Analysis of Gender and Alcohol, Gender and Sensation Seeking, and

Sensation Seeking and Alcohol

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Abstract

Analysis was done on relationships between gender and alcohol, gender and sensation seeking, and sensation seeking and alcohol. The data showed which gender is at higher risk of alcohol consumption and what alcohol consumption may lead to in terms of sensation seeking. 149 women and 78 men with a mean age of 25.61 (SD = 7.641) were approached on a college campus and asked to fill out a 40-item, forced choice questionnaire. The study found men report drinking greater amounts of alcohol than women, no difference between the genders on sensation seeking, and some correlations between alcohol consumption and sensation seeking. The data is important for alcohol intervention strategies in college students.
Analysis of Gender and Alcohol, Gender and Sensation Seeking, and Sensation Seeking and Alcohol

The ever-captivating “Battle of the Sexes” is alive and well. This study continued the fight in its quest to discover which gender reports drinking more alcohol, which gender reports engaging in higher levels of sensation seeking behaviors, and whether higher levels of reported sensation seeking behavior predicts higher levels of reported alcohol consumption. Past research has shown that men find more reasons to drink (Vaisman-Tzachor, & Lai, 2008). Men were also found to consume larger quantities of alcohol and were found to drink on more occasions (Green, Polen, & Perrin, 2003). Hirschberger, Florian, Mikulincer, Goldenber, and Pyszcynski (2002) found that men were more inclined to partake in risky behaviors; and O’Jile, Ryan, Parks-Levy, Betz, and Gouvier (2004) found that while men scored higher on the Sensation Seeking Scale, there did not appear to be a gender difference in the sub-scale of Experience Seeking. Interestingly, predictive values were found between sensation seeking and alcohol use in Crawford, Pentz, Chou, Li, and Dwyer’s (2003) longitudinal study.

While the previous literature was helpful and important, most of them were looking at more than just gender and alcohol consumption, gender and sensation seeking, and sensation seeking and alcohol. These relationships were more so just necessary side notes for their main focuses. It is important to focus just on these relationships in order to get the most relevant, in-depth information and to ensure accurate data for theories that seem to be foundational for many other research questions. Which is why questionnaires were handed out to college students, in order to answer the three main questions of this study.
Past research has done a lot looking at whether men or women report drinking more alcohol, and definitely has helped to lay a good foundation for this study. It was found that men had more reasons to drink alcohol and thus, were more likely to become intoxicated (Vaisman-Tzachor, & Lai, 2008). Wilsnack, Wilsnack, Kristjansen, Vogeltanz-Holm, and Gmel (2009) found men to consume larger amounts of alcohol, and that women more frequently abstain from alcohol over their lifetime. Green, Polen, and Perrin (2003) concluded that men drink more often than women, and drink more alcohol than women per occasion with this data: 59.7% of the sample’s women were drinkers, averaging 6.33 drinks per month; while 72.4% of the sample’s men were drinkers, averaging 16.69 drinks per month.

Hirschberger et al. (2002) found males to have greater sensation seeking than females. Responses on the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) showed a gender difference with men scoring higher than women; however, there was no difference seen between genders when it came to Experience Seeking (O’Jile, et al., 2004). In Ball, Farnill, and Wangeman’s (1984) study, men scored higher than women on the SSS as well. Concurrent with other previous literature, the Experience Seeking subscale did not appear to have a gender difference in Green, Freeborn, and Polen’s study (2001) as well.

There have been positive correlations found between people with high sensation seeking tendencies and risky behaviors, such as alcohol use. This was highlighted when research was done with women with high sensation seeking scores and their related levels of alcohol use; showing that for both men and women, high sensation seeking scorers were also high scorers when it came to alcohol use (Yanovitzky, 2006). Ramadan, and McMurran (2005) found a correlation between sensation seeking and harmful drinking in both men and women. In Crawford et al.’s (2003) longitudinal survey, there was a predictive value found in middle school
children’s levels of sensation seeking and their later rates of substance use, particularly alcohol, in high school; showing predictive values between sensation seeking and alcohol use. Horvath, Milich, Lynam, Leukfeld, and Clayton (2004) used a longitudinal, cross-lagged panel design, and found that sensation seeking and substance use seemed to influence each other mutually. Adolescents with higher levels of sensation seeking seem to have higher levels of substance use in early adulthood and, substance use in adolescents seem to have an influence in later levels of sensation seeking.

While, most of the mentioned studies used their data to support other questions, this study is specifically interested in analysis of: gender and reported levels of alcohol consumption; gender and reported levels of sensation seeking behaviors; and sensation seeking behaviors and alcohol consumption. These data will provide an up-to-date foundation for other research, such as pre-meditative alcohol intervention strategies. Questionnaires will be handed out to college students to be filled out. It can be deduced that our data will be concurrent with previous literature. It is hypothesized that men will report drinking more often than women. It is hypothesized that men will report higher levels of sensation seeking behaviors on the subscales of Boredom Susceptibility and Thrill Seeking, but that there will be no gender difference on the subscales of Disinhibition and Experience Seeking. It is hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between sensation seeking and alcohol consumption.
Methods

Participants

This study consisted of a total of 227 participants. The mean age of the participants was 25.61 (SD = 7.641), ranging from 18 to 56 years old. 149 of which were women, or 65.6%, and 78, or 34.4%, were men. All participants were college students.

