

Peers and Parents and Alcohol Use in College Students

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Introduction

- Alcohol use among college students is a continuing and serious problem (Hingson et al., 2009; National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014) with varying outcomes for young men and women (Labrie & Cail, 2011).
- From high school to college, *peers* generally serve as a *risk* factor and *parents* generally serve as a *protective* factor for student drinking (Wetherill & Fromme, 2007).
- The transition to college involves changes in the environmental context such as moving from home, getting acquainted with new social situations, increasing salience of peer groups, and increasing access to alcohol (Turrisi et al., 2007). As well, peer associations and peers' approval of alcohol use are a stronger influence than parents (Perkins, 2002), especially on heavy drinking during the first year of college (Borsari et al., 2007).
- Nonetheless, *parental communication* and *parental involvement* during college years buffer the relationship between peer norms and drinking in college students (Turrisi et al., 2007). However, only a few studies claim that alcohol-related parenting is associated with decreased heavy drinking among college students (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005).
- Derived from Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1971), the current study tests the direct associations between friendship importance, friends' views, and frequency of peer use, as well as conflict and affection of parents on alcohol use in college students. Potential buffering effects of variables on the association between friends' approval of alcohol use and students' alcohol use are also tested.

Method

The data used for the study were collected from volunteers recruited from three state assisted campuses in the northeast, the south, and the southwest (Fischer et al., 2007). All procedures were approved by IRBs. Information came from anonymous volunteers with a wide range of majors, ages, and family incomes. The sample in this study ($N = 1,577$) were unmarried college students with ages limited to 18-25 years ($M = 20.2$ years, $SD = 1.5$). Sixty-six percent were women. The sample had 85% White/Non-Hispanic, 5% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 4% other.

Measures

- Four hierarchical regression models assessed the associations between demographic control variables (Model 1), peers (Model 2), parents and living arrangements (Model 3), and interaction variables (Model 4) on college student alcohol use (see Table). The results varied only slightly among models, therefore the results for the most inclusive fourth model are provided.
- The demographic variables used in the analyses were: age; gender (0 = female, 1 = male); ethnicity (0 = white, 1 = other); grade point average; mother/father education; and parents' household income.
- The peer predictors added in Model 2 were friendship importance (two items, $\alpha = .61$; Bell, Forthun, & Sun, 2001); friends' approval of alcohol use for someone their age (1 item; Fischer et al., 2007); and one item of perceived average alcohol use by other students.
- Model 3 parenting variables were 8-item scales measuring mother and father conflict and support/warmth with the student (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; alphas from 0.87 to 0.91) and living arrangement (living with parents = 0; living with roommates and other = 1).
- The dependent variable (DV), frequency of alcohol use was measured with standardized scores averaged on CORE items about alcohol use in the last month, frequency of binge drinking on the last 10 drinking occasions, and number of binges in the last two weeks (NIAAA, 2004).

Abstract

The current study was designed to understand the predictors of drinking behavior in 1,577 students ($M = 20.2$ years, $SD = 1.5$) in three different colleges. Lower grade point average, being European American, and having higher parental income were associated with greater college student drinking. Peers' views about alcohol use and the importance of friendship to the individual were significant predictors of alcohol use, but there was less vulnerability to friends' views when friendships were less important to the student. There were no differences in frequency of drinking among males and females. Living apart from parents was associated with greater college student drinking but no other parent variables were directly associated with student drinking. The study discusses the potential implications for the prevention and intervention efforts on student drinking.

Hypotheses

- (a) greater friendship importance and higher association with friends who drink and approve of drinking will be associated with increased rate of drinking in first year college students, and (b) lower friendship importance buffers the effects of peers' approval of alcohol use.
- (a) lower affection, higher conflicts with parents, and living away from parents will be associated with increased drinking; and (b) parenting acts as a buffer such that students with higher parental affection and lower parental conflict will demonstrate a weaker association between peers approval of alcohol use and students' own alcohol use.

Table: Direct and Moderating Effects on Alcohol Use (N = 1,577)

Variables In Models	Model 4	
	B	SE B
(Constant)	.01	.02
Model 1 Demographic Variables $\Delta R^2 = .09, \Delta F(7, 1464) = 21.64^{***}$		
Gender	.04	.02
Age	.03	.02
Grade Point Average	-.18***	.02
Ethnicity (non-White)	-.11***	.02
Mother's Education	.01	.02
Father's Education	.02	.03
Parents' Income	.12***	.02
Model 2 Added Peer Variables $\Delta R^2 = .17, \Delta F(3, 1461) = 113.97^{***}$		
Friendship Importance	.06**	.02
Friends' Views of Using Alcohol	.42***	.02
Views of Alcohol Use by Others	-.01	.02
Model 3 Added Parent Variables $\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(5, 1456) = 4.24^{**}$		
Mother Affection	-.05	.03
Mother Conflict	.00	.03
Father Affection	.00	.03
Father Conflict	.05	.03
Living Arrangement	.08**	.02
Model 4 Added Interaction Terms $\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(7, 1449) = 1.97$		
Friends' Views*Gender	-.01	.02
Friends' Views*Friendship Importance	.05*	.02
Friends' Views*Mother Affection	-.05+	.03
Friends' Views*Mother Conflict	-.01	.03
Friends' Views*Father Affection	-.02	.03
Friends' Views*Father Conflict	-.02	.03
Friends' Views*Living Arrangement	.01	.02
Cumulative $R^2 = .28, F(22,1449) = 25.70^{***}$		

