

An abstract graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of white lines and circles on a blue gradient background, resembling a circuit board or neural network.

ROLE OF ALCOHOL IN RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

- The authors introduced two literature theories, Murray and Holmes' Dependency-Regulation Theory (1998) and Steele and Josephs' Alcohol Myopia Theory (1990), which influenced the course of their experiment. The results are supported by both theories. Intoxicated individuals with low-self esteem reported more “negative feelings” toward a conflict with their significant other showing that there is a connection with alcohol and conflict in relationships.



INTRODUCTION

- Alcohol is predicted to play a role in increased conflict in relationships.
 - Two theories:
 - Murray and Holmes' Dependency-Regulation Theory suggests that couples in an intimate relationship will have different reactions to conflict based on self-esteem levels.
 - Steele and Josephs' Alcohol Myopia Theory says that “negative feelings” are emphasized during conflicts when alcohol is involved (pg.185).
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METHODS

• Demographics & Special Characteristics

- 56 men with average age of 20.1 years and average relationship of 21.7 months
- Heterosexual relationship with minimum 6 month duration
- Alcohol consumers

• Recruitment & Compensation

- Mass testing of male students in Intro. Psychology courses
 - Offered one course credit and monetary payment
 - \$5 dollars for sober condition
 - \$15 for intoxicated or placebo

• Instructions

- Participants were instructed to complete questionnaires to determine general relation and self-views
 - Recall a relationship conflict where both the participant and partner were at fault

• Materials

- Independent Variables Questionnaire (Pre-Experiment)
- Dependent Variables Questionnaire (Post-Experiment)
- Placebo beverage and alcoholic beverage
- Alco-Sensor IV breathalyzer

METHODS (CONT.)

- Design
 - Groupings of four
 - Measures taken before and after beverage consumption
- Conditions
 - Intoxication: 18
 - Placebo: 15
 - Sober: 19
- Actual Events:
 - Informed consent
 - Weighing of alcoholic and placebo beverages
- Operational Definitions:
 - IV:
 - *Self-esteem*: scale comprised of 10 questions and measured on 9-point scale
 - *Love for partner*: scale consisting of three statements measuring participants love for their partners
 - DV:
 - *Self-emotion, partner's emotion, insecurity in partner's affection, blame, conflict seriousness*
- Unusual Occurrences
 - Removal of four participants

RESULTS

- -Analyses were conducted using a 2 (alcohol condition: alcohol vs no alcohol) x 2 (self-esteem: high vs low) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA)
- **$F(1, 47) = 4.66, p < .05$**
- - Study showed that there was a significant main effect of the alcohol condition on the measure of the participants' own feelings about a conflict.
- -The participants who had drunk alcohol (**$M = 6.13$**) reported more negative feelings towards the conflict than the participants who had not drunk any alcohol (**$M = 4.93$**).

- -Study also found a significant main effect of the alcohol condition for the participants' understanding of their partners' feelings about the conflict.
- **$F(1, 47) = 7.41, p < .05$.**
- The participants in the alcohol consumption group (**$M = 5.26$**) reported that they perceived their partners to be more upset about the conflict than the participants who did not consume any alcohol (**$M = 4.06$**).
- The covariate for the partner emotion measure was significant, **$F(1, 47) = 5.33, p < .05$.**
- -It was revealed that there was a significant interaction of the alcohol condition and self-esteem on the measure of general insecurity in partner's affections.
- **$F(1, 47) = 4.74, p < .05$**

ALCOHOL AND CONFLICT

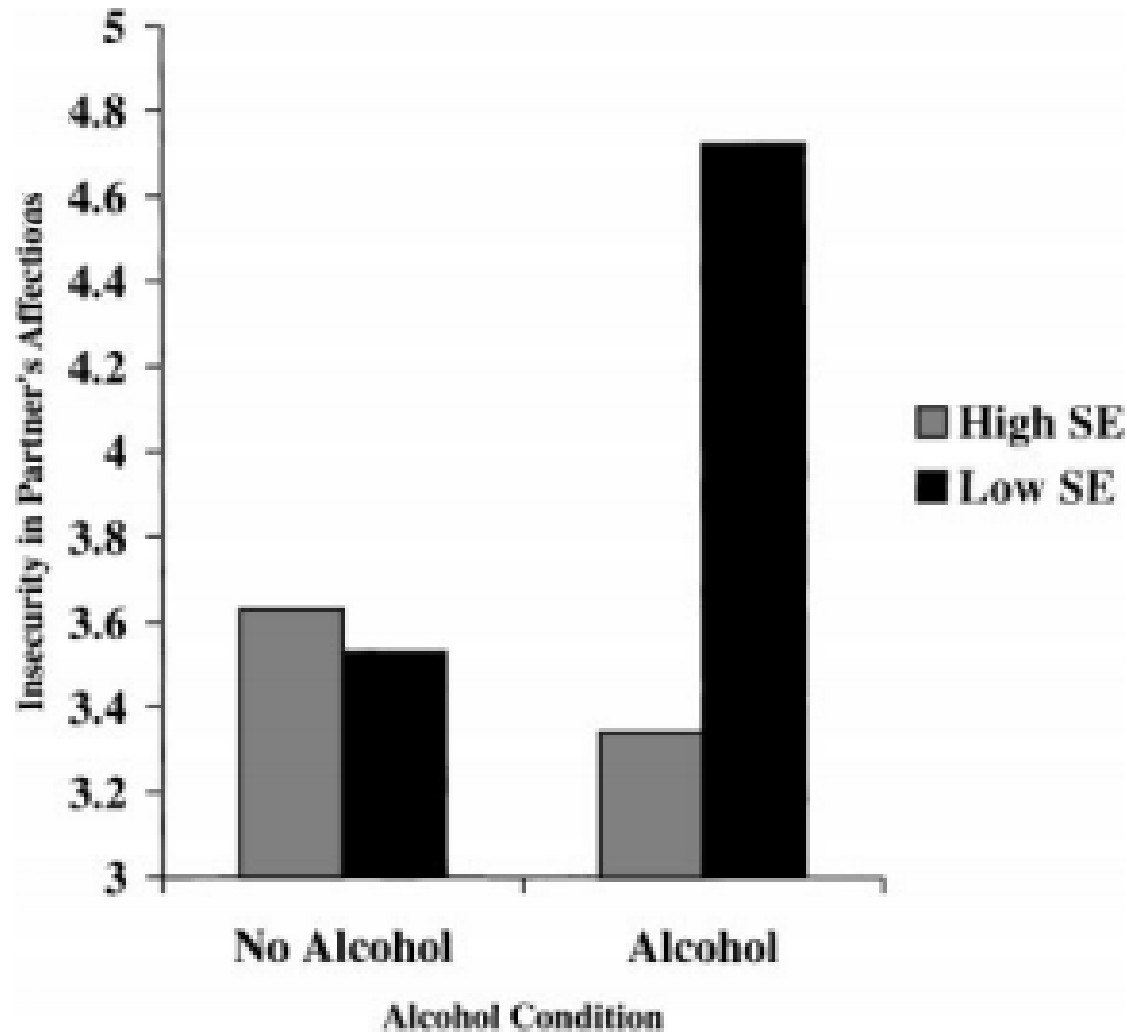


FIG. 1. Insecurity in partner's affections ratings as a function of alcohol condition and self-esteem.

- Similar levels of insecurity were reported between low self-esteem (LSEs) participants who has not had any alcohol to drink ($M=3.53$) and high self-esteem (HSEs) who also did not consume any alcohol ($M=3.63$).
- Intoxicated participants with low self-esteem ($M=4.72$) reported significantly higher levels of insecurity than intoxicated participants with high self-esteem ($M=3.34$).
- $t(47) = 2.54, p < .05$.
- Intoxicated LSEs had significantly higher levels of insecurity than the LSEs that were not intoxicated.
- $t(47) = 2.43, p < .05$
- The covariate was not significant, $F(1,47) = 2.21, ns$.

BLAME RESULTS

- -Intoxicated participants with low self-esteem (**$M=4.98$**) reported significantly more blame than the other three cells combined (**$M=4.15$**), $t(47) = 2.06$, $p < .05$.
- -Covariate was significant, $F(1, 47) = 5.58$, $p < .05$.

THREE-WAY ANALYSIS

- 2 (alcohol condition: alcohol vs no alcohol) x 2 (self-esteem: low vs high self-esteem) x 2 (seriousness of conflict: high vs low seriousness) ANCOVA was conducted.
- LSEs (**$M=3.96$**) and HSEs (**$M=4.67$**) were equally blaming when participants were not intoxicated and were evaluating a conflict of high seriousness, $t(43)=1.24$, ns.
- Intoxicated LSEs (**$M=5.50$**) were significantly more blaming than intoxicated HSEs (**$M=3.69$**) during a conflict of high seriousness, $t(43) = 2.35$, $p < .05$.
- The covariate was marginally significant, $F(1, 43) = 3.71$, $p < .06$.

DISCUSSION

- The researchers concluded that alcohol can lead to exacerbation of relationship conflict, with intoxicated partners feeling more negative about their perception of the conflict and their perception of their partners view of the conflict
- Since the Dependency-regulation Theory posits the importance of not distancing oneself in a relationship, exacerbated feelings towards conflict as a result of intoxication can lead to increased detachment from partners.
- This maladaptive effect has been shown to be buffered by individuals having a high self-esteem, while low self-esteem individuals were more likely to blame their partner for the conflict (Murray et al., 1998)

DISCUSSION (CONT.)

- Intoxicated High self-esteem individuals were less likely to react defensively to conflict and blame partners than that of intoxicated low self-esteem individuals
- Alcohol has also been shown to play a role in domestic violence and one's level of aggression when provoked (Leonard and Senchak, 1996; Bushman and Cooper, 1990; Hull and Bond, 1986), and with low self-esteem individuals being more likely to blame their partners for conflict, domestic violence could be more likely to occur in relationships with low self-esteem individuals.

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