

# Close friend injunctive norms for risky drinking mediates relationship between alcohol social media content shared by social network and college drinking

## Introduction

Alcohol-related content (ARC) is ubiquitous across popular social media platforms and viewed by millions of users, including college students. Most studies examining effects of exposure to ARC on college drinking have assessed exposure globally (i.e., whether friends post ARC) rather than content sharing behaviors of specific named close friends (i.e., if [friend name] posts ARC). Individuals one considers close friends are called a social network, and assessments of a participant's perceptions of the behaviors of specific individuals who are important to them are called social network assessments. Injunctive and descriptive norms have been found to mediate the relationship between exposure to ARC and use. However, this remains unexplored for exposure to ARC from specific social network members.

## Method

### Participants

- $N = 129$  college students
- Mean age = 23.42,  $SD = 5.64$ ; 86.8% female
- 56.6% White, 23.3% Black
- Cross-sectional online survey for course credit, collected May through December 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic)

### Materials

#### Social Media Usage

- Questions about what platforms participants use, how often they check social media, and if/what kinds of content they personally share depicting alcohol use

#### Social Network

- Brief Important People Interview (BIPI; DeMartini et al., 2013; Zywiak & Longabaugh, 2002)
- Identified 10 people important to them since the start of the school year, with follow-up questions about each person (e.g., if they post alcohol content on social media)

#### Alcohol Consumption

- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985)
- Report standard drinks consumed each day of a typical week for the past 30 days
- Calculated *quantity* (total number of drinks for the week), *peak* (highest number of drinks on any one day), and *frequency* (number of drinking days)

#### Alcohol Problems

- Brief Young Adult Alcohol Consequences Questionnaire (B-YAACQ; Kahler et al., 2005)
- Selected "yes" if they had experienced a particular consequence in the past 30 days (24 items;  $\alpha = 0.87$ )

#### Descriptive Norms

- Modified DDQ (Collins et al., 1985)
- Report perceived standard drinks consumed by close friends for each day of a typical week in the past 30 days
- Calculated perceived *quantity*, *peak*, and *frequency* norms