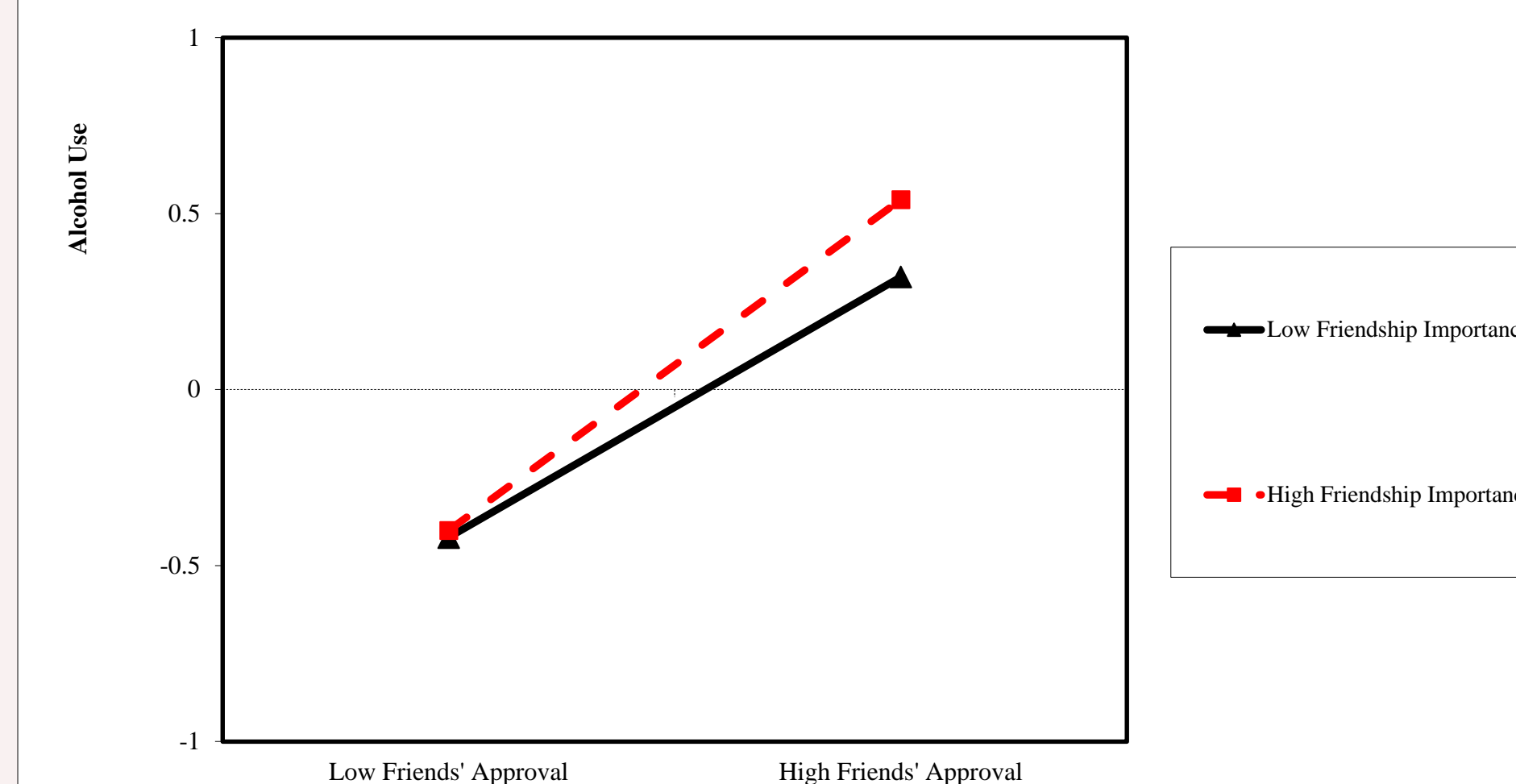
+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Note: The results varied only slightly among models, therefore the results for the most inclusive fourth model are provided. All variables were centered by standardized scores; thus, B and Beta are the same with only B and SE of B shown in the table.

