

Alcohol as Social Lubricant

Alcohol Myopia Theory, Social Self-Esteem, and Social Interaction

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This study examines how consuming alcohol differentially affects the communicative behavior and perceptions of high and low social self-esteem (SSE) women as they engage in a brief interaction with a flirtatious male. Alcohol myopia theory proposes that alcohol affects behavior when it blocks a person's normal inhibitions about enacting a behavior. It was predicted that low SSE women would be more inhibited when talking to a flirtatious male than would high SSE women and, therefore, that alcohol would have a stronger effect on the low SSE women's behavior. Following administration of a social self-esteem measure and random assignment to an alcoholic or nonalcoholic beverage condition, participants (N = 50) talked with an attractive, flirtatious male confederate. Low SSE women were less anxious and self-disclosed more when drinking than when sober, whereas high SSE women were not significantly affected by alcohol consumption. The discussion highlights the complex and often contradictory effects of alcohol consumption on social interaction.

A popular conception of alcohol is that it serves as a social lubricant, a mechanism to ease feelings of anxiety and nervousness during social interactions. Social drinkers believe that alcohol will relax them, improve their mood, reduce anxiety, and make them better conversationalists (Critchlow, 1986; Norris, 1994). Although people believe that drinking makes social interactions function more smoothly, there is scant research demonstrating how alcohol actually affects social interaction. The present research utilizes alcohol myopia theory to examine how alcohol affects the communication behaviors of women

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as they engage in a brief "get to know you" interaction with a flirtatious male confederate.

Surprisingly little is known about how alcohol consumption affects basic communication patterns. For example, self-disclosure theorists assume that self-disclosure becomes more intimate over time. Initial interactions follow a normative sequential progression whereby some topics are appropriate for early in the interaction and others are almost always broached at later stages (Kellermann, 1991). It is unclear from the alcohol literature if a similar pattern occurs when people are drinking alcohol or whether intimacy levels increase more rapidly when drinking such that stages of relational development are skipped (Caudill, Wilson, & Abrams, 1987; Rohrberg & Sousa-Poza, 1976). As a first step toward examining the effects of alcohol on social interaction, we examined an initial interaction in which a man is flirting with a woman.

Drinking and flirting are commonly associated in our culture. Women who drink alcohol at bars, parties, weddings, and other public places are often approached by men. Whereas men may initiate conversation, women, through their verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors, allow a potential encounter to develop or end (Schwartz, Patterson, & Steen, 1995). Unfortunately, most laboratory alcohol studies have only men in their samples (Norris, 1994), and the few studies with women rarely examine communication behaviors. The present research attempts to rectify this gap in both the alcohol and communication literatures.

ALCOHOL MYOPIA THEORY

Although it is a common belief that alcohol has some social benefits, the effects of alcohol on social behavior are neither simple nor straightforward. For example, studies examining alcohol's effects on social anxiety show equivocal results, with some finding that alcohol consumption increases anxiety, others showing that alcohol reduces anxiety, and still others finding no effects at all (De Boer, Schippers, Cees, & Staak, 1993; Wilson, 1988; Young, Oei, & Knight, 1990). Similar findings exist for communicative behavior, such as talk time and self-disclosure. In some cases, individuals are more talkative when drinking alcohol; in others, they are more taciturn. Still other studies have shown no differences in either talk time or self-disclosure as a function of alcohol (Caudill, Wilson, & Abrams, 1987; Rohrberg & Sousa-Poza, 1976; Smith, Parker, & Noble, 1975). Individual differences in response to alcohol may account for some of these inconsistent results. Some people may be more disposed to loosen up when drinking than others. However, other results suggest that the same

person may exhibit a variety of responses on different drinking occasions (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). For example, a woman may be talkative and happy one night, but withdrawn and sullen the next.

