

Public Abstract

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Title:Daily Alcohol Use and Relationship Functioning in Young Adult Romantic Relationships

Alcohol use is thought to have a range of effects on functioning in romantic relationships, from positive (e.g., the enhancement of intimacy) to negative (e.g., the escalation of relationship aggression). However, few studies have attempted to explain why and under what circumstances these effects occur, or examined the possibility of bi-directional influences between relationship functioning and alcohol use. Many studies are also limited by including only men, thus ignoring the female partner's alcohol use and perceptions of relationship functioning. The present study sought to address these limitations by examining bi-directional effects of alcohol use and relationship processes in a normal population sample of 81 couples who completed daily reports of both behaviors for a period of about 3 weeks. Results from analyses conducted using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) showed uniformly positive effects of drinking with one's partner, but largely negative effects of drinking and of drinking to intoxication on later relationship functioning. Negative relationship processes also shaped later alcohol use among both men and women. However, interaction analyses showed that these bi-directional effects were more numerous and consistent among women than men. Indeed, only women drank in response to feeling disconnected to their partners and only women drank with their partners in what might be considered a strategic effort to regulate relationship dynamics. Overall the results of the current study indicate that the associations between drinking and relationship processes are complex and bi-directional and their importance is perhaps greater for women than men.