1989

Aggression as influenced by the expected effects of alcohol

Geoffrey Erickson
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Aggression as influenced by the expected effects of alcohol

Erickson, Geoffrey Diehl, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1989

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AGGRESSION AS INFLUENCED
BY THE
EXPECTED EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Geoffrey Erickson
May, 1989

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Few people are unaffected by the behaviors related to alcohol consumption. A great deal of evidence exists for a strong relationship between alcohol consumption and aggressive behavior. In this regard, several studies have reported that the majority of persons jailed for violent crimes had been intoxicated. For example, according to Graham (1980), the crime statistics vary, but alcohol appears to have been implicated in more than 50% of the violent crimes sampled in his investigations. Shupe (1954) found, through urinalysis conducted on 882 persons arrested during or immediately after the commission of a felony, that over 72% had blood-alcohol levels--most over .10%. Mayfield (1976) found that 58% of assaultive offenders were drinking at the time of their offenses. A study of male Scottish drinkers (Myers, 1982) compared 50 convicted for violent crimes with 50 convicted for non-violent crimes. Myers found that those convicted for violent crimes were more likely to have consumed alcohol on the day of the offense than those convicted for non-violent crimes.

Theories of Intoxicated Aggression

Two theoretical positions are of relevance with regard to alcohol-related aggression: one stresses a physiological explanation (Mark & Ervin, 1970) while the other advocates a psychological explanation (Sobell & Sobell, 1973;

MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). The physiological approach deals primarily with the pharmacological action of alcohol upon mechanisms in the biochemistry of the brain. These mechanisms are reported either to trigger aggressive impulses (Mark & Ervin, 1970) or to remove the inhibitions which normally restrain aggressive behavior (Chafetz & Demone, 1962). The psychological approach focuses on social learning as well as on situational factors to explain alcohol-related aggression. In this context, social learning is considered to be responsible for the expectations an individual develops about the behaviors which will result from his or her drinking. The situational factors may be those which led to the alcohol consumption or behaviors intensified by the intoxication.

For example, in their review, MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) considered studies of the drinking habits of several cultures. They noted that many people copied the behaviors of those who had introduced them to the beverage, while the normal behaviors of others were intensified by the alcoholic beverages. From their findings, MacAndrew and Edgerton proposed two theories: "time-out" and "within-limits." "Time-out" refers to changed behaviors while one is drinking. When a person drinks, he knows that the normal rules do not apply and he will be forgiven what would normally be unacceptable behaviors. He can

be more assertive, boisterous, even aggressive. However, although the drinker can alter his behavior to include unacceptable actions in that many who know he has been drinking forgive these inappropriate actions, these actions must remain within the limits tolerated by a given society.

Statement of Problem

While everyone seems to agree that behavior changes with alcohol consumption, not all agree on how much change is the result of the pharmacological action of the beverage, the psychological response when one is aware he or she has been consuming alcohol, or the interaction of the two. Since learning is related to experience, it seems reasonable to assume that a more experienced social drinker would exhibit more profound behavior from the effects of alcohol; and since men and women are raised with different social concepts (i.e., men are supposed to be more aggressive than women), it seems fair to assume that behaviors exhibited during their intoxicated state would reflect these gender-related differences in socialization.

Although many studies have been conducted concerning alcohol-related behavior, few have addressed the possible differences in behavior between heavy and light and male and female social drinkers. Given the aforementioned discussion, the following hypotheses were generated:

- (1) Heavy social drinker subjects, when answering

the questionnaires, will express a greater increase in aggression from the sober condition to the intoxicated condition than the light social drinkers responding under the same conditions.

(2) Male social drinkers will express a greater increase in aggression from the sober condition to the intoxicated condition as measured by the questionnaires than will female social drinkers.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE

The research to be reviewed in this chapter was conducted by using either an experimental method or a survey technique.

The Experiments

Three experiments have reported results which seem to support the physiological position. In one of these, Boyatzis (1974) found more interpersonal aggression demonstrated at experimental parties where distilled spirits and beer were available than at parties where only non-alcoholic beverages were served. Further, he reported that at the parties where distilled spirits were available, the level of aggression exhibited was positively correlated with the amount of liquor consumed. Using a design similar to Boyatzis' but with an added placebo condition, both Shuntich and Taylor (1972) and Zeichner and Pihl (1980) reported that more aggression was expressed by subjects who had consumed an alcoholic beverage than by subjects who had consumed a placebo or a non-alcoholic beverage. Like Boyatzis, both Shuntich and Taylor and Zeichner and Pihl observed that aggression seemed to be related to the type and amount of beverage their subjects had consumed.