One theory that has successfully predicted how alcohol consumption affects social behavior, accounting for both dispositional and situational differences, is alcohol myopia theory (Steele & Josephs, 1990). Alcohol myopia is the "short-sighted information processing that is part of alcohol intoxication" (Steele & Josephs, 1990, p. 922). This theory suggests that alcohol affects perceptions such that an intoxicated person will attend to a restricted range of cues, take longer to understand them, and piece these cues together in a less coherent way than will a sober person (Steele & Southwick, 1985; Tartar, Jones, Simpson, & Vega, 1971). Alcohol myopia theory also makes predictions about how alcohol affects social behavior. Steele and Josephs (1990) posit that social behaviors are affected by two kinds of cues: those that instigate a behavior (provoking cues) and those that constrain a behavior (inhibitory cues). Situations in which both provoking and inhibitory cues are present are referred to as inhibition response conflicts, because the inhibitory cue to suppress action operates in opposition to the provoking cue to act. According to alcohol myopia theory, alcohol consumption suppresses inhibitory cues; thus, intoxicated individuals are more likely to act on their provoking cues than are sober individuals. Steele and Josephs suggest that alcohol consumption suppresses inhibitory cues (rather than suppressing provoking ones) because inhibiting an impulse requires more effort than simply acting on that impulse.

An example of an inhibition conflict can occur after a relational breakup, if one person still has feelings for his or her ex-partner. The spurned lover may see the ex-partner in a social situation, and his or her first impulse may be to try to rekindle the romance. Thus, a cue that provokes action is encountering the former lover. Potential inhibitory cues (possible rejection, public humiliation, the ex-lover's new partner who is present) may keep the former lover from making advances. When sober, he or she considers these risks and decides not to act. The stronger the inhibition cues, the less likely the individual will approach the ex-lover. Alcohol myopia theory suggests that alcohol may suppress these inhibitory cues or may make these cues seem less relevant, resulting in the former lover approaching the ex-partner.¹ In sum, although alcohol consumption limits the ability to perceive and process important information, alcohol myopia theory predicts that alcohol results in more extreme social behavior only when individuals experience an inhibition response conflict.

When people act in accordance with a provoking cue, rather than with possible inhibitory cues, their behavior is seen as more extreme, because it is not what they would "normally" do. For example, when an attractive man flirts with a woman, his behavior may provoke the woman to flirt

back. Her belief that she does not interact well with others may serve as an inhibitory cue that may prevent her from flirting. If she is drinking alcohol, however, this inhibition may be blocked such that it does not seem relevant or is not integrated into her decision to flirt with him. If there are no inhibitory cues (and thus no inhibition response conflict), the provoking cue serves to direct subsequent behavior, whether or not the individual is drinking alcohol. So, if a woman wants to flirt in response to a man's flirting and feels confident about her social skills, then there may be no strong inhibition preventing her from doing so. In such situations, we would expect that she might flirt with the man, whether she is drinking alcohol or not.

Alcohol myopia theory has successfully explained and predicted diverse phenomena. Steele and Southwick (1985) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of alcohol consumption on social behaviors such as aggression and sexual adventurousness and found that people behaved more extremely under the influence of alcohol only in inhibition conflict situations. Alcohol myopia also explains one of the positive outcomes of drinking alcohol: an increase in altruistic behavior. Steele, Critchlow, and Liu (1985) manipulated both inhibition conflict and intoxication level and found participants behaved in an extremely helpful manner as their level of intoxication increased, but, again, only when they experienced an inhibition conflict.

Murphy, Monahan, and Miller (1998) used alcohol myopia theory to predict women's responses to potential dating partners. Intoxicated and sober women evaluated potential dating partners by watching short videotapes of men talking about themselves and a perfect first date. The authors hypothesized that consuming alcohol would result in women finding the men better potential partners only when a provoking cue to respond to the man (he is attractive) was in conflict with an inhibitory cue (he suggests a sexually risky first date). Their results support myopia theory: Women who were drinking alcohol rated an attractive (provoking cue), but sexually risky (inhibitory cue), man as having significantly better relationship potential than did sober women. When low inhibition conflict was present (when the man was attractive and sexually safe or when he was unattractive), both sober and drinking women rated him similarly.

