

# Inclusion of Close Friends as a Moderator of the Relationship Between College Life Alcohol Salience Scale and Binge Drinking



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## Present Research

**Aim:** This cross-sectional study examined how self-identification with close others moderates the relationship between how integral college students' feel that alcohol is to their college experience and peak drinks.

## Introduction

*The literature has demonstrated that undergraduates often over estimate the amount of alcohol other students drink such that overestimation is related to increased peak drinks and more alcohol-related problems<sup>1</sup>.*

- ❑ Heavier drinking students also tend to associate with other heavier drinking students<sup>2</sup>. As a consequence, the closer students are with members of their network, the higher their level of peak drinks<sup>3</sup>.
- ❑ This affiliation with heavier drinking students can skew drinking norms since those who perceive others as being more approving of drinking tend to drink more<sup>4</sup>.
- ❑ How integral students' felt drinking was an important part of their college experience predicted their drinking and alcohol-related consequences a month later<sup>5</sup>.
- ❑ Although these variables have been explored independently, research has yet to examine the moderating effect of students' identification with close friends on the relationship between the degree to which students believe that drinking is an important part of college life and students' peak drinks. We specifically chose to examine peak drinks as the outcome variable (e.g., the most drinks consumed in one sitting) because it may be more indicative of social drinking than other drinking indices due to the fact that most students might not choose to drink heavily alone<sup>5</sup>.
- ❑ For the purposes of this study, students were prescreened for heavy drinking criteria.
- ❑ H1: We hypothesized that higher identification with close friends would predict peak drinks among heavy drinking college students because heavier drinkers who self-identify with close friends might have friends who are also heavier drinkers.
- ❑ H2: We predicted that students' greater endorsement of the College Life Alcohol Salience Scale (CLASS) would predict peak drinks because they believe that drinking is important to their college experience.
- ❑ H3: We expected an interaction between close student identification and CLASS such that students who identified the most with their close friends and endorsed higher levels of CLASS would drink the most on one drinking occasion.

## Methods

### Participants

- ❑ This was a one-time, cross-sectional study approved by an Institutional Review Board conducted at a large, public, Southern university.
- ❑ Recruitment was primarily conducted through the university's online research management system.
- ❑ Participants needed to be at least 18 years or older and were prescreened for heavy drinking criteria (4+drinks females/5+ drinks males in one sitting) online.
- ❑ Qualified participants were re-directed to the online questionnaire.
- ❑ There was a total of 511 participants
  - ❑ Gender: 72.8% female
  - ❑ (M=22.13 year old; SD=3.75) Range=18-45
  - ❑ Ethnicity: 49.90% White/Caucasian, 3.72% Native American/American Indian, 16.05% Black/African American, 14.87% Asian, 0% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4.70% Multi-Ethnic, 10.76% Other.
- ❑ Participants received extra credit that could be applied to their courses.

### Measures

- ❑ **Inclusion of the Other in the Self adapted for self-identification with close friends (ICS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).** The ICS is a pictorial measure of closeness adapted to measure self-identification with close friends. It consists of one item featuring a series of 7 pairs of concentric circles. The pairs of circles represent varying degrees of overlap in students' self-identification with their close friends. This measure was used to identify the participants perceived level of "closeness" between themselves their close friends, with 1 representing the least self-identification with close friends and 7 representing the most self-identification with close friends.
- ❑ **College Life Alcohol Salience Scale (CLASS; Osberg et al., 2010)<sup>1</sup>.** CLASS assesses the degree to which students' believe that drinking is an integral part of their college experience. Fifteen items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). A sum score of the items was created. Items included "College is a time for experimentation with alcohol". Three items were reverse scored (e.g., "Alcohol is not an important aspect of college life."
- ❑ **Quantity/Frequency Index was used to indicate peak drinks<sup>8</sup>.** Only the first item of the quantity/frequency index was used: "Think of the occasion you drank the most during the past month. How much did you drink?" Self-reported answers ranged from 0 -25+ drinks.

## Results

Table 1. Zero-order Correlations between the main variables.

	1.	2.	3.
1. Inclusion of Close Friends in the Self (ICS)	--	.076†	.109*
2. College Alcohol Life Salience Scale (CLASS)		--	.236***
3. Heavy episodic drinking (HED)			--
Means	5.687	42.111	10.411
Standard Deviation	1.431	9.291	5.4447

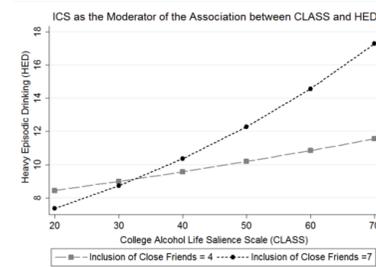
Note: N=511, P<.10 †, p<.05\*, p<.01\*\*, p<.001\*\*\*

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis predicting HED.

Step		b	b SE	Z
Step 1	CLASS	.0124	.002	5.40***
	ICS	.032	.015	2.11*
Step 2	CLASS * ICS	.004	.002	2.37*

Note: N=511, P<.10 †, p<.05\*, p<.01\*\*, p<.001\*\*\*

Figure 1.



### Analytic Strategy

- ❑ Due to the fact that the distribution of the dependent variable of peak drinks was skewed, we utilized hierarchical negative binomial regression analyses.
- ❑ In Step 1, CLASS and ICS were entered in as predictor variables of peak drinks. The results revealed significant positive main effects for both CLASS (H1) and ICS (H2) in predicting peak drinks.
- ❑ In Step 2, the interaction between CLASS\*ICS was also significantly and positively associated with peak drinks.



## Discussion

- ❑ Results of the current study supported our assumption that higher self-identification with close friends would be positively associated with greater peak drinks(H1).
- ❑ Thus, the more students self-identified with their close friends, the higher their peak drinks.
- ❑ Moreover, as anticipated, results revealed that CLASS was significantly positively associated with peak drinking (H2).
- ❑ Therefore, students who were higher in endorsement of CLASS tended to have higher peak drinks.
- ❑ Finally, in line with our expectations, there was a significant interaction between CLASS\*ICS in predicting peak drinking (H3).
- ❑ Those who highly self-identified with their close friends and highly endorsed CLASS appeared to drink more drinks in one sitting relative to those who did not self-identify as much with their close friends but also highly endorsed CLASS.
- ❑ The implications of these findings are important in that they suggest that clinicians or those working with heavy drinking students might be able to utilize both ICS and CLASS as screening tools for identifying at-risk, heavy drinking college students.
- ❑ This information might be utilized to inform interventions targeting students who believe that alcohol is vital to their college experience.

## References

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