Lang, Goeckner, Adesso, and Marlatt (1975) used a balanced placebo design in an effort to control for expectancy factors. By using this design, Lang and his colleagues attempted to isolate both the expectancy

(psychological) and the pharmacological (physiological) effects of alcohol. In so doing, they argued that Boyatzis (1974) and Shuntich and Taylor (1972) had failed to control adequately for expectancy factors which in turn resulted in cancelling their placebo controls. In their study, 96 heavy social drinkers, as defined by their scores on the Drinking Habits Questionnaire (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969), were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 x 2 x 2 design. Half the subjects were told they would be drinking vodka and tonic water, while the other half were told they would be drinking only tonic water. Within each of these two groups, half the subjects were actually given vodka and tonic water, while the other half were given tonic water only. Within each of these four drinking groups, half the subjects were provoked to aggress by an insulting confederate of the experimenter, while the other half experienced a non-threatening social interaction. Lang et al. reported that results of this experiment were significant in the expect alcohol condition. That is, subjects who thought they had consumed vodka and tonic water were more aggressive than subjects who thought they had consumed only tonic water, regardless of the actual beverage consumed. While their study seems to support the physiological approach, they may have failed to find a significant pharmacological effect because only heavy

social drinkers were recruited as subjects. To explain, restricting the group in this manner may have served as a means of both holding constant shared expectancies concerning the effects of alcohol and eliminated variance associated with physiological adaptations to alcohol consumption.

The Surveys

A survey relevant to this study by Brown, Goldman, Inn, and Anderson (1980) found that social drinkers who had less exposure to alcohol and less alcohol consumption expected more positive effects than those who had more experience with alcohol. They also noted that heavier social drinkers were more likely to expect sexual enhancement as well as aggressive behavior while using alcohol. Finally, Brown et al. reported that while drinking women tended to expect more pleasurable social experiences, men were more likely to anticipate aggressive behavior. Like Brown et al., Isaacs (1979) found in his survey that greater aggression was expected of intoxicated males than intoxicated females.

Together these studies suggest that heavy social drinkers expect to become more aggressive when intoxicated than do light social drinkers; and that male social drinkers expect to become more aggressive when intoxicated than female social drinkers.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Research Participants

The subjects for this study were 40 male students and 40 female students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at San Jose State University. Students selected for this study were classified as either light or heavy social drinkers on the basis of their responses to the Drinking Habits Questionnaire (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969) (see Appendix A). The mean Drinking Habits Questionnaire (DHQ) score is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants Drinking Habits Means $\pm$ Standard Deviations

	Times per Week	Maximum # Drinks
Male Heavy Drinkers	2.9 $\pm$ 3.0	11.0 $\pm$ 3.6
Male Light Drinkers	0.5 $\pm$ 0.5	2.4 $\pm$ 1.3
Female Heavy Drinkers	2.1 $\pm$ 2.9	8.1 $\pm$ 3.1
Female Light Drinkers	0.2 $\pm$ 0.1	1.6 $\pm$ 0.5

Materials

Materials consisted of Drinking Habits Questionnaires, consent forms (see Appendix B), shortened Personality Research Forms (PRF) (see Appendix C), and Brief Anger-Aggression Measures (BAAM) (see Appendix D).

The PRF (Jackson, 1974), shortened for the purpose of this study, and the BAAM (Maiuro, Vitaliano, & Cahn, 1976) were used to measure state aggression. State aggression in the present study refers to an individual's immediate tendency to aggress.

The Drinking Habits Questionnaire. The DHQ defines five categories of drinking frequency: abstainers (drink less than once a year or not at all), infrequent drinkers (drink at least once a year but less than once a month), light drinkers (drink at least once a month but no more than three to four drinks each time), moderate drinkers (drink at least once a month but no more than five to six drinks each time), and heavy drinkers (drink nearly every day or weekly, often 5 or more drinks on each occasion). For comparative reasons, subjects chosen for the present study were those at the two extremes of a group of 320 students tested with the DHQ. They were chosen for their presumably shared expectancies as to what their behaviors would be if they were intoxicated.