Provoking Cue: Flirting Behavior

The first step toward predicting how alcohol might affect social interaction is to identify the level of inhibition conflict in a situation by assessing both provoking and inhibitory cues. The provoking cue in the present study was the flirting behavior of a male confederate. The flirting gave

the impression that the man was about to ask the woman for a date by inquiring whether she was involved in a relationship, suggesting they would make a good couple, and so on. Thus, like insults in studies of aggression and requests for help in studies of altruistic behavior, the man's flirting served as a provoking cue.

Inhibitory Cue: Social Self-Esteem

Inhibitory cues are salient only in response to a specific provoking cue. Inhibitory cues affected by alcohol myopia can originate within the person or the environment. Internal cues affected by alcohol consumption include self-awareness (Hull, 1981), sensation seeking (Cooper, Frone, Russell, & Mudar, 1995), and social anxiety (Abrams & Wilson, 1979). External cues can include verbal and nonverbal signals from a conversational partner. We propose that those who are insecure about their social skills may experience the strongest inhibition conflict when a man is flirting with them. To assess how a woman's perceptions of her social worth and her confidence in her social skills may act as an inhibitory cue, we measured social self-esteem.

Social self-esteem was conceptualized in line with Baumeister's self-presentation theory. Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton (1989) label individuals with high social self-esteem (SSE) as "self-presentational." High SSE individuals are characterized by a willingness to take risks in order to enhance their image, confidence in their ability to achieve social success, and belief in their attractiveness. In contrast, persons with low SSE are characterized by negative self-perceptions, negative metaperceptions, and a "self-protective" interpersonal style (Baumeister, 1993; Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988).

Although all women may experience some inhibitions when talking with a flirtatious man (especially in a laboratory setting), it is expected that social self-esteem influences the strength of the inhibition conflict experienced. Self-esteem theorists suggest that people want to protect their self-esteem and how others view them (Darley & Goethals, 1980). High SSE women maintain their positive sense of self by believing that they are well liked, by acting in a self-assured manner, and by actively seeking the approval of others (see Baumeister et al., 1989, for a review). The provoking cue (a man is flirting with me) is not in conflict with a high SSE woman's view of herself as likeable; thus, these women should not experience an inhibition conflict. Because high SSE women are expected to experience a low level of inhibition conflict, alcohol should not significantly affect their perceptions about themselves or affect their behavior in response to his flirting.

The low self-esteem person also wants to be liked, but tries to gain

approval in a markedly different way. Low SSE women approach social interactions in a cautious, more passive manner than do the high SSE women. Schultz and DePaulo (1996) found that, unlike those with high self-esteem, low self-esteem individuals do not self-enhance when given the opportunity and, instead, attempt to appear pleasant. Low self-esteem women avoid calling attention to themselves, believing that the less they are in the spotlight, the less likely they will be embarrassed (Josephs, Larrick, Steele, & Nisbett, 1992). People with low SSE also worry more about how others perceive them during social interactions than do those with high SSE (Leary & Kowalski, 1993). Thus, although low SSE women may want a positive interaction, this desire is in conflict with their experience of interactions as uncomfortable events (Blaine & Crocker, 1993). The man's flirtatious behavior should appeal to the low SSE woman's desire to be liked, yet it is in direct conflict with her desire to self-protect, because it puts her in the spotlight and requires her to use social skills to respond. Therefore, low SSE women may experience a strong inhibition conflict resulting in more significant changes in behavior when drinking alcohol.

To assess how alcohol might affect low SSE women, we measured several behaviors and perceptions that have been shown to differentiate between high and low self-esteem women. More specifically, we focus on behaviors that are associated with acting self-protectively, because low SSE women are more likely than high SSE women to utilize a self-protective interpersonal style (Baumeister, 1993; Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988). Powers and Zuroff (1988) suggest that it is self-protective for a woman to report that a man has a moderate interest in her, rather than report that he felt very positively about her, even if a man is acting in a highly interested manner. In addition, increased self-disclosure indicates decreased self-protectiveness, because a woman is placing personal information in the conversational spotlight (DePaulo, Epstein, & LeMay, 1990). Third, it may also be less self-protective for a woman to respond positively to a flirtation attempt rather than to change the topic or ignore the flirting altogether. We expect that:

- H1: Low SSE women will experience more anxiety during the flirtatious interaction than will high SSE women.
- H2: Low SSE women will have a more self-protective response to a man's flirting than will high SSE women, and, thus, low SSE women will (a) report more negative metaperceptions, (b) self-disclose less, and (c) act less flirtatious and flattered than will high SSE women.

