

Drinking in College Athletes and Non-Athletes

Diana M. Dumas

Boise State University

Rob Turrisi

Penn State University

Mandi James

Boise State University

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between adult attachment style, drinking quantity, and problems associated with drinking in college athletes and non-athletes. Results indicate that for athletes, drinking quantity is associated with avoidance of intimacy, whereas for non-athletes, drinking quantity is associated with an approach toward intimacy. Further, there was no relationship between attachment style and drinking problems for athletes, while for non-athletes, the Preoccupied style was associated with psychosocial problems related to drinking.

The college student population has been identified as an at-risk-group for heavy drinking and problems associated with alcohol use. Evidence also suggests that student athletes drink more heavily and frequently than non-athletes, contrary to the widely held belief that athletic activity may serve as a buffer against alcohol abuse. Although both peer influences and social context have been related to alcohol use in college students, the importance of peer relationships to the student is often excluded from this relationship.

Adult attachment theory provides a unique way of understanding students in terms of their interpersonal functioning, as well as the importance of relationships to them. The four-category model of adult attachment proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) is based on the underlying constructs of view of self and other. This model yields four adult attachment styles: Secure (positive self, positive other), comfortable with intimacy; Preoccupied (negative self, positive other), preoccupied with seeking validation from others; Fearful (negative self, negative other), expect rejection and therefore fear close relationships; and Dismissing (positive self, negative other), not interested in intimacy.

The aim of the current study was to examine drinking quantity and problems in athletes and non-athletes from an attachment theory perspective. To date, there is no research examining the relationship between alcohol use and adult attachment in college athletes and non-athletes. It was hypothesized that there would be differences in the relationship between adult attachment style and drinking quantity based on athlete status. It was also hypothesized that there would be an interaction between adult attachment and athlete status for psychosocial problems related to drinking, but not for physiological problems related to drinking.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Two hundred-forty freshmen (70.8% female, 29.2% male) were recruited at Boise State University. Ages ranged from 18 to 20 ($M = 18.42$, $SD = 0.62$). Participants were primarily Caucasian (91.3 %), with 3.3 % Hispanic, 2.5 % Asian, and 2.9 % other. Participants were asked to complete a packet of self-administered questionnaires.

Measures

Adult Attachment was assessed using The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ, Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) which identifies four attachment styles: Secure, Preoccupied, Fearful, and Dismissing.

Quantity of Drinking included questions regarding 1) the number of drinks typically consumed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday and 2) how many times in the last 30 days they have gotten drunk.

Problems Associated with Drinking were assessed using nine items from the Rutgers Alcohol Problems Index (RAPI, White & Labouvie, 1989). Participants are asked to indicate how often the following have occurred in the past 30 days while consuming alcohol or as a result of drinking: 1) noticed a change in your personality, 2) had a bad time, 3) had withdrawal symptoms, that is, felt sick because you stopped or cut down on your drinking and 4) felt physically or psychologically dependent on alcohol.

Results

The distribution of attachment style was: 47.5 % Secure, 12.1 % Preoccupied, 23.3% Fearful, and 17.1 % Dismissing. Chi square analyses revealed no differences in

attachment style for athletes and non-athletes. A 2 (positive vs. negative image of self) x 2 (positive vs. negative image of others) x 2 (athlete vs. non-athlete) independent-groups MANOVA was performed to assess main effects and interaction effects for the two quantity variables and four problems related to drinking variables. Results of the MANOVA using the Wilks Lambda indicated a significant interaction effect for athlete status x self, Wilks Lambda = .93, $F(1,217) = 2.56$, $p = .02$ and athlete status x other, Wilks Lambda = .93, $F(1,217) = 2.27$, $p = .04$. As predicted, there were differences in the relationship between adult attachment style and drinking quantity for athletes and non-athletes (see Table 1).

Drinking Quantity

For both weekend drinking and drunkenness, the interaction effect of self x other was significant (see Table 1). For athletes, those with a negative view of other, the Fearful and Dismissing styles, rated themselves higher on drinking quantity and drunkenness than those with a positive view of other, Secure and Preoccupied styles, while for non-athletes, those with a positive view of other, Secure and Preoccupied styles, rated themselves higher on weekend drinking and drunkenness than those with a negative view of other, Fearful and Dismissing styles (see Figure 1).

Problems Related to Drinking

For the psychosocial problems related to drinking, the interaction effects of athlete status x self and athlete status x other were significant (see Table 1). For athletes, there was no relationship between adult attachment style and drinking related problems, while for non-athletes, those with a Preoccupied style reported higher levels of problems related to drinking than the other groups (see Figure 2). For physiological problems related to drinking, the interaction effects were not significant (see Table 1).

Discussion

Results support the hypothesis that the relationship between adult attachment style and drinking is different for athletes and non-athletes. Specifically, for athletes, those with a negative view of other, the Fearful and Dismissing styles, had higher levels of drinking than those with a positive view of other, Secure and Preoccupied, while adult attachment was not related to problems associated with drinking. For non-athletes, for drinking quantity and drunkenness, those with a positive view of other, Secure and Preoccupied styles, rated themselves higher than those with a negative view of other, Fearful and Dismissing styles, but only the Preoccupied style was related to psychosocial problems associated with drinking. Therefore, for athletes, avoidance of intimacy is related to higher levels of drinking, whereas for non-athletes, an interest in intimacy is related to higher levels of drinking, and a strong need for intimacy to validate one's self is associated with psychosocial drinking related problems. Results indicate that identification of attachment style may be important in prevention efforts aimed at the reduction of college drinking, and that the relationship between attachment style and drinking is different for athletes and non-athletes.