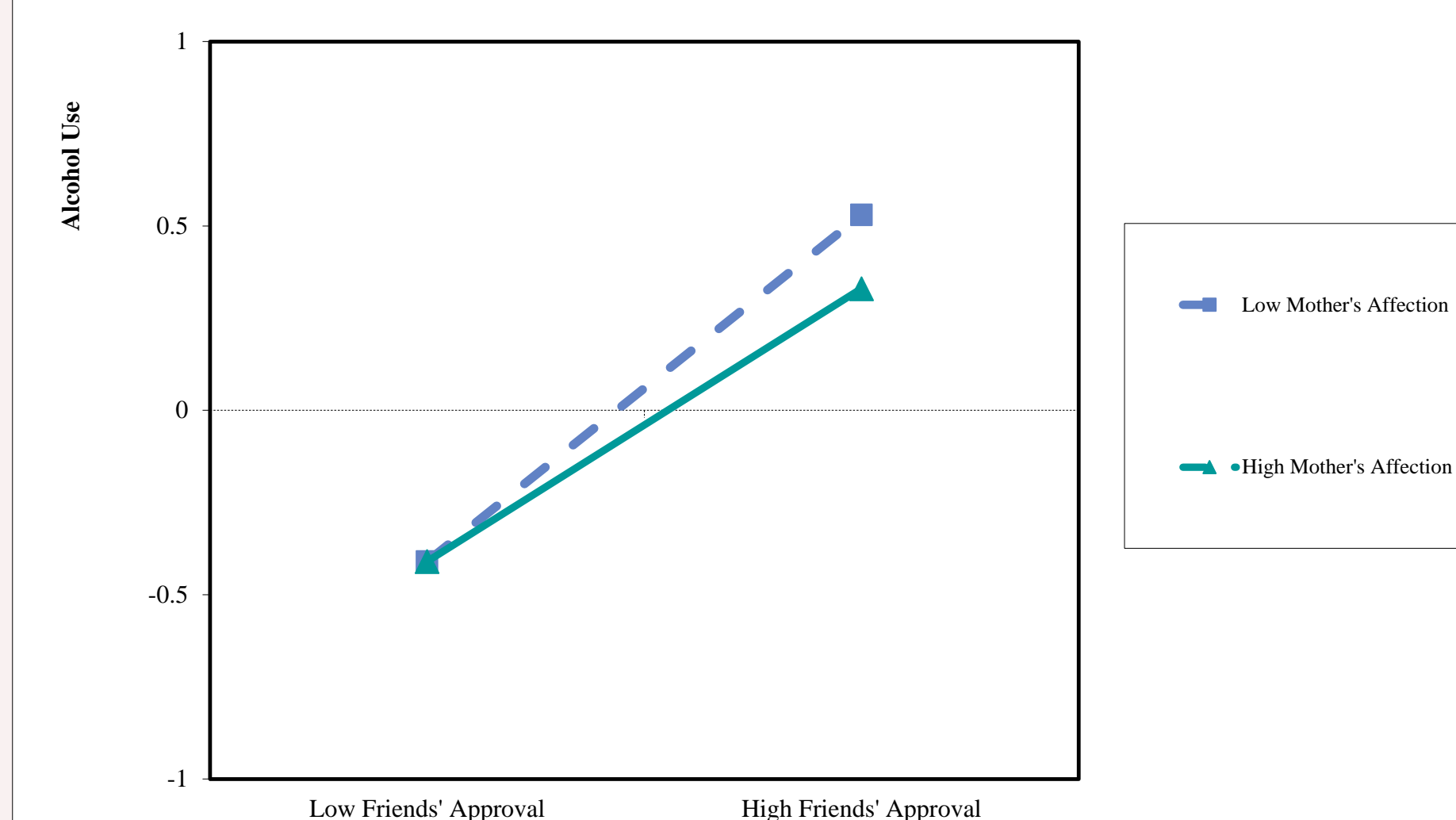
Implications

- The implications of the current study for prevention and intervention efforts on student drinking indicate possibilities for whom to target and where. Parents may be a protective factor as higher levels of mother's affection buffered the impact of friends' approval of alcohol use on students' own use.
- Because friendships are a pervasive part of student life, harnessing the power of valued peers may be a point of intervention. This study points to the importance of peers, not just in reiterating the importance of perceptions of peers but also the importance of valuing friendships both as a direct effect and as an interaction effect in enhancing risk when other students are perceived to view alcohol use favorably.
- Students who still lived at home had lower alcohol use. This association may be due to: greater monitoring by parents, student self-selection, or fewer opportunities to drink with peers. Because many students live away from home, school dorms and other living arrangements may provide locations for intervention and prevention.
- With the exception of friends' approval of alcohol use, most of the associations that supported the hypotheses were modest.

Friendship Importance Moderates Association Between Friend's Approval of Alcohol Use with College Student Alcohol Use



Mother's Affection Moderates Association of Friends' Approval of Alcohol Use with College Student Alcohol Use



For questions and comments about the poster, please contact: manju.chawla@ttu.edu. References are available on request or on the reverse side of the handout. Poster at NCFR, November, 2017.

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