According to alcohol myopia theory, perceptions and behaviors should change as a function of alcohol only when an individual is experiencing

an inhibition response conflict. Women with low SSE are expected to experience a stronger inhibition conflict than women with high SSE, and, therefore:

H3: Intoxicated low SSE women will experience less anxiety than will sober low SSE women, whereas the anxiety experienced by high SSE women will not be significantly affected by alcohol consumption.

H4: Intoxicated low SSE women will have a less self-protective response than will sober low SSE women, whereas alcohol consumption will not significantly affect the self-protective responses of high SSE women. Thus, inebriated low SSE women will (a) report more positive metaperceptions, (b) self-disclose more, and (c) act more flirtatious and flattered than sober low SSE women.

METHOD

Design

A 2 (alcohol versus no alcohol consumption) \times 2 (SSE—high versus low) design was employed. Women were randomly assigned to either the alcohol or no alcohol condition. Social self-esteem was not assessed prior to random condition assignments.

Participants

Fifty women were recruited via ads in the university and two local newspapers. The ads sought single, heterosexual social drinkers, 21–28 years old, to participate in a study about the effects of alcohol on speech behavior.² Participants were screened to ensure they met the study requirements, did not have a negative history with alcohol or health conditions that could be aggravated by alcohol, were not pregnant, and could stay until their blood alcohol level (BAL) returned to .02 g/dl. Those who met the requirements were offered \$15 to participate and were scheduled for one week after their menstrual period, to avoid hormonal variation that affects alcohol absorption.

Independent Variables

Alcohol Consumption

Participants in the alcohol condition consumed enough alcohol to raise their BAL to approximately .08 g/dl. This is a higher amount of alcohol

than used in most studies and is more than sufficient to induce behavioral impairment and perceived intoxication. Participants were weighed to calculate dosage. The mean amount of 80 proof vodka consumed by the participants in the drinking condition was 118 ml. The vodka was mixed with lemon-lime soda and lime juice. Sober participants received only the soda and lime juice mixture.

Social Self-Esteem

Social self-esteem was assessed using the short form of the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI; Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). The TSBI has 16 Likert-type items assessing how characteristic certain behaviors are on a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) scale. Internal consistency (α) in previous studies ranged from .89 to .92 (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The TSBI correlates positively with self-assurance, locus of control, and social desirability (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). McFarlin, Baumeister, and Blascovich (1984) found people who scored low on the TSBI were more compliant and more likely to yield to negative feedback than people who scored high. Brown et al. (1988) found that people who scored low on the TSBI engaged in less "in-group" enhancement and were more cautious and indirect in their behavioral tactics than those who scored high on the TSBI.

To calculate SSE, the TSBI items were summed and divided by the number of items; scores ranged from 2.88 to 4.63. Participants with scores above and including the median of 3.87 were considered high in SSE and those below were classified as low SSE. The internal consistency of the TSBI scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .84$). There was approximately the same number of women with high and low SSE in the alcohol and no alcohol conditions.

Provoking Cue: Confederate's Flirting Behavior

Each participant held a 10-minute conversation with one of three male confederates. Confederates were instructed to engage in a "get to know you" interaction for the first 5 to 6 minutes before beginning to flirt with the participant. The actual time the flirting began varied across interactions, because confederates were instructed to smoothly transition to flirting, rather than abruptly shifting topic. Nonverbally, the confederate conveyed increased interest through forward body lean and increased positive immediacy cues. Although it varied somewhat across interactions, his first flirtatious attempt was usually "You're a pretty girl, do you have a boyfriend?" His second flirtatious attempt

