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SOCIAL ANXIETY'S EFFECT ON ALCOHOL USE AMONG STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a correlation between social anxiety and alcohol use in college students. College students have a high likelihood of drinking due to college usually being a party culture. When you couple a party culture with factors such as stress and anxiety the ramifications can lead to excess alcohol use. These factors are a great reason to study how social anxiety effects alcohol use in college students and who it effects in this demographic. The results of this study will be of great importance to students, parents, and health care personnel as well as important to college faculty.

BACKGROUND

Alcohol consumption has been shown to be used to curb negative effects of social anxiety and thus has been shown to be used frequently to self-medicate social anxiety (Gorka, Shankman, Olino, Seeley, Kosty, Lewinsohn, 2014). People with social anxiety have been shown to have a greater focus on external stimuli while sober and become more internally focused when drunk or even have the expectation of drinking (Stevens, Cludius, Bantini, Hermann, Gerlach, 2013). People with anxiety have been shown to use alcohol to curb negative emotions (Allan, Albanese, Norr, Zvolensky, Schmidt, 2014). Social anxiety has been shown to have greater effect on females drinking due to role and personal consequences while the effect on males was due to physical consequences (Schry, Norberg, Maddox, White, 2014).

METHODS

The method for this pilot study was a 13 question self-reporting anonymous survey distributed by the author's classmates to college classrooms (N=71). The human subjects were protected using the University of Montana IRB guidelines.

RESULTS

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	Entire Sample (n=71) (S)		Male (n=43) (S)		Female (n=28) (S)	
	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)	(M)	(S)
Dependent Variables						
Anxious in social situations	2.69	1.01	2.70	.151	2.68	.200
When in non-social situations home with friends how many drinks	1.87	1.04	2.16	.166	1.43	.149
Drink to improve a positive mood	2.32	1.18	2.37	.185	2.25	.216
Drink to socialize better	2.56	1.14	2.58	.174	2.54	.221
Drink to improve negative mood	1.99	1.18	2.05	.182	1.89	.220
Drink to fit in	1.85	.995	1.93	.150	1.71	.191
When in social situations how many drinks do you have	2.46	1.19	2.67	.178	2.14	.223
Independent Variables						
Gender						
Male	(43) 61%					
Female	(28) 39%					
Age						
18-24 (Trad)	(57) 80%					
25+ (Non-Trad)	(14) 20%					
Feel anxious in social situations						
No	(39) 55%					
Yes	(32) 45%					
Expectation of being able to consume alcohol lessens anxiety						
No	(50) 70%					
Yes	(21) 30%					
Notice decrease in heart rate after consuming alcohol when socially anxious						
No	(55) 78%					
Yes	(16) 22%					
Feel a greater need to drink when you are expected to give a speech						
No	(62) 87%					
Yes	(9) 13%					

Table 2
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances for Comparison of Differences in Drinking and Social Anxiety Based on Gender.

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Anxious in social situations</i>					
Male	2.70	.989	.077	69	.938
Female	2.68	1.06			
<i>Drinks in non-social situations</i>					
Male	2.16	1.09	3.29	68.12	.002
Female	1.43	.790			
<i>Drink to improve positive mood</i>					
Male	2.37	1.22	.423	69	.673
Female	2.25	1.14			
<i>Drink to socialize better</i>					
Male	2.58	1.14	.163	69	.871
Female	2.54	1.17			
<i>Drink to improve negative mood</i>					
Male	2.05	1.19	.535	69	.595
Female	1.89	1.17			
<i>Drink to fit in</i>					
Male	1.93	.986	.892	69	.375
Female	1.71	1.01			
<i>Drinks in social situations</i>					
Male	2.67	1.17	.813	69	.066
Female	2.14	1.18			

Table 3
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances for Comparison of Differences in Drinking Based on Social Anxiety.

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
<i>Drinks in non-social situations</i>					
Not Anxious	1.67	.898	-1.88	69	.064
Anxious	2.13	1.16			
<i>Drink to improve positive mood</i>					
Not Anxious	2.10	1.10	-1.77	69	.081
Anxious	2.59	1.24			
<i>Drink to socialize better</i>					
Not Anxious	2.33	1.08	-1.91	69	.061
Anxious	2.84	1.17			
<i>Drink to improve negative mood</i>					
Not Anxious	1.90	1.10	-6.97	69	.488
Anxious	2.09	1.30			
<i>Drink to fit in</i>					
Not Anxious	1.69	.893	-1.44	69	.155
Anxious	2.03	1.09			
<i>Drinks in social situations</i>					
Not Anxious	2.41	1.19	-.423	69	.674
Anxious	2.53	1.22			

CONCLUSION

Males showed a greater tendency to drink more than females for all motives as well as showing greater social anxiety than females. Overall the subjects of this study drank less and were showed not to drink as much for social anxiety as hypothesized. Subjects also showed a tendency to drink more to improve a positive motive than a negative motive.

FUTURE STUDIES

Given the results of this study future studies would benefit from using a larger population. Further studies on this subject would benefit from using general anxiety instead of being narrowed to social anxiety. Also future studies would benefit from using a sample of individuals with diagnosed general anxiety. Further studies should also use a control group. Lastly further studies should use an equal or close to equal amount of each gender.

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