



Natural Drinking Groups: Strength of Identity with the Group Moderated the Effect of Drinking Norms on Drinking During a Specific Drinking Event

Abstract

The link between perceived drinking norms and an individual's actual drinking behavior has been well established. However, recent research has shown that social identity has an important influence on the relationship between social or group norms and drinking behaviors. The current study examines the impact of social identity and drinking norms as they relate to a specific group of friends or acquaintances with which participants recently gathered. 414 students reported on an event where they shared alcohol with friends or acquaintances in the past 30 days. The group norm (the percentage of drinkers in the group) was significantly related to the number of drinks consumed by the participant during the event. As predicted, the interaction between strength of identity and the group norm for drinking was significant. Further examinations showed that the effect of group norm was only significant for participants who strongly or moderately identified with the group.

Background

The influence of drinking norms on an individual's drinking behavior has been well established (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Perkins, 2003), especially among college students' drinking; a population whose drinking style remains a problem even after years of research and prevention work (Wechsler & Toben, 2008). Group pressure or normative influence is an aspect of several theories used in health research and prevention. In the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), norms are thought to influence behavior through a "motivation to comply" to the perceived norms of important individuals (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). A common finding is that perceived norms for drinking are usually an over-estimate of the actual normative behavior. Social Identity Theory was offered to refine the description of the relationship between norms and behavior (Hogg & Abrams 1988). The strength of identity that a person feels towards the group will moderate the normative influence of the group on behavior (Hogg & Abrams 1988).

Reed and colleagues (2007) recently reported that the strength of identity with friends, peers and fraternities/sororities moderated the relationship between perceived group-specific drinking norms and drinking behavior. Additional studies are needed, however, to support and validate these findings.

This study examined the moderating effect of social identity on the relationship between drinking norms and individual's drinking among a natural drinking group (NDG) of college students and friends.

Method

Participants

A random sample of students was drawn from those enrolled at a large public university in the Southwestern U.S.. Only those participating in the survey who reported drinking in the past year were included in these analyses. Further:

- All had participated in a group in which at least one person was drinking in past 30 days
- Of the 594 students surveyed, 414 were included
- An additional 6 were removed as outliers (reported greater than 30 drinks)
- 64% were female
- 67% were white
- 18% were members of a Greek organization
- Mean age = 22 (SD=2.96)
- Mean number of drinks = 6.57 (SD=4.96)
- Mean percentage of drinkers per group = 88% (SD=18.771)

Measures

Participants responded to survey items related to a recent drinking event.

- Self-reported number of drinks during the event
- Their own gender
- Their own age
- Their own fraternity/sorority status
- Descriptive drinking norm of the group members (i.e., number of drinks consumed by fellow group members).

Jason Daniel, MPH, Loraine Devos-Comby, PhD & James E. Lange, PhD

sumed by fellow group members).

- Social Identity (Terry & Hogg 1996) (On a scale of 1 to 7):
 1. To what extent do you feel strong bonds to the group?
 2. Think about who you are. How important, using the scale provided, is the group to your sense of who you are (your self-identity)?
 3. How much do you feel you identify with the group?
 4. How similar do you feel your attitudes and beliefs are to those of individuals in the group?