usually took one of two forms. If she did not have a boyfriend (50% of the sample), then he responded with some variation of, "Pretty girl like you, I can't believe you don't have a boyfriend." If she had a boyfriend, then he responded with some variation of, "Oh, I was hoping you weren't taken." The confederate continued flirting if time permitted or if he was uncertain that the woman really understood that he was flirting. He attempted a third flirtatious statement in approximately 60% of the interactions and a fourth flirtatious statement in approximately 40% of the interactions. His third and fourth flirtatious remarks usually took the form of, "You never know when you'll meet people, like we've met here," and, "I was thinking maybe you and I could have hooked up." He flirted for approximately 1-1/2 to 2 minutes before allowing the conversation to return to more superficial content by following the lead of the participant (i.e., discussing a topic she shifted to) or changing the topic ("So, did you stay in this room the whole time?"). The 10-minute interactions were edited to make two 2-minute videotapes. The first tape was of the 2 minutes immediately before the onset of the confederate's flirting, to provide a baseline assessment of participants' behavioral responses. The second tape was of the 2 minutes starting with his flirting behaviors, to assess participants' responses to the provoking cue.

The three male confederates were chosen based on their similar degree of physical attractiveness and outgoing personalities. Participants' perceptions of the confederates' physical attractiveness were assessed using five 1-7 (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) items (e.g., he was handsome, I didn't like his looks, he was sexy looking). These items loaded as one factor in an exploratory factor analysis ($\alpha = .89$). Two confederates were perceived as almost significantly different on the attractiveness factor, means of 2.83 and 3.54; $t(39) = 1.99, p = .054$, so attractiveness was entered as a covariate for all analyses.

Because confederates' behavior could vary across the 50 interactions, independent coders watched the videotapes and used four 1-7 (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) scales to assess how much the confederate followed the participant's lead, how explicitly he flirted with her, how interested he was in her, and how persistently he flirted with her. These items were used as covariates to control for differences in the confederate's behavior toward each of the participants. Intercoder reliabilities for these variables were high; Cronbach α ranged from .88 to .99. Finally, to account for possible differences among confederates, scores for each dependent measure were assessed with "confederate" as the independent variable. No significant differences in the dependent measure scores were found among confederates.

Dependent Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all measures filled out by participants and coders used a 1–7 (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) response scale.

Anxiety

After the interaction, participants completed the State Trait Anxiety Index (STAI) as an indicator of how they felt during the interaction (Spielberger, 1985). Sample items from the STAI include: "I felt tense," "I felt at ease," and "I felt upset." Scores for the 20 Likert items were summed to create a composite anxiety score; internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .91$).

Measures Assessing Self-Protective Behavior

Self-protection was assessed by measuring (a) women's metaperceptions about the confederate, (b) self-disclosure, and (c) the participants' responses to his flirtatious comments. For all coding tasks, coders were blind as to participant's self-esteem and alcohol consumption. At least 20% of the interactions were examined by two coders or coding teams to assess reliability of each of the measures used to assess self-protective behavior.³

Metaperceptions

Six items assessed participants' impressions of the confederate's interest in them. An exploratory factor analysis with an oblique rotation indicated that two factors accounted for 75.2% of the variance in the data. The first factor ($\alpha = .84$) was comprised of a sum of three items that reflected how much the woman thought the man was interested in a friendship (e.g., "He could see being friends with me"). The second factor ($\alpha = .71$) was also comprised of three items and reflected how much she thought the confederate was interested in a romantic relationship (e.g., "He is interested in a dating relationship with me").

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure was assessed for all 4 edited minutes of the interaction by two independent coders. Coders first rated self-disclosure on two items ("She offered personal information about herself" and "She was willing to talk about her personal life"). These items formed one self-disclosure scale ($\alpha = .78$).