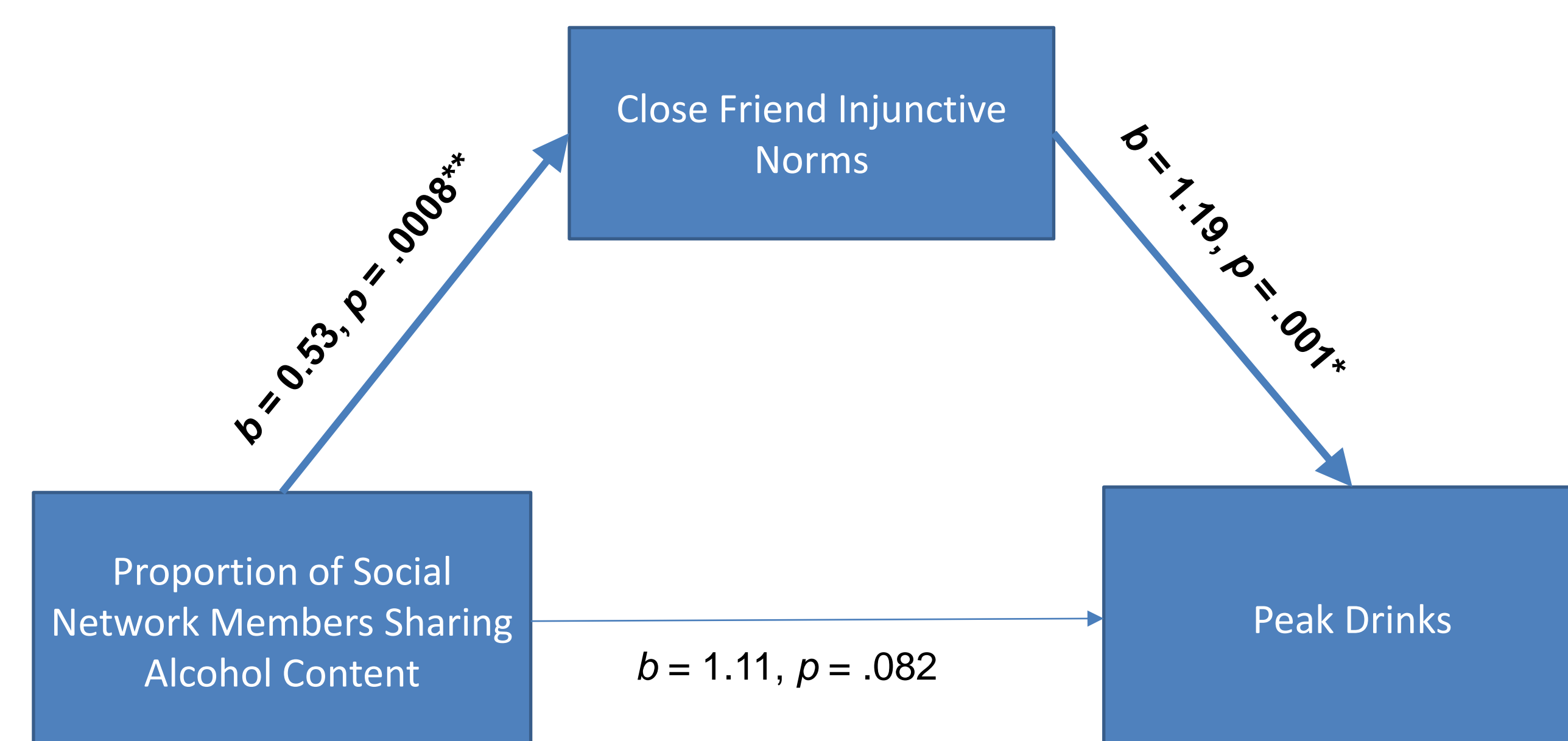
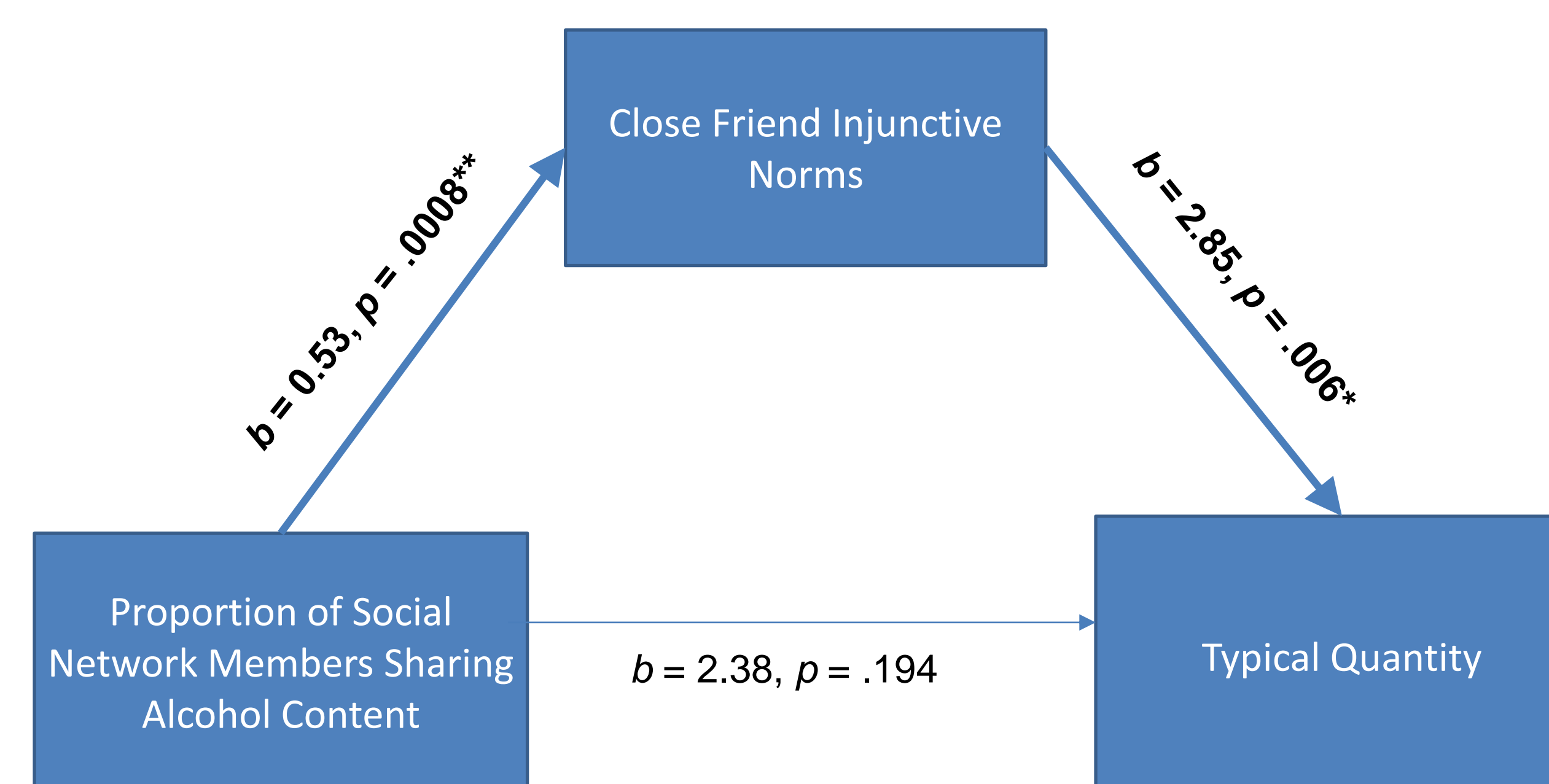
#### Injunctive Norms

- 10 items ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ; Carey et al., 2010)
- Response options: 1 = *strong disapproval* to 6 = *strong approval*