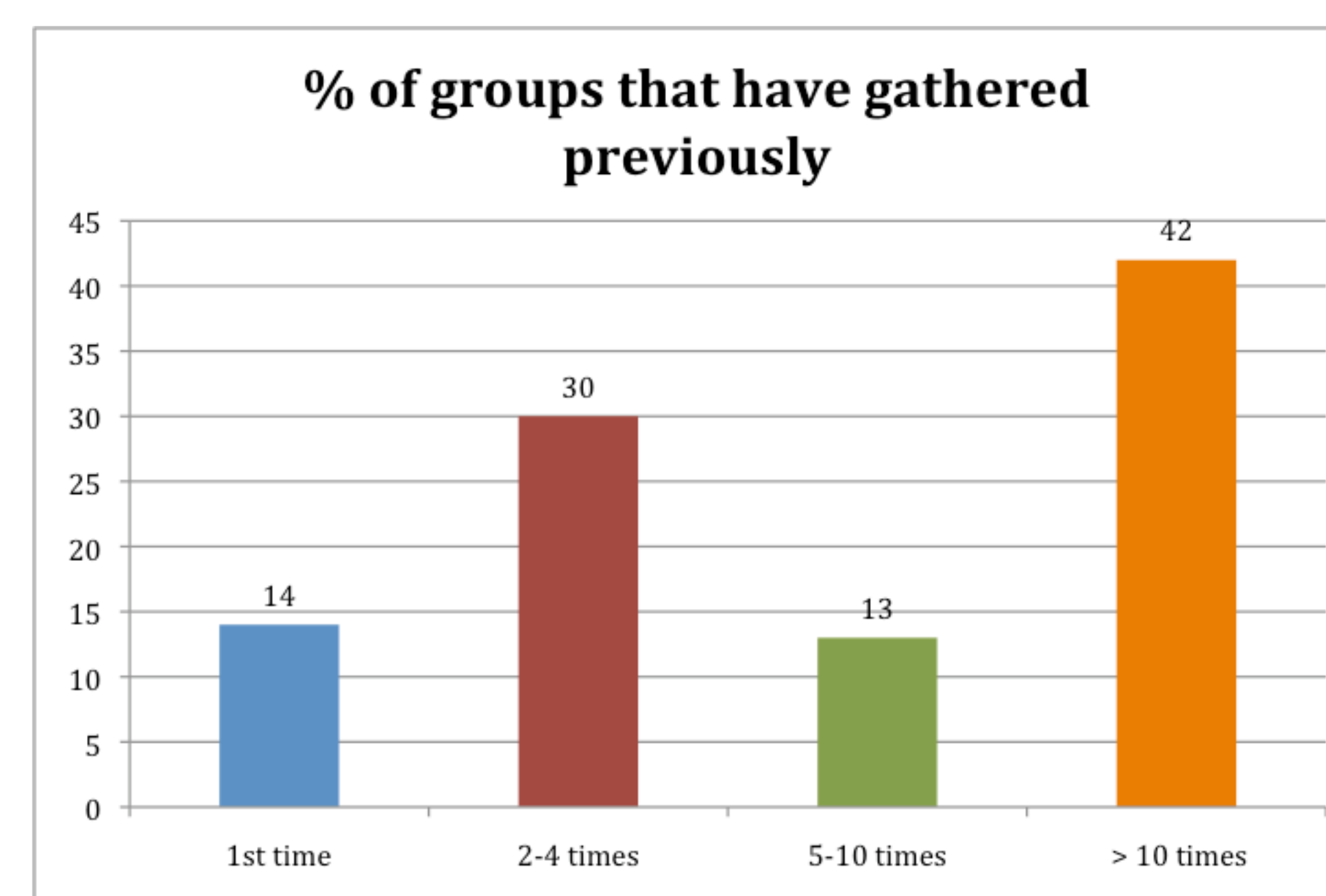


Figure 1. Number of times gathered with current group

Analysis

Step 1: Assess collinearity and variable contribution
Dependent variable: number of drinks

- Covariates: Age, fraternity status, class standing, ethnicity and gender were included with the drinking norm and social identity measures.
- Variables were centered (each value minus the mean).
- Age and class standing were significant covariates.
- Age and ethnicity were not significantly related to dependent variable.

Step 2: Run multivariate linear regression with interaction

- Age, Greek status, descriptive norm and social identity
- Interaction: social identity and descriptive norm
- All covariates centered
- Graphing software accessed at <http://www.people.ku.edu/~preacher/interact/mlr2.htm> (Preacher, & Curran et al., 2006) used to test significance of slopes for low, moderate and high identity interaction (see Figure 2).

Table 1. Centered multivariate regression: Group influences on event drinking

n=414	B	Std Err	sig.
Age	-0.59	0.090	.516
Gender (0=m, 1=f)	-2.556	0.556	.000
Greek (1=no, 2=yes)	-2.630	0.724	.000
Descriptive Norm	0.039	0.014	.005
Social Identity	0.019	0.181	.916

Table 2. Moderating effect of Social identity on group drinking norms and event drinking

n=414	B	Std Err	sig.
Age	-0.042	0.089	.635
Gender (1=f vs 0=m)	-2.711	0.553	.000
Greek (1=yes, 2=no)	-2.593	0.716	.000
Descriptive Norm	0.037	0.014	.008
Social Identity	.008	0.179	.963
Interaction term (identity & norms)	0.022	0.008	.006

Results

Groups Description:

- Group size ranged 2 to 101 members
- 66% of groups were smaller than 6 people
- Nearly half (42%) had gone out with this group more than 10 times (Figure 1.)

• For interaction analysis, see Tables 1 & 2, and Figure 2.