References

- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment style among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 226-244.
- White, H. R. & Labouvie, E. W. (1989). Towards the assessment of adolescent problem drinking. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 50*, 30-37

Table 1

Follow-Up Analyses for Drinking Quantity and Problems Related to Drinking

F (7, 217)

	Athlete x Self	Athlete x Other
<u>Drinking Quantity</u>		
Weekend	.30	4.3*
Drunkenness	.02	5.3*
<u>Psychosocial Problems</u>		
Personality	11.9**	7.4**
Bad Time	5.5*	7.5**
<u>Physical Problems</u>		
Withdrawal Symptoms	0.47	0.11
Dependency	0.36	0.36

*p<.05,**p<.01,***p<.001.

Figure 1

Mec

Estimated Marginal Means of Weekend Drinking

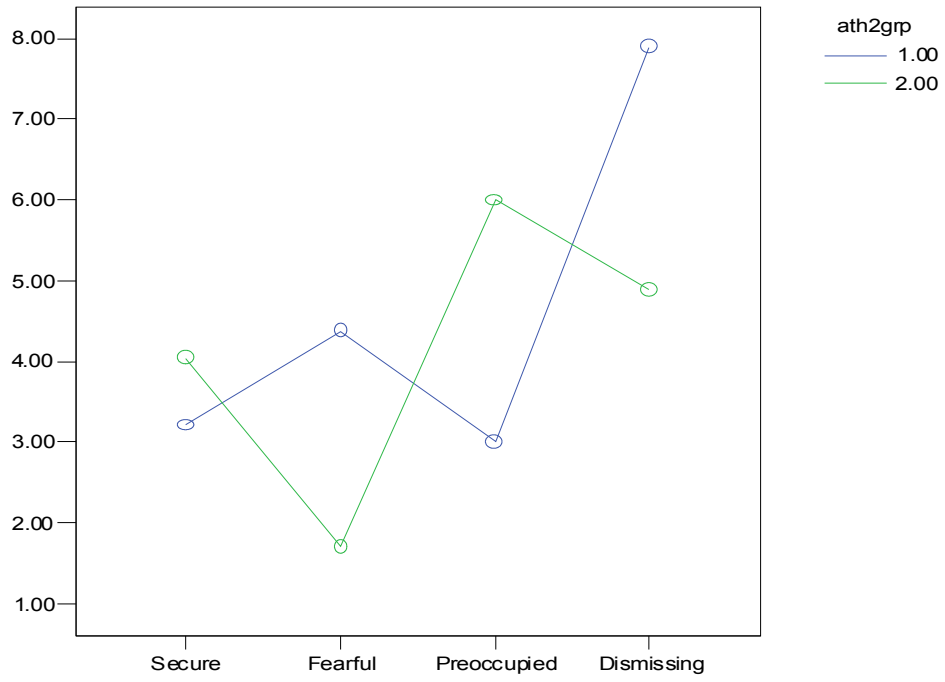
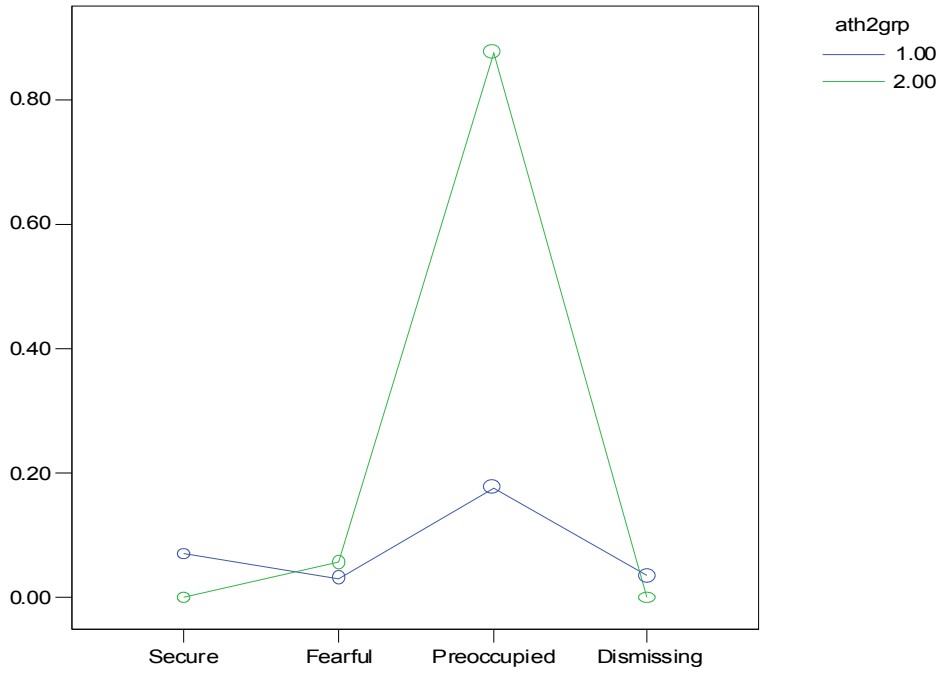


Fig
Me

Estimated Marginal Means of During the past month, number

Estimated Marginal Means of In the past 30 days, how many times have you noticed a change in your personality as a result of drinking?



Estimated Marginal Means of In the past 30 days, how many times have you had a bad time as a result of your drinking?