Materials

Participants were given a 40-item, forced choice measure questionnaire. We used the Sensation Seeking Scale, with four subscales: Boredom Susceptibility, Disinhibition, Experience Seeking, and Thrill Seeking (Zuckerman, 1994). Boredom Susceptibility refers to how quickly a person becomes bored. Disinhibition refers to a temporary loss of self-control. Experience Seeking is related to the pursuit of novel experiences. Thrill Seeking is refers to the want of exciting experiences, such as cliff jumping. We added onto the questionnaire a section asking demographic type questions, such as age and gender.

Procedure

Participants were approached on a college campus and asked to fill out our 40-item, forced choice measure questionnaire. After the participants completed the questionnaire, they put it into a stack without their names on them in order to keep the data anonymous. The questionnaire took ten to thirty minutes to complete. No follow up was needed; the participants were thanked for their time.
Results

We looked at whether there was a gender difference when it came to alcohol consumption. The men ($M = 9.30, SD = 1.13$) reported drinking larger quantities of alcohol than the women ($M = 5.06, SD = 5.86$). The results for a $t$-test showed a statistical difference in how much alcohol men versus women consume ($t (229) = -4.05, p < .001$). So, on average, men report drinking greater amounts of alcohol than women report drinking.

We also examined whether there was a gender difference when it came to sensation seeking behaviors, with these four subscales: Boredom Susceptibility, Thrill Seeking, Disinhibition, and Experience Seeking. The results showed no statistical difference in any of the subscales between men and women, with little to no difference between the men’s mean scores and the women’s mean scores on the subscales ($t (228) = -.5$). Men and women appear to be on the same level when it comes to sensation seeking, as seen on the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinhibition</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience-Seeking</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrill and Adventure Seeking</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Sensation Seeking</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total Score)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, we looked to see if there was a relationship between alcohol and sensation seeking behaviors. The data revealed a positive correlation between alcohol and Experience Seeking ($r = -0.148, p < .05$). It is a positive correlation because in our data, the lower the number for Experience Seeking, the higher the level of Experience Seeking. This means that as people drank more, they were more likely to partake in Experience Seeking. There was a positive correlation found between alcohol and Disinhibition ($r = 0.112, p < .05$), meaning that as more alcohol is consumed, people become more Disinhibited. There was no significant correlation found between alcohol and Boredom Susceptibility ($r = 0.007, p < .05$), or alcohol and Thrill Seeking ($r = -0.017, p < .05$).

**Discussion**

While some of our results are in line with our hypotheses, some are a little different. It had been hypothesized that men would report drinking more alcohol than women, which is conducive with our results. The hypothesis that no gender difference would be found in the SSS subscales Disinhibition and Thrill Seeking was supported, but the hypothesis that there would be a gender difference on the subscales Boredom Susceptibility and Thrill Seeking were not. The results also support, in part, the hypothesis that as alcohol consumption increased so would sensation seeking behaviors. This is true only with the SSS subscales Experience Seeking and Disinhibition; there were no significant correlations between alcohol consumption and Boredom Susceptibility or Thrill Seeking.

Our data lined up with previous work when it came to gender and alcohol consumption. Green, Polen and Perrin (2003) found that men drink more alcohol per occasion than women. The present data showed that men drink an average of twice as many drinks per week than
women. The same pattern is shown in Wilsnack et al.’s (2009) study where they found that men consume larger quantities of alcohol than women, and are more likely, in general, to drink.

Our data revealed no significant difference between men and women in any of the SSS subscales, which is somewhat surprising when compared to some of the previous literature. O’Jile et al. (2004) found that men scored higher on the SSS, except for in Experience Seeking, and Ball, Fanill, and Wangeman’s (1984) study showed opposite results to our data findings. In their study they found that men scored higher than women on the SSS in all subscales. However, time may be to blame for the opposing findings in this study, since it is over two decades old and the social expectations and roles of men and women then were more polarized and strict than they are today.

This study is unique compared to past literature, because it compares alcohol consumption and sensation seeking through the SSS subscales. Previous work has shown there is a correlation between sensation seeking and harmful drinking (Ramadan, & McMurran, 2005). Horvath et al.’s (2004) study showed that alcohol use and sensation seeking are mutually influential on one another. So, if looking at just the Disinhibition and Experience Seeking SSS subscales, our data shows the same results as previous literature. If looking at just the Thrill Seeking and Boredom Susceptibility SSS subscales, however, our data reveals opposite results as previous literature. This could be because Horvath et al.’s (2004) study may not have broken the SSS down into the subscales when analyzing their data. It could also be because they were looking at a very specific population of people, who may have been predisposed to either alcohol consumption or sensation seeking behaviors.
Of course, there are limitations to our study. First of all, the present survey relied on self-report, which has liabilities such as personal differences amongst the participants in how they define or categorize certain things. The fact that the questionnaire was forced choice also presents a problem. It leaves out a lot of sensation seeking activities, and forces what could be seen as extreme answers. The fact that people are sober and in an intellectual setting when they take the survey could also be problematic. Alcohol effects a person’s thought processes, meaning the participants were in a different state of mind when they took the survey than when under the influence. Being in one state of mind versus the other could influence the answers they give. In the future it would be beneficial to use a more in-depth survey. Perhaps a more longitudinal study would yield more accurate results as well.

This study has profitable aspects. There is now a study that has focused on the questions of the relationships between gender and alcohol, gender and sensation seeking, and alcohol and sensation seeking in depth. In previous studies with this information, the data were collected as a side note necessary to the main aspect of the study. This study has applications outside of larger research questions as well. It may be used as a great tool in interventions involving college drinking. It presents the knowledge of who is at higher risk of consuming alcohol, how much alcohol, and what behaviors drinking may lead to. This will, hopefully, decrease the threat of dangers such as driving under the influence.
References


