that included 5-items from the sociability subscale of the Comprehensive Effects of Alcohol Scale (CEOA; Fromme, Stroote, & Kaplan, 1993). Items were rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale (M = 4.15, SD = .60, α = .83)

- ***Laboratory Session***

- Approximately 1½ months later, participants completed a laboratory session.

- ***Priming Task***

•Participants first completed an "advertisement ratings task."

•They were instructed that they would rate pictures taken from advertisements on various dimensions.

•e.g., "How much money do you think was spent on the advertisement based on this picture?"

•They were further instructed that the advertisements would be taken from random categories.

•After rating pictures from a couple of filler categories, half of the participants rated 8 pictures of alcohol products. In the control condition, participants rated 8 pictures of furniture (see below).

- ***Self-Concept Ratings Task***

- Finally, in an ostensibly unrelated study, participants completed a 30 item self-concept ratings task.

We would like you to rate the extent to which each of the following attributes reflect your actual self. That is, to what extent do you believe you actually possess these attributes?

- Four of the attributes, "sociable," "outgoing," "friendly," & "welcoming," were related to sociability. All items were rated on a 1 (definitely does not describe me) to 7 (definitely does describe me) scale (M = 5.60, SD = .80, α = .83) .

Results

•In order to examine the predicted sociability alcohol expectancies X condition interaction, a hierarchical regression equation was computed. Alcohol expectancies scores were first converted to mean-deviation scores (Aiken & West, 1991).

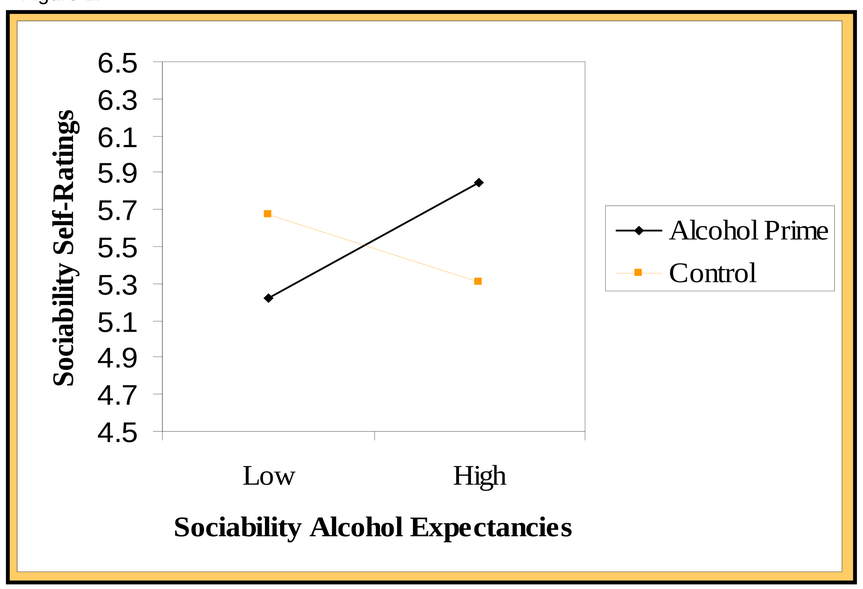
•Two control variables, gender and average alcohol use, entered on the first step, did not produce a significant change in R^2 (R^2 change = .01, p = .77). Similarly, the main effects of sociability alcohol expectancies and condition, entered on the second step, did not produce a significant change in R^2 (R^2 change = .02, p = .61). However, the interaction variable, entered on the third step, did produce a significant change in R^2 (R^2 change = .08, p < .05; β = .43).

•As predicted, this interaction shows that sociability related alcohol expectancies were associated with sociability self-ratings for participants in the experimental condition (β = .36, p < .05) but not for participants in the control condition (β = -.23, p = .23). The generated means for this interaction, for participants who were one standard deviation above or below the mean for the predictor variable, are shown in Figure 1.

Step 3, R^2 = .10, R^2 change = .08, p < .05	b	β
Gender	-.05	-.07
Average Alcohol Use	.06	.05
Condition[a]	.04	.03
Sociability Alcohol Expectancies	-.17	-.21
Condition X Sociability Alcohol Expectancies	.45*	.43*

Condition[a] (0 = control condition, 1 = alcohol prime condition).

Figure 1.



Additional Analyses

• Additional analyses revealed that aggression related alcohol expectancies did not interact with condition to predict sociability self-ratings (p = .89).

•Moreover, sociability alcohol expectancies did not interact with condition to predict self-ratings related to intelligence (e.g., "clever," "smart," etc.; p = .96).

Conclusions and Future Directions

•These findings build on previous research that suggests the activation of alcohol outcome expectancies, independent of actual alcohol consumption, may influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

•Specifically, these results suggest that alcohol-related cues may also influence perceptions of the self.

• Future research needs to examine the underlying mechanisms driving these effects.

- e.g., Do primes facilitate "perceptual assimilation?"

•Do changes in the self-concept influence specific motives to drink?

•Do high private self-consciousness ratings enhance these effects?

•Do high self-concept clarity ratings attenuate these effects?

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