Participant's Responses to Confederate's Flirting

Two coders worked as a team to evaluate how flirtatious and flattered participants appeared in response to the confederate's flirting. Because these were measures of her response to the man's flirting, only the second 2-minute segment was examined. The flirtatious evaluation is a composite of four items (e.g., "She seems interested in talking with him," "She seemed attracted to him"). A flattered response was defined as the woman accepting the confederate's compliments and having a generally positive reaction to the man's flirting. Possible responses on the flattered scale ranged from 1 (offended) to 4 (not affected) to 7 (flattered by his flirting). Intercoder reliabilities for the two coding teams for the flirtatious ($\alpha = .89$) and flattered scales were high ($\alpha = .93$).⁴

The flirtatious and flattered measures above examined women's overall response to the confederate's flirting behaviors. In addition, each verbal response they made to each of the confederate's flirtatious comments was also examined. A team of two coders recorded the content of each flirtatious comment and the participant's responses to each flirtatious comment. Intercoder reliability between this team of coders and another team for these two measures was $r = 1.0$. The mean number of flirtatious comments made by the confederate was 3.12 ($SD = 1.29$, $Mdn = 3.00$). The mean number of participants' responses was 4.16 ($SD = 1.88$, $Mdn = 4.00$). The authors then read the responses and inductively derived a coding scheme. A coding team then coded each response into one of three mutually exclusive categories: positive acknowledgment ("Thank you"; "You're so sweet"); negative acknowledgment ("We would never hook up"); and topic shifts ("What do you think of Athens?"). A woman could give more than one response to a flirtatious comment made by the confederate. For example, she might positively acknowledge and then shift topic (e.g., confederate says, "I was thinking you and I could hook up," and she responds, "Yeah, you never know. So, do you like school?").

Experimental Procedure

Participants were asked not to use any drugs, including alcohol, for at least 12 hours prior to their appointment time and not to drink (other than water) or eat for 4 hours before their appointment. When participants arrived in the early afternoon, their identification was checked to ensure that they met the age requirement. Participants were asked if they had met the requirements, and then they were weighed. They then read and signed a detailed consent form and completed a series of measures, including the TSBI. Participants were then randomly assigned to condition, and the appropriate beverage was prepared.

Next, participants' blood alcohol level (BAL) was assessed with a breathalyzer test (using the Alco-Sensor IV Breath Alcohol Tester) to ensure they had not consumed alcohol prior to the study. Women knew whether they were to receive alcohol and all women, regardless of experimental condition, went through the same procedures, receiving a similar amount of liquid to drink and waiting for the same absorption period. The beverage was divided into three drinks. While drinking, all participants watched taped TV situation comedies that did not deal with the constructs under investigation. Participants finished each drink within 10 minutes. There was a 5-minute absorption period between drinks. There was a 10-minute absorption period after the last drink, and then BAL was checked.

At this time, the participants completed five moderately difficult anagrams (each within 20 seconds) to test for the cognitive impairment that accompanies alcohol consumption. They were reminded that they would be having a "get to know you" interaction with another participant who had been drinking and that the interaction would be videotaped in order to study their speech behaviors. Participants were not aware that their partner was a confederate until debriefing. The participant and confederate were seated across a round, 3' diameter (92.31 cm) table. Two video cameras, one focused on each conversant, were mounted in plain view.

The confederate was then brought in, and an investigator performed a breathalyzer test on the confederate. Breathalyzer tests for confederates and participants were conducted so that participants could not see the results. The investigator reminded the interactants that they should not use their names during the interaction and that they were being videotaped. The investigator then left the room. Although confederates did not consume alcohol, they were instructed to answer that they had been drinking, if questioned, in order to remain consistent with the idea that they too were participants. Confederates were unaware of participants' self-esteem or alcohol consumption; indeed, they believed that all of the participants were drinking alcohol. After 10 minutes, the investigator returned, and the confederate moved to another room. Next, the participant's BAL was checked, and she then sat alone and completed measures concerning her perceptions of the conversation and the confederate's behavior, how physically attractive she felt the confederate was, her metaperceptions about the confederate, and the STAI. She then indicated how much the drinks affected her and the confederate using two 0 (*did not affect me-him at all*) to 3 (*the drinks really affected me-him*) items. Participants in the nonalcoholic condition were debriefed, both orally and through a written description of the study, and then were paid. Those in the alcoholic condition remained until their BAL returned to .02 g/dl, then they were debriefed and paid.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Manipulation Check: Alcohol Consumption

