

Origins of University Students' Alcohol Appraisals

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Introduction

Alcohol appraisals, that is, people's thoughts and attitudes about alcohol, have been shown to contribute to people's subsequent drinking behaviours (Collins & Carey, 2007). Alcohol appraisals are not formed only in one stage of life or only within one context such as family, but they develop over time and within different contexts.

Here, we examined undergraduates' alcohol appraisals, their origins in the context of family and peer experiences, and university orientation, and how the development of the appraisals relate to current drinking behaviours.

Methods

We used a semi-structured interview to ask 39 undergraduate students (13 male, 26 female, 18- to 22-years of age) about their views on alcohol, how alcohol makes them feel, and their experience with alcohol in the context of family and peer experiences, and university orientation.

All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim before being analysed qualitatively using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2007) to identify emerging themes.

We also administered the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) to categorise participants' drinking behaviour.

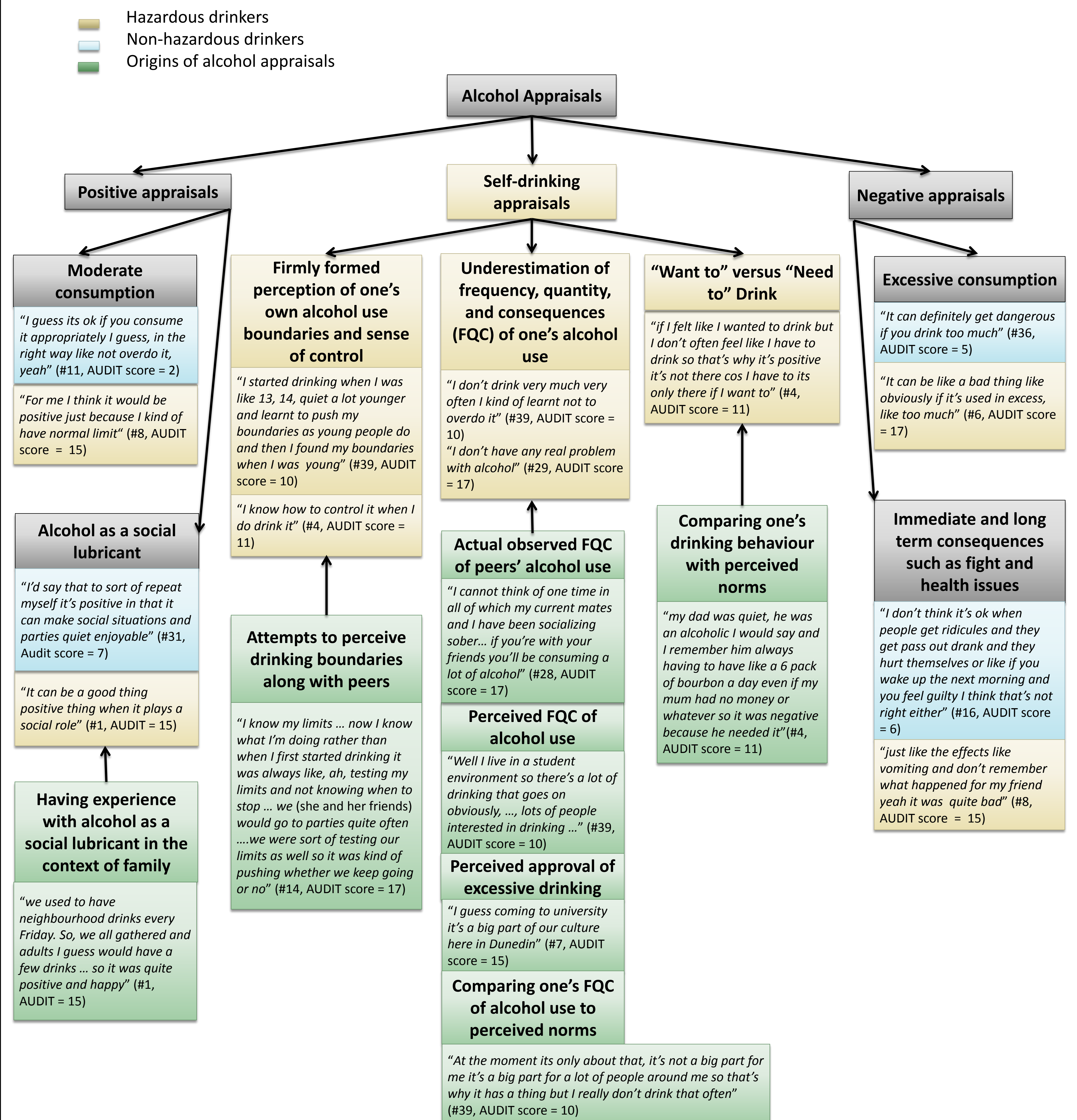
Results

Twenty one participants were categorised as hazardous drinkers (AUDIT score > 8; Babor et al., 2001) and 18 participants were categorised as non-hazardous drinkers (AUDIT score < 8).

We identified a model of alcohol appraisals with 3 components: 1) positive appraisals, 2) negative appraisals, and 3) self-drinking appraisals, as well as contributing factors. Both hazardous and non-hazardous drinkers appraised alcohol positively and negatively in a similar way, but "self-drinking appraisals" were very specific to hazardous drinkers. For example, hazardous drinkers appraised the frequency, quantity, and consequences (FQC) of their alcohol use inaccurately.

Figure 1 shows the three components that made up participants' alcohol appraisals and the factors that contributed to the development of those appraisals.

Figure 1. Model of Alcohol Appraisals



Conclusions

The findings of our study demonstrate that having positive or negative appraisals toward alcohol may not contribute to subsequent drinking behaviours as both hazardous and non-hazardous drinkers appraised alcohol as being positive or negative in a similar way. For example, both groups tended to appraise alcohol as being positive when it is consumed for socialising.

However, self-drinking appraisals may be a good predictor of hazardous drinkers' alcohol use. For example, hazardous drinkers were more likely to drink hazardously when they wrongly believed that they had control over their drinking or thought that they did not drink too much or too often. Further, we found that most aspects of self-drinking appraisals were formed in the context of participants' relationship with their peers and at the beginning of the hazardous drinker's alcohol consumption. We recommend that future studies focus on the early stage of young people's alcohol consumption to investigate how their self-drinking appraisals develop in relation to their peers.

References

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