

The DRAM, Vol. 9(3) - Shots and Ladders: A look at drinking games and alcohol consumption

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Drinking games are very prevalent among college students, and participation in drinking games predicts heavy drinking (Bosari, 2004). However, not all drinking games are created equal. There is a lack of research comparing which drinking games are preferred by various populations and how these different types of drinking games relate to alcohol consumption. This week's DRAM reviews a study that examines different categories of drinking games and their association with drinking behavior in college students (LaBrie, Ehret, & Hummer, 2013).

Methods

- Researchers recruited students from two west-coast universities via a Web-based screening survey.
 - The current analysis included only participants who consumed at least one alcoholic drink per week ($N = 3421$, 68.3% of survey respondents)
- Participants provided demographic information, including Greek status, and answered four free response questions about their drinking game behavior:
 - "In the past 30 days, how many days did you play drinking games?"
 - "What drinking games did you play?"
 - "In which of the games listed above did you consume the most alcohol?"
 - "How many drinks did you typically consume when you played the above game?"
- Researchers used Internet searches and student focus groups to obtain descriptions of the games listed by respondents.
- Independent coders grouped the 100 distinct games in the sample into five categories of drinking games derived from previous drinking game research (Bosari, 2004). (see Figure)

Category	Description	% of sample who played in the past 30 days*	% of game players who reported game as the one in which they consumed the most alcohol (i.e., peak drinking game)	Average # of drinks consumed during game play by those listing game as peak drinking game
Targeted / Skill (e.g., Quarters)	Games based on individual ability where either the loser(s) drink or the winner selects a target to drink	26.3	36.5	5.16
Communal (e.g., Movie Drinking Game)	Group activities where drinking is based off external cues	4.7	46.8	n/a**
Chance (e.g., Kings)	Games based on random chance such as the value of playing cards or a roll of the dice	55.5	53.7	4.43
Extreme Consumption (e.g., Edward Fortyhands)	Games with minimal structure where the main object is simply to rapidly consume multiple drinks in a short time	7.2	58.3	5.83
Even Competition (e.g., Beer Pong)	Individual or team games where the losing side must drink as punishment	72.8	74.7	4.61

Figure. Distribution of drinking games played and peak drinking of students who reported playing drinking games in the past 30 days. (Adapted from LaBrie, et al., 2013). *70.1% of drinkers played drinking games in the past 30 days **Result not reported by LaBrie, et al. because of small number of respondents engaging in game type. Click image to enlarge.

Results

- Competition drinking games were the most commonly played drinking games, followed by Chance games, Targeted games, Extreme games, and Communal games (see Figure).

- Three quarters of the respondents who reported playing Competition games also selected these as the games in which they drank the most alcohol (i.e., peak drinking game).
- Peak drinking game types differed significantly by gender, race, and Greek affiliation
 - Males, Caucasians, and Greek-affiliated students were more likely to report peak drinking during Competition games.
 - Females, non-Caucasians, and non-Greek-affiliated students were more likely to report peak drinking during Targeted drinking games.
- Students reported the highest number of drinks during peak drinking game drinking in Extreme Consumption games followed by Targeted and Skill games, then Chance and Even Competition games, which did not differ from each other, $F(2, 2178) = 11.42, p < .001$.

Limitations

- The data have the usual limitations of self-report and recall bias.
- For peak drinking in games, it is difficult to determine whether students reported peak drinking due to the fact that they were more likely to play that category of game or because they drank more when playing games in that category as compared to other categories.
- The open ended nature of the drinking game question might have affected results. Students might not realize some games qualify as drinking games. For example, one of the extreme drinking games listed in the study, “Chugging” was likely not considered a game by many students.

Conclusions

This study provides an initial foray into how different drinking game categories relate to peak drinking in college students. The authors found that peak drinking differed by game type, and that different subpopulations were more likely to report peak drinking in different drinking game categories. However, there are issues with how each drinking game category was defined. For example, both Even Competition games and Target and Skill games involve player skill. It would be interesting to see an empirical derivation of drinking game categories using clustering of factor analytic techniques. The categories defined in the current study provide a starting point

for future research on student drinking. Since students reporting peak drinking in Extreme Consumption games and Targeted and Skill games consumed more alcohol as compared to other drinking game categories, these games might be potential intervention targets.

- Jed Jeng

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

References

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LaBrie, J. W., Ehret, P. J., & Hummer, J. F. (2013). Are they all the same? An exploratory, categorical analysis of drinking game types. *Addictive Behaviors*, 38(5), 2133-2139.