BAL readings taken just before and after the interaction were not significantly different and were averaged to form one BAL. The average BAL for participants in the no alcohol condition was .00, whereas the average BAL in the alcohol condition was .083 ($Mdn = .82$).⁵ Sober women correctly solved more anagrams than did intoxicated women, $t(48) = 2.05$, $p = .046$, sober $M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.20$, $Mdn = 2.00$; intoxicated $M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.28$, $Mdn = 2.00$, suggesting that alcohol caused some cognitive impairment. Also, intoxicated women reported the drinks affected them, whereas sober women felt that the drinks had almost no effect on them, $t(48) = 8.64$, $p < .001$, intoxicated $M = 1.84$, $SD = .64$, and sober women $M = .37$, $SD = .50$.⁶

Confederate's Behavior

All participants indicated that the drinks had at least a slight effect on the confederate, intoxicated $M = 1.12$, $SD = .83$; sober $M = 1.49$, $SD = .76$; $t(48) = 2.05$, $p = .11$. Coder's assessments of the confederate's flirtatious behavior were examined using a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) \times 2 (first versus second segment) repeated measures analysis of variance. A significant within-subjects effect for flirting was obtained, $F(1, 46) = 150.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .77$, such that the man flirted with the women significantly more during the second 2-minute segment ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.41$) than during the first 2-minute segment ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 1.57$). These results indicate that the provoking cue (flirting behavior) was present and discernable.⁷

There were no significant between-subjects effects, indicating the man's flirting behavior did not significantly alter as a function of the independent variables; however, the confederates' behaviors are likely to vary across the interactions. To assess for such differences, coders' perceptions of his behavior (how positively he acted, followed her lead, explicitly flirted, how interested he was in her, and how persistently he flirted) were assessed. These potential covariates were entered as dependent measures into a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) multivariate analysis of variance. There were no significant effects, suggesting the confederates' behavior did not significantly differ as a function of participant SSE or alcohol condition. These items were assessed

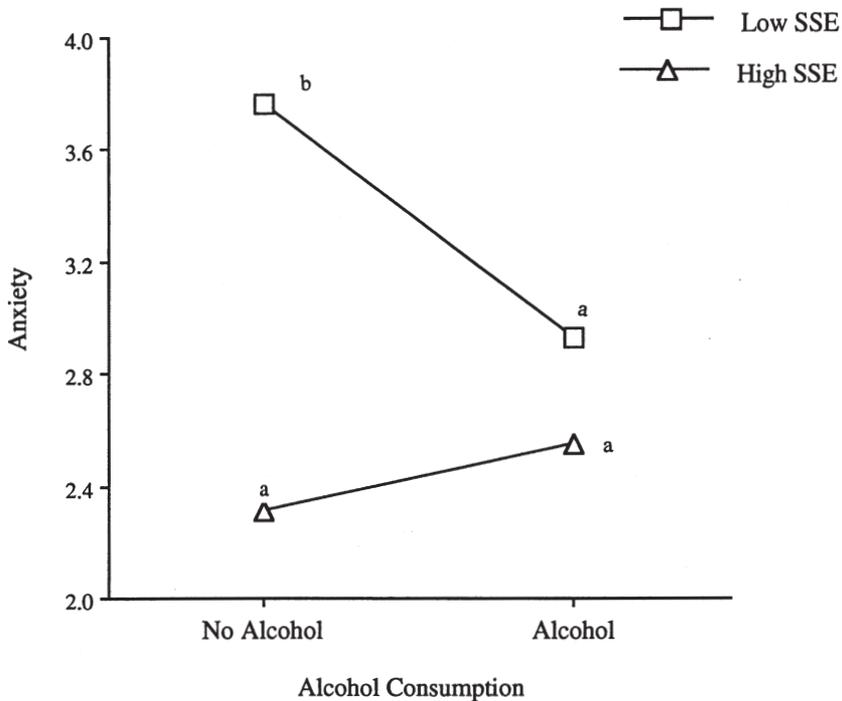


Figure 1: Anxiety Scores as a Function of Alcohol Consumption and Social Self-Esteem
 NOTE: Shared subscripts indicate means that are not significantly different using Student *t*-tests at $p < .05$. SSE stands for social self-esteem. Higher numbers indicate more anxiety.

as covariates for each dependent measure; significant covariates are reported below.