The Personality Research Form. The PRFs A and B consist of 15 scales (i.e., achievement, aggression, and dominance) with 20 items per scale. Because of the time constraints and the possibility of fatigue as a factor, the PRF was shortened to include 20 items from the aggression scale and 10 items from the dominance scale

to serve as buffer items. According to Jackson, a high scorer on the PRF "enjoys combat and argument; is easily annoyed; sometimes willing to hurt people to get his way; may seek to 'get even' with people whom he perceives as having harmed him." Reliability estimates (KR 20) for homogeneity and stability on the aggression scale were .94 and .87, respectively. Validity coefficients for the aggression scale were significant at the .05 level. (Jackson, 1974, pp. 6, 21, 22, 24, 25). However, the reliability and validity of the shortened version used here are unknown but were assumed to be comparable to those reported by Jackson.

The Brief Anger-Aggression Measure. The BAAM consists of six items representing subscales of the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory. Factor analysis of the six items found a factor "which could best be described as anger-irritability accompanied by a tendency to act in an aggressive and violent fashion." Internal consistency for the BAAM was indicated by a coefficient alpha of .82. Total scores for the BAAM and the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory were significantly related ($r=.84$) (Maiuro et al., 1986).

Experimental Design

The manipulated variables in this study were: (a) expectancy: subjects answered the questionnaires as sober

or as they thought they might if they were intoxicated; (b) type of social drinker: heavy or light; and (c) gender: male or female. The response variables were the aggression scores for each individual on the PRF and the BAAM scales. A 2 (gender) x 2 (drinking level) x 2 (expectancy) mixed factor design with repeated measures in the third factor was used to evaluate the data for each scale.

Procedure

A large class of 500 students was screened using the DHQ (Cahalan et al., 1969). Students were given the consent forms and asked to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a survey to be conducted the following week. Students willing to participate numbered 320. From this group, 80 students were selected on the basis of these criteria, i.e., 20 heavy social drinker males, 20 light social drinker males, 20 heavy social drinker females, and 20 light social drinker females were asked to participate. These students were then tested in one of two group sessions on the PRF and the BAAM scales under different expectancy conditions.

Specifically, the experimenter distributed packets containing the questionnaires and instructions. Participants were asked not to begin until everyone had a packet and the researcher had a chance to go over the instructions with the class. Students were then asked

to read the instructions on the first page of the questionnaire. They were told that they would be answering the questions in their present state (sober) or as they thought they might if they were intoxicated. Participants were instructed to answer the questions on the answer sheet as directed in the instructions on each page of the questionnaires. This was done so as to preserve the uniformity of order on the answer sheets even though the order of the questionnaires had been counterbalanced. Before beginning, each group was asked if everyone understood what was to be done and if there were any questions. When it appeared to the experimenter that everyone understood the instructions, the students were asked to begin working. The order of the questionnaires as well as the participants' self-perception as intoxicated or sober when filling out the questionnaires was counterbalanced among students. When each group had finished, the students were thanked for their effort and dismissed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The means and standard deviations for the PRF and the BAAM scores for each sex by social drinking level by expectancy grouping are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean $\pm$ standard deviation for each sex by social drinking level by expectancy conditions for the PRF and the BAAM scales.

Sex by Drinking Group	PRF		BAAM	
	Sober	Intoxicated	Sober	Intoxicated
Heavy Drinkers				
Male	9.3 $\pm$ 5.2	9.6 $\pm$ 4.2	9.8 $\pm$ 3.1	11.9 $\pm$ 3.7
Female	7.4 $\pm$ 3.3	9.1 $\pm$ 3.7	8.7 $\pm$ 4.4	11.6 $\pm$ 3.9
Light Drinkers				
Male	7.5 $\pm$ 4.0	9.3 $\pm$ 4.7	9.3 $\pm$ 3.7	11.3 $\pm$ 4.7
Female	7.3 $\pm$ 5.1	9.8 $\pm$ 4.6	8.8 $\pm$ 4.1	11.7 $\pm$ 3.8

The data which are summarized in Table 2 were analyzed using separate 2 (sex) x 2 (drinking levels) x 2 (expectancy condition) mixed factor ANOVAs with repeated measures in the third factor for the PRF and the BAAM scores. The ANOVA summary tables for the PRF and the BAAM scores are presented in Appendices E and F.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that heavy drinkers would express greater levels of aggression (i.e., have a greater increase in scores for both the PRF and the BAAM going from the sober condition to the intoxicated condition) than light drinkers. The data did not support this prediction for either the PRF [$F(1,76)=1.2, p>.05$] or the BAAM [$F(1,76)=<1$].

