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The Effect of Alcohol Primes on Drinking and Driving Decisions

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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

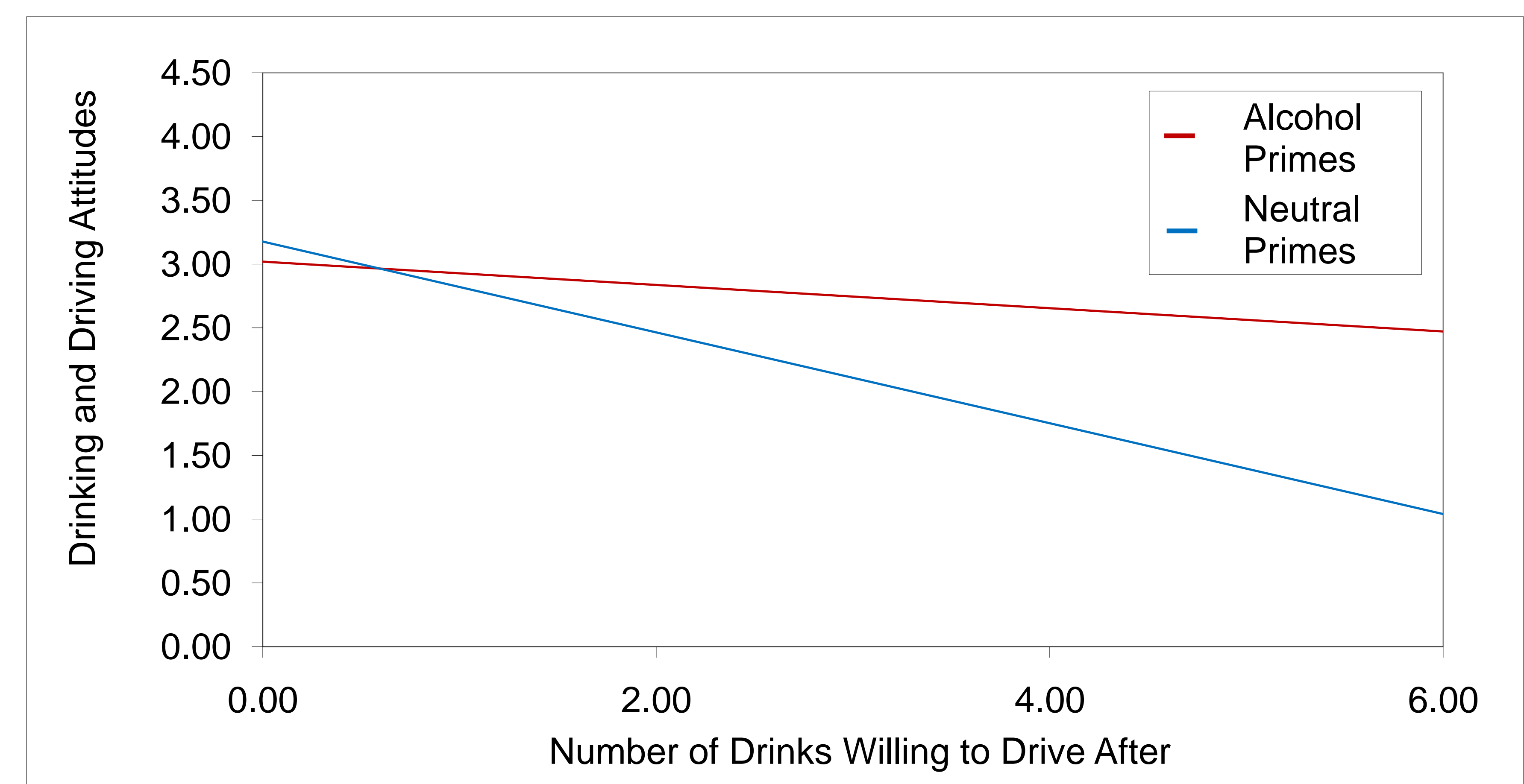
- ❖ *Alcohol Use.* Drinker/nondrinker status and past month quantity and frequency of use.
- ❖ *Willingness to Drive and Perceived Risk.* Participants reported on their willingness to drive and perceived risk of driving in hypothetical drinking scenarios.
- ❖ *Drinking and Driving Attitudes.* Participants 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.

Results

- ❖ 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 willing 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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