

Alcohol Use, Adult Attachment, and Gender

Dale Wright, Diana Doumas
Boise State University
Rob Turrisi
Penn State University

Alcohol abuse represents a significant problem on college campuses in the United States, with a substantial percentage of students reporting heavy and/or binge drinking. These drinking behaviors have been associated with many negative social and interpersonal problems such as academic problems, participating in unplanned and unsafe gender, drunk driving, and other serious legal difficulties. While previous research has identified many of the psychological and social factors that contribute to college drinking, less attention has been paid to how interpersonal factors are associated with drinking-related behavior.

Although adult attachment theory has been applied to the study of coping strategies and risky behaviors, including drinking, only one study to date has specifically studied the relationship between adult attachment and drinking-related consequences. While this study identified the attachment dimension negative model of self as a predictor of alcohol-related consequences, no gender differences were found. This is a somewhat unexpected finding, as the literature on alcohol studies consistently demonstrates that males have higher rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related consequences than females. Thus, the main goal of this study was to replicate the above study to evaluate the hypothesis that the relationship between attachment and alcohol-related consequences is different for males and females.

Four hundred and fifty seven participants (Male = 34%, Female = 66%) were recruited from general psychology. Participants completed questionnaires assessing attachment characteristics, alcohol use, and alcohol related consequences.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that when controlling for alcohol consumption, alcohol related-consequences were related to gender, model of self, and the interaction of gender, model of self, and model of other. Results supported the hypothesis that the relationship between alcohol-related consequences and attachment would be different for males and females. For males, alcohol-related consequences were associated with a positive model of the self, whereas for females, alcohol-related consequences were associated with both a negative model of the self and negative model of others.

Results of this study indicate the importance of assessing interpersonal factors and the interaction between adult attachment and gender when identifying risk factors and interventions strategies for problematic alcohol use.