## Procedure

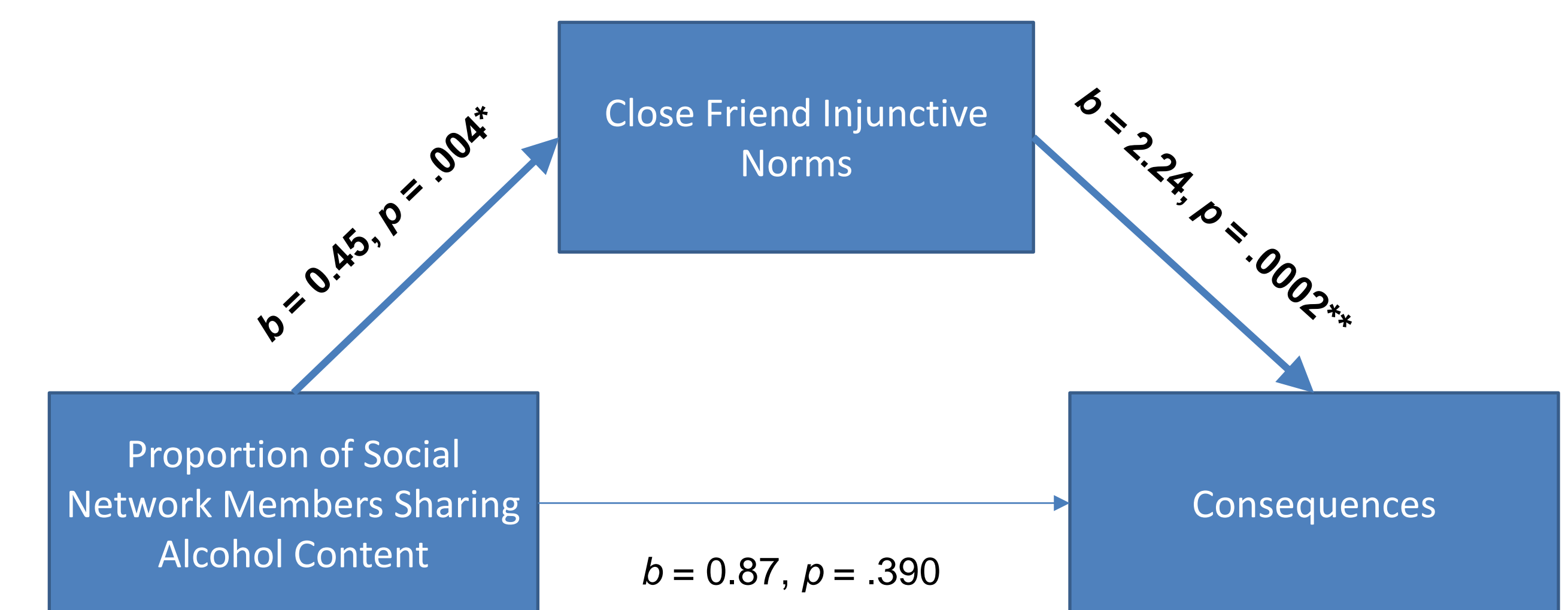
### Analysis Approach: Mediation analyses

- Conducted using SPSS 28 and the PROCESS Macro v3.5
- **Outcomes** = 4 alcohol indicators (separate model for each)
  - Quantity, Peak, Frequency, Problems
- **Covariates** = gender, frequency of social media checking, alcohol quantity (only for alcohol problems model)
- **Main predictor** = proportion of social network sharing alcohol content
- **Mediators** = Close friend descriptive norms (4 separate models), close friend injunctive norms (4 separate models)
- Used bootstrapping with 5000 samples and significant effects were determined by 95% confidence intervals that do not contain zero



Note. Bolded lines indicate significant associations. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .001$

## Results



- Close friend *injunctive* norms were found to mediate associations between exposure to ARC shared by social network members and 3 alcohol outcomes (indirect effects):
  - **Typical quantity**,  $b = 1.51^*$ ,  $SE = 0.78$ , 95% BCCIs [0.13, 3.20]
  - **Peak drinks**,  $b = 0.63^*$ ,  $SE = 0.25$ , 95% BCCIs [0.16, 1.14],
  - **Consequences**,  $b = 1.01^*$ ,  $SE = 0.49$ , 95% BCCIs [0.23, 2.11]
  - But not frequency,  $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ , 95% BCCIs [-0.19, 0.48]
- Close friend *descriptive* norms (typical quantity, frequency, peak drinks) were not found to mediate any associations between exposure to ARC shared by social network members and alcohol outcomes,  $p$ 's  $> .05$ .
- This indicates seeing more alcohol content from specific close friends may influence how much students perceive their friends approve of heavy drinking, suggesting a potential mechanism to address in tailored interventions.

## Discussion

Findings that injunctive norms were a significant mediator of the relationship between exposure to ARC and alcohol outcomes are in line with previous research. However, examining ARC content sharing for specific individuals may differ from examining these behaviors for friends globally, which may explain why descriptive norms were not a significant mediator. Future research should examine close friend drinking norms using global and specific assessments and see how each uniquely explains the relationship between exposure to ARC and alcohol outcomes.

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