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The Effect of Alcohol Primes on Drinking and Driving Decisions

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Results indicated a significant interaction between alcohol primes and drinking and driving attitudes on willingness to drive ($F = 14.42$, $p < .001$).

In the neutral condition, greater perceived danger from drinking and driving was associated with reduced willingness to drive.

In contrast, following alcohol primes, perceived dangerousness was uncorrelated with drinking and driving decisions.

For the full sample, there was no effect of danger or safety primes on drinking & driving decisions.

Supplementary analyses were conducted for participants who reported some willingness to drink and drive.

- For this subsample, there was a significant interaction between danger primes and drinking and driving attitudes on willingness to drive ($F = 11.54$, $p < .001$).
- In the danger prime condition, perceived dangerousness was less predictive of drinking and driving decisions than in the neutral condition.

Discussion

Results of this study suggest that subtle alcohol primes can influence judgments about drinking and driving.

These results have possible implications for drinking and driving research, as they suggest the potential for contextual effects on drinking and driving decision-making.

Longitudinal studies are required to understand the reciprocal influence of perceptions about drinking and driving and engagement in the behavior.

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Introduction

- Over one-third of college drivers report past month drinking & driving (Wechsler et al., 2003).
- Perceived danger of drinking and driving is one factor that influences engagement in the behavior.
- Priming research has consistently shown that previously seen information can alter a person’s behavior (Bargh et al., 1996) and judgments (Carver et al., 1983).
- Alcohol word primes (e.g., beer, vodka) have been shown to influence behaviors and judgments about the anticipated outcomes of drinking (e.g., increased hostility; Friedman et al., 2005, 2007).
- The present study tested the effects of priming on drinking and driving decision-making in hypothetical drinking scenarios.

Method

Participants

- 268 college student drinkers (mean age = 18.57).
- 81% Caucasian; 63% female.

Measures

- Alcohol Use. Drinker/nondrinker status and past month quantity and frequency of use.
- Willingness to Drive and Perceived Risk. Participants reported on their willingness to drive and perceived risk of driving in hypothetical drinking scenarios.
- Drinking and Driving Attitudes. Participants were asked to report how dangerous they perceive drinking and driving to be.

Procedure

- Participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses using an online sign-up system.
- Prior to lab appointment, participants completed an online survey that measured drinking and driving attitudes, behaviors and normative beliefs.
- Participants completed a lexical decision task (LDT) which served as the priming mechanism.
- Participants were randomly assigned to one of four priming conditions:
  1. Alcohol (e.g., beer, vodka)
  2. Danger (e.g., DUI, accident)
  3. Safety (e.g., safe, secure)
  4. Neutral (e.g., water, juice)
- Immediately following the priming condition participants filled out questions regarding their willingness to drive in hypothetical drinking scenarios.