Statistical Assumptions

For each analysis, assumptions about the data (e.g., distribution, skew, and outliers) were examined and found to be satisfactory, unless otherwise noted.

H1 and H3: Social Anxiety

H1 predicted that low SSE women will be more anxious than will high SSE women. H3 posited that intoxicated low SSE women will be less anxious than will sober low SSE women, whereas the anxiety experienced

by high SSE women will not significantly be affected by alcohol consumption. STAI scores were entered into a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) analysis of covariance. The confederate's physical attractiveness was a significant covariate, $F(1, 45) = 4.22, p = .046, \eta^2 = .09$. Low SSE women reported feeling significantly more anxious than did high SSE women, $M = 3.35, SD = .99$, and $M = 2.43, SD = .73; F(1, 45) = 12.83, p = .001, \eta^2 = .22$, supporting H1. This main effect was qualified by an alcohol by SSE interaction effect, $F(1, 45) = 5.01, p = .030, \eta^2 = .10$. As shown in Figure 1, the high SSE women's anxiety did not significantly change as a function of alcohol, whereas the low SSE women were significantly less anxious as a function of alcohol, $t(21) = 2.03, p = .05$. Only when sober were low SSE women significantly more anxious than high SSE women. Thus, alcohol lowered the anxiety of the low SSE women such that their anxiety was similar to the high SSE women, supporting H3.

H2 and H4: Self-Protection

H2 stated that low SSE women will have a more self-protective response to a man's flirting than will high SSE women. Specifically, low SSE women will (a) report more negative metaperceptions, (b) self-disclose less, and (c) act less flirtatious and flattered than will high SSE women. H4 stated that intoxicated low SSE women will have a less self-protective response than will sober low SSE women, whereas alcohol consumption will not significantly affect the self-protective responses of high SSE women. Thus, inebriated low SSE women will (a) report more positive metaperceptions, (b) self-disclose more, and (c) act more flirtatious and flattered than will sober low SSE women.

H2 and H4a: Metaperceptions

For participants' judgments of the confederate's interest in a friendship and a romance, a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) multivariate analysis of covariance was utilized (see Table 1). The confederate's physical attractiveness, $F(2, 44) = 4.13, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$, and how much he followed her conversational lead, $F(2, 44) = 2.08, p = .043, \eta^2 = .09$, were significant covariates. The multivariate main effects for alcohol, Wilks's $\Lambda = .86, F(1, 45) = 3.39, p = .046$, and SSE, Wilks's $\Lambda = .82, F(1, 45) = 4.64, p = .015$, were significant. Intoxicated women thought the confederate was more interested in a friendship with them than did the sober women, $F(1, 45) = 5.96, p = .019, \eta^2 = .12$. In addition, high SSE women reported that the confederate was more interested in

Table 1
Self-Protective Measures as a Function of Alcohol and Social Self-Esteem

<i>Self-protective measures</i>	<i>No alcohol</i>	<i>Alcohol consumption</i>
Friendship metaperception*	4.27 (1.07)	4.64 (.74)
Romantic metaperception	3.67 (1.39)	4.00 (1.10)
Flirting behavior	4.76 (1.05)	4.85 (1.02)
Flattered behavior	4.80 (1.56)	4.36 (1.71)
<i>Self-protective measures</i>	<i>Low SSE</i>	<i>High SSE</i>
Friendship metaperception*	4.20 (.83)	4.67 (.97)
Romantic metaperception*	3.39 (1.22)	4.21 (1.18)
Flirting behavior*	4.56 (1.68)	5.01 (.86)
Flattered behavior	4.13 (1.39)	4.96 (1.74)

NOTE: $N = 50$. Higher numbers indicate more positive evaluation or behaviors. Within each row (dependent measure), an asterisk indicates means that are significantly different (Student t -tests at $p < .025