Hypothesis 2 predicted that men would express higher levels of aggression (i.e., have a greater increase in scores for both the PRF and the BAAM going from the sober condition to the intoxicated condition) than women. This prediction was also not supported by the data for either the PRF [$F(1,76)=2.4, p>.05$] or the BAAM [$F(1,76)=<1$].

In addition to these nonsignificant main effects for both drinking level and gender for both of the response variables, none of the interactions was significant (see Appendices E and F). The only significant finding was the main effect for expectancy, i.e. the subjects' perception as to how they would answer the questionnaires when intoxicated compared to sober. Specifically, these subjects responded more aggressively when answering the questionnaires as they thought they might if intoxicated for both the PRF [$F(1,76)=15.0, p<.001$] and the BAAM [$F(1,76)=43.3, p<.001$].

The data in the present study supported the results

of the Lang et al. study in that all subjects expected an increase in aggression as a result of intoxication from alcohol. The data, however, failed to support the investigator's speculation that heavy drinkers would expect to become more aggressive than light drinkers as a result of intoxication from alcohol. The surveys by Brown et al. and Isaacs reported increased aggression expected by males as a result of intoxication but not expected by the females surveyed. The data from the present study failed to support their findings. That is, no significant gender differences were found in the present study for either the PRF or the BAAM.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Research of intoxicated aggression has taken two theoretical approaches: one body of research involves the physiology of alcohol consumption while the other involves the psychology of the alcoholic beverage consumer. The physiological approach deals with alcohol's direct effect on mechanisms in the brain, while the psychological approach concerns the behavioral changes resulting from social learning. The independent variables chosen for this study were those that might possibly indicate whether social learning was a factor differentiating among groups. It was hypothesized that when all subjects answered questionnaires as they thought they might if intoxicated, heavy social drinkers would have more greatly increased aggression scores than light social drinkers and male social drinkers would have more greatly increased aggression scores than female social drinkers.

The participants were 80 introductory psychology students. They were males and females chosen for their differing drinking practices as determined by their scores on Cahalan's Drinking Practices Questionnaire (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969). Participants were asked to answer questionnaires in a sober state and as they thought they might if they were intoxicated. The research design was

a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed design with type of drinker, gender, and perception of oneself as sober or intoxicated as independent variables.

Two separate analyses of variance failed to confirm either of the two hypotheses. The only significant finding on the ANOVAs involved a non-hypothesized increase in aggression for the participants answering the questionnaires as they thought they might if intoxicated compared to sober.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Drinking Habits Questionnaire

1. We are interested in how frequently you drink alcoholic beverages. In general, over the past month, how often did you have any drink containing alcohol, whether it was wine, beer, hard liquor, or any other alcoholic beverage? Please check (✓) the item that best describes your usual drinking frequency:

- (0) three or more times a day
- (1) two times a day
- (2) once a day
- (3) nearly every day
- (4) three or four times a week
- (5) once or twice a week
- (6) two or three times a month
- (7) about once a month
- (8) less than once a month but at least once a year
- (9) less than once a year--or--I have not had any alcoholic beverages during the past month

We are also interested in how much alcohol you consume during each drinking occasion. By one drink we mean one 12 ounce bottle of beer, one standard cocktail, or one four ounce glass of wine. Think of all the times you have been drinking in the past month:

2. When you drank, how often did you have as many as 5 or 6 drinks?

- (0) nearly every time (if so, check this and skip to question # 5)
- (1) more than half the time (if so, check this and skip to question #5)
- (2) less than half the time
- (3) once in a while
- (4) never

3. When you drank, how often did you have 3 or 4 drinks?

- (0) nearly every time (if so, check this and skip to question #5)
- (1) more than half the time (if so, check this and skip to question #5)
- (2) less than half the time

- (3) once in a while
- (4) never

4. When you drank, how often did you have 1 or 2 drinks?

- (0) nearly every time
- (1) more than half the time
- (2) less than half the time
- (3) once in a while
- (4) never

5. Think of the occasion you drank the most this past month. How many drinks did you have on this occasion? (Reminder: one drink equals 12 oz. of beer or 4 oz. of wine or one standard cocktail.)