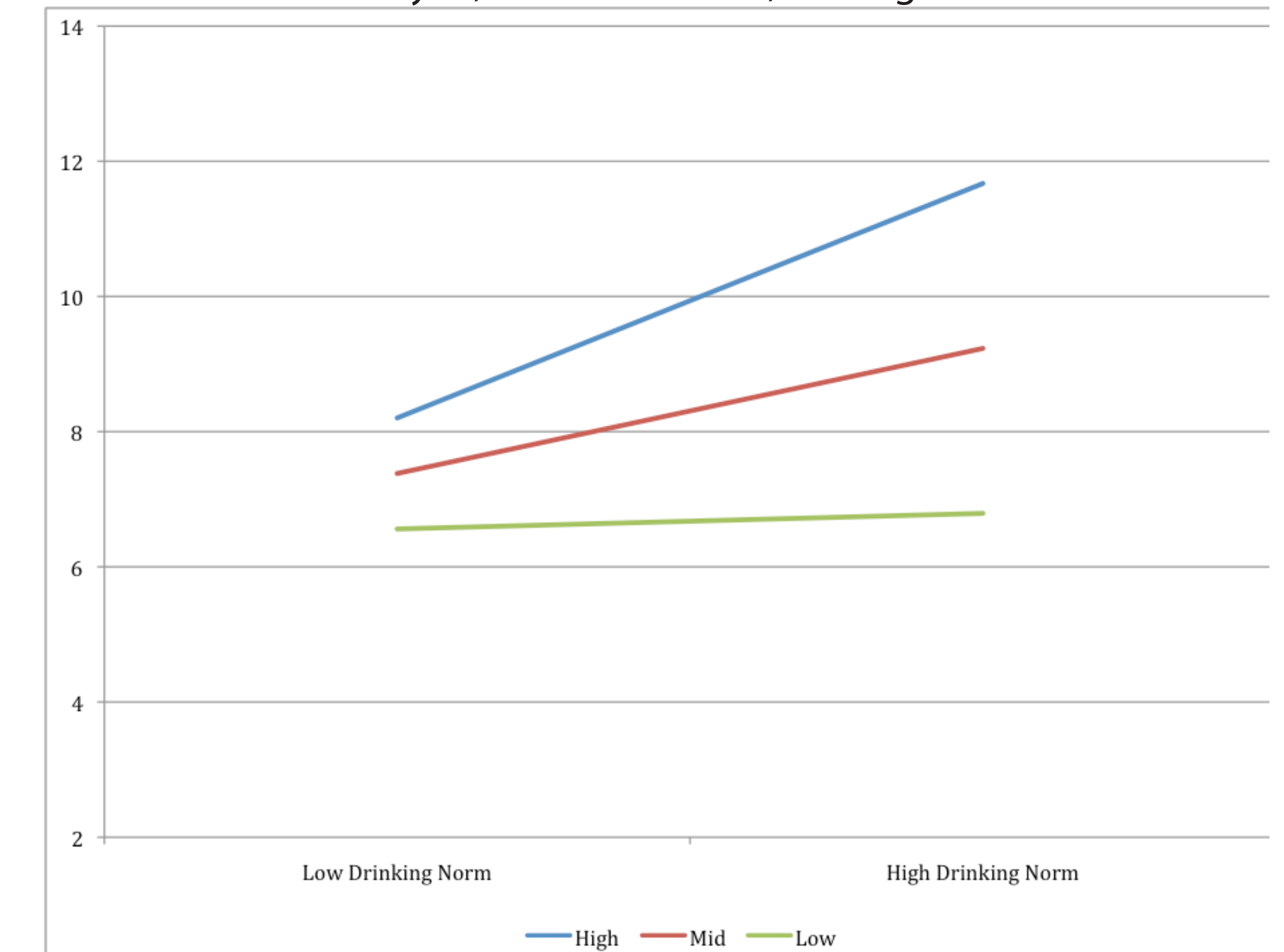


Figure 2. The relationship between norms and drinking, moderated by 3 levels of Social Identity

Discussion

The results support the role of social identity as a moderating factor between group drinking norms and drinking behavior. This study differs from previous research in two ways: First, a descriptive norm was used, meaning that the groups actual drinking behavior, as opposed to their attitudes toward drinking, were related to individual drinking; Second, this relationship was moderated by the strength of identity with the group. But perhaps more importantly, this analysis is linked to a specific event with a specific group of people, indicating that the relationship exists in smaller groups (NDG).

Implications of these findings include: (1) SNA based interventions' effects may be weakened by a lack of strong identification with the normative group of focus; (2) messages that target specific group norms or stereotypes are more likely to succeed than those that target general students; (3) groups that form around drinking or partying are important to consider when attempting to understand—and perhaps intervene upon—student drinking.

References

- Borsari, B., & K. B. Carey (2003). "Descriptive and injunctive norms in college drinking: a meta-analytic integration." *J Stud Alcohol* 64(3): 331-41.
- Hogg, M., & D. Abrams (1988). *Social Identification: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. London, Routledge.
- Montano, D., & D. Kasprzyk (2008). *Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, and the Integrated Behavioral Model. Health Behavior and Health Education: Theory, Research and Practice*. K. Glanz and B. Rimer. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Perkins, W. (2003). *The Emergence and Evolution of the Social Norms Approach to Substance Abuse Prevention*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Preacher, K., P. Curran, et al. (2006). "Computational tools for probing interaction effects in multiple linear regression, multilevel modeling, and latent curve analysis." *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics* 31: 437-448.
- Reed, M. B., J. E. Lange, et al. (2007). "The relationship between social identity, normative information, and college student drinking." *Social Influence* 2(4): 269 - 294.
- Terry, D. J. and M. A. Hogg (1996). "Group Norms and the Attitude-Behavior Relationship: A Role for Group Identification." *Pers Soc Psychol Bull* 22(8): 776-793.
- Wechsler, H. and F. Toben, Nelson (2008). "What We Have Learned From the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study: Focusing Attention on College Student Alcohol Consumption and the Environmental Conditions That Promote It." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 69(4): 481-490.

This study was supported by research grants U01 AA014738 and R21 AA 016800-01A1 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Opinions are solely those of the authors.

For reprints visit the Report Vault at iPrevention.Com