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When do binge eaters also binge drink? The role of impulsivity as a moderator

Studies have shown that Bulimia Nervosa (BN) and alcohol abuse are highly comorbid (Beary, Lacey, Phil, & Merry, 1986; Dansky, Brewerton, & Kilpatrick, 2000), and that impulsivity plays an important role in both BN and alcohol abuse (Bushnell, Wells, & Oakley-Browne, 1996; Poikolainen, 2000). Combining these findings, Bulik, Sullivan, McKee, Weltzin, & Kaye (1994) theorized that the comorbidity between BN and alcohol abuse may be due to impulsivity as an underlying personality link. It may be, however, that the level of impulsivity moderates the relationship between BN and alcoholism, so that individuals with BN are also likely to have frequent and intense alcohol use, but only if they are high in impulsivity and not if they are low in impulsivity. In contrast to earlier studies that have looked jointly at BN, alcoholism, and impulsivity in clinical BN samples, the present study uses a non-clinical sample of women who exhibit a range on the variables of bulimic symptoms, intensity and frequency of alcohol use, and impulsivity. Results from this study could be helpful in identifying whether intervention with those who display BN symptoms and impulsivity will minimize problematic alcohol use prior to the escalation of BN symptoms to DSM-IV diagnostic levels. In this study, women undergraduates attending a midwestern university were selected from the undergraduates taking Introductory Psychology and from undergraduates throughout campus to participate. Upon arrival, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that took between 45 minutes to one hour to complete. Bulimic symptoms were measured using the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI) Bulimia Subscale (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983), the Eating Disorder Examination-Questionnaire Version 4 (EDE-Q4; Fairburn & Beglin, 1994), and the Bulimia Test--Revised (BULIT-R; Thelen, Farmer, Wonderlich, & Smith, 1991). Impulsivity was measured using the Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS; Barratt, 1985). Intensity and frequency of alcohol use were measured using the Modified Michigan Alcohol and Drug Screening Test (MMADST; Scifres, 2003) and the Drinking and Smoking Survey (Bardone, 2000). Hierarchical multiple regression will be used and the results are expected to show that impulsivity moderates the relationship between bulimic symptoms and intensity/frequency of alcohol use. It is hypothesized that individuals with high BN symptoms and high impulsivity will have the highest frequency and intensity of alcohol use and that a significant two-way interaction between bulimic symptoms and impulsivity is expected to predict alcohol use.