- (0) 18 or more drinks
- (1) 15-17 drinks
- (2) 12-14 drinks
- (3) 8-11 drinks
- (4) 5-7 drinks
- (5) 3-4 drinks
- (6) 1-2 drinks
- (7) 0 (I did not drink this month)

6. Approximately how many hours did your highest drinking occasion last? That is, over what time period did you drink the drinks you noted in question # 5 above?

number of hours I did not drink this past month

7. On how many occasions this past month did you drink?

a) 18 or more drinks	number of occasions
b) 15-17 drinks	number of occasions
c) 12-14 drinks	number of occasions
d) 8-11 drinks	number of occasions
e) 5-7 drinks	number of occasions

8. How typical was your drinking pattern this past month compared to your general drinking pattern over the past three months?

- (1) I drank a lot more this past month
- (2) I drank somewhat more this past month
- (3) I drank about the same this past month
- (4) I drank somewhat less this past month

- (5) I drank a lot less or not at all this past month
- (6) I did not drink at all this past month and I did not drink at all during the past 3 months

9. Have your drinking habits changed in the past two years?

- (1) yes (if so, please answer questions 10 and 11)
- (2) no

10. Answer question number one as you would have before your drinking habits changed.

- (0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

11. What was the average number of drinks consumed per occasion?

- (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

Appendix B
Consent Form
AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE
AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: GEOFFREY ERICKSON

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: AGGRESSION AS INFLUENCED BY THE EXPECTED EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

I have been asked to participate in a research study that is investigating alcohol related behaviors. The results of this study should help to give a better understanding of how perceptions are changed by alcohol consumption.

I understand that

- 1) I will be asked to respond to some questionnaires. The whole process should take no more than one hour.
- 2) There are no foreseen risks in this study.
- 3) The possible benefit of this study to me is the knowledge that I am making a contribution to research.
- 4) The results of this study may be published, but any information from this study that can be identified with me will remain confidential.
- 5) Any questions about my participation in this study will be answered by Geoffrey Erickson (can be reached through messages left with the Psychology Department office). Complaints about procedures may be presented to Dr. Hicks at 924-5658. For questions or complaints about research subject's rights, or in the event of research related injury, contact Serena Stanford, Ph.D. (Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies) at 924-2480.
- 6) My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced; I may refuse to participate in any part of this study, and may withdraw at any time, without prejudice to my relations with SJSU.

7) I have received a copy of this consent form for my file.

I HAVE MADE A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. MY
SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT I HAVE READ THE INFORMATION
PROVIDED ABOVE AND THAT I HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE.

DATE

SUBJECT'S SIGNATURE

INVESTIGATOR'S SIGNATURE

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Appendix D

Brief Anger-Aggression Measure

Answer the following questions as you are, sober. Begin on number 36 row two.

Directions: Read the statements listed below. Rate each one so that it describes your current way of feeling or behaving.

1. When I really lose my temper, I am capable of hitting or slapping someone.

0	1	2	3	4
Extremely Unlikely	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Very Likely
2. I get mad enough to hit, throw, or kick things.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently
3. I easily lose my patience with people.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently
4. If someone doesn't ask me to do something in the right way, I will avoid doing it, delay doing it, or not do it at all.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently
5. At times I feel I get a raw deal out of life.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently
6. When I get mad I say threatening or nasty things.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very Frequently

Appendix E

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for the PRF

SOURCE	SS	df	MS	F	p
Total	3108.2	159			
Between Subjects	2409.7	79			
Drinking Level (DL)	9.5	1	9.5	<1	
Gender (G)	6.0	1	6.0	<1	
DL x G	12.7	1	12.7	<1	
Error b	2381.5	76	31.3		
Within Subjects	698.5	80			
Repeated Measures (RM)	110.6	1	110.6	15.0	.001
RM x DL	8.6	1	8.6	1.2	
RM x G	17.6	1	17.6	2.4	
Rm x DL x G	3.3	1	3.3	<1	
error w	558.5	76	7.3		

Appendix F

Analysis of Variance Summary Table for the BAAM

SOURCE	SS	df	MS	F	p
Total	2794.0	159			
Between Subjects	2113.0	79			
Drinking Level (DL)	1.6	1	1.6	<1	
Gender (G)	5.6	1	5.6	<1	
DL x G	4.9	1	4.9	<1	
Error b	2100.9	76	27.64		
Within Subjects	693.1	80			
Repeated Measures (RM)	245.0	1	245.0	43.3	.001
RM x DL	0.1	1	0.1	<1	
RM x G	5.6	1	5.6	<1	
Rm x DL x G	0.1	1	0.1	<1	
error w	430.2	76	5.7		