

ABCT 2020 Script

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE MODERATES HARM REDUCTION VIA PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES

Jordan A. Ortman, Jennifer L. Shipley, M.P.H., Megan Strowger, M.S., Abby L. Braitman, Ph.D.

Drinking alcohol is often seen as an inherent part of the college experience. While drinking can be done safely and with minimal harm, this is not always the case, and can result in negative outcomes. Because of this, researchers are focusing on ways to reduce the negative outcomes that result from college drinking. One prominent way this is being done is by encouraging the use of Protective Behavioral Strategies or PBS. PBS use by college students has been shown to consistently reduce the number of negative alcohol-related outcomes. That being said, PBS is not equally effective for everyone. In this study, we examined a possible moderator in its effectiveness. It was hypothesized that reduction in problems when using PBS would be weaker for those who believe using PBS is not important.

Participants for this study were 526 college students. In order to participate, students had to report consuming at least 1 alcoholic beverage in the past 2 weeks. We examined typical weekly quantity of alcohol consumption, past-month alcohol-related problems, PBS use, and perceived importance of PBS use. PBS use was assessed via the Strategies Questionnaire, which categorizes PBS into three subscales including Selective Avoidance, Strategies While Drinking, and Alternatives to Drinking. Perceived importance of PBS was assessed with 5 items created by the researcher. The data used in this study was part of a larger clinical trial. Only pre-intervention data were included in these analyses. To examine the moderation hypotheses, linear multiple regressions were used, controlling for quantity of alcohol consumed.

We found that perceived importance of PBS did in fact moderate 2 of the 3 PBS subscales when controlling for the quantity of alcohol consumed. Namely, it was found that students who valued the use of PBS experienced fewer negative outcomes when they used more ‘Selective Avoidance’ strategies compared to those who did not value PBS. This was also true for ‘Strategies While Drinking’ PBS such that, participants who used more ‘Strategies While Drinking’ experienced fewer problems only if they rated the importance of PBS higher. The third moderation model was non-significant. In other words, the association between ‘Alternatives to Drinking’ PBS and problems did not vary based on reported perceived importance of PBS. Overall, college students who held the belief that PBS was important experienced a protective relationship for two of the three PBS subscales. The novel finding that ‘Alternatives to Drinking’ was non-significant may be related to varying motives for drinking. Some research has suggested that individuals who drink to cope and/or conform tend to have problems specifically with ‘Alternatives to Drinking’ strategies. As such, perceived importance of PBS may not be enough to overcome one’s motives for drinking in all cases. In conclusion, our results showed that although PBS is effective for most people, there are certain attitudes or beliefs that can hinder its effectiveness. Therefore, college administrators may want to target those who do not value PBS for alcohol harm reduction interventions. Further, promoting the importance of PBS could be an effective addition to future drinking interventions and educational campaigns.

References

- Hingson, R., Zha, W., & Smyth, D. (2017). Magnitude and trends in heavy episodic drinking, alcohol-impaired driving, and alcohol-related mortality and overdose hospitalizations among emerging adults of college ages 18–24 in the United States, 1998–2014. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 78(4), 540-548. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2017.78.540>
- Linden, A. N., Kite, B. A., Braitman, A. L., & Henson, J. M. (2014). Protective behavioral strategy use and motivations for drinking: Exploring Alternatives to Drinking strategies. *Addictive Behaviors*, 39(2), 469-472. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2013.10.008
- Martens, M. P., Ferrier, A. G., Sheehy, M. J., Corbett, K., Anderson, D. A., & Simmons, A. (2005). Development of the Protective Behavioral Strategies Survey. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 66(5), 698–705. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsa.2005.66.698>
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH-2018). (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.datafiles.samhsa.gov/study/national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-2018-nid18757>
- Pearson, M. R. (2013). Use of alcohol protective behavioral strategies among college students: A critical review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 33(8), 1025-1040. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2013.08.006>