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Big-Five personality domains predict drinking motives

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Abstract

Relations between the Big-Five personality domains and motivations for drinking alcohol were examined. Young adult drinkers ($n = 581$) completed the Drinking Motives Questionnaire-Revised and the 100-item International Personality Item Pool questionnaire measuring the Big-Five personality domains. Multiple regression analyses revealed that personality domains predicted both external (Conformity and Social), and particularly, internal (Coping and Enhancement) drinking motives after controlling for usual weekly drinking levels, demographic variables and overlap between drinking motives. Replicating previous findings with the NEO personality scales, Coping motives were predicted by low Emotional Stability, and Enhancement motives were predicted by high Extraversion and low Conscientiousness. Additional relations not previously documented with the NEO personality scales were observed between personality domains and drinking motives (e.g., low Extraversion predicted Coping motives, and high Intellect/Imagination and low Agreeableness predicted Enhancement motives). Thus, converging evidence suggests the presence of personality vulnerability factors associated with risky internal reasons for drinking.

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1. Introduction

The particular reasons or “motives” one has for drinking alcohol relate to patterns of alcohol use and abuse (Cooper, 1994). Discerning the desired outcomes one expects to obtain from

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drinking may inform the situations in which one is likely to drink, how much one might drink, and the particular negative consequences of one's drinking. This knowledge may in turn guide interventions for problem drinkers.

Expanding upon Cox and Klinger's (1988) suggestion that drinking motives may stem from expectations of affective change (e.g., increase in positive affect or decrease in negative affect), Cooper (1994) developed a model to describe four distinct reasons for drinking. The model consists of "internal" motives to increase positive affect ("Enhancement Motives") and reduce/avoid negative affect ("Coping Motives") (cf. Cox & Klinger, 1988, 1990) as well as "external" motives to improve social gatherings ("Social Motives") and reduce/avoid social rejection ("Conformity Motives"). These motives can also be classified as either positively reinforcing (Enhancement and Social Motives) or negatively reinforcing (Coping and Conformity).

Research has demonstrated that these four motives predict different patterns of alcohol use, some of which may place individuals at risk for problem drinking (Carey & Correia, 1997; Carrigan, Samoluk, & Stewart, 1998; Cooper, Russell, Skinner, & Windle, 1992; Stewart & Chambers, 2000). Enhancement Motives predict drinking among same-sex friends, where heavy consumption of alcohol is customary or encouraged (Cooper, 1994). In fact, Enhancement Motives predict increased drinking problems—a relationship owing to the heavier drinking behaviour of Enhancement drinkers (Cooper, 1994). In contrast, negative reinforcement motives (Coping and Conformity) have been shown to predict drinking problems independent of heavy consumption (Cooper, 1994). Drinking to reduce or avoid negative states or situations may create a dependence on alcohol to cope, which could account for the direct association of the negative reinforcement motives with alcohol problems. Finally, Social Motives are associated with light drinking at social gatherings and celebrations, and have been found to be unrelated to problem drinking (Cooper et al., 1992).

Cox and Klinger (1988) suggested that drinking motives might be the proximal antecedents of alcohol use, whereas other variables, such as personality factors, influence alcohol use by way of their association with drinking motives. Much research supports a link between certain personality traits and risky drinking behaviour (Cooper, Agocha, & Sheldon, 2000; Loukas, Krull, Chassin, & Carle, 2000; Stewart, Loughlin, & Rhyno, 2001; Stewart, Zvolensky, & Eifert, 2001). For example, sensation seeking (excitement and novelty seeking) and impulsivity predict frequency and amount of alcohol consumption (Grau & Ortet, 1999) and are related to risky drinking behaviours (Conrod, Pihl, Stewart, & Dongier, 2000; Sher, Bartholow, & Wood, 2000; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000). Anxiety-related constructs have also been linked to problem drinking. Stewart, Zvolensky, et al. (2001) found that university students high in anxiety sensitivity (fear of anxiety symptoms) drank more often, and drank to excess more frequently, than low and moderate anxiety sensitive individuals. In addition, Sher et al. (2000) linked substance-use disorders to the anxiety-related constructs of neuroticism and harm avoidance.

Different drinking motives may mediate these pathways from personality traits to alcohol use and abuse (see Cooper, 1994; Cox & Klinger, 1988). One important step in demonstrating such a mediating role for drinking motives is establishing a link between relevant personality traits and certain drinking motives. Research has shown that the negative reinforcement motives (Coping and Conformity) are predicted by anxiety-related constructs (Stewart & Zeitlin, 1995) and mediate the relationship between anxiety sensitivity and heavy drinking behaviour (Stewart, Zvolensky, et al., 2001). In addition, Enhancement motives are predicted by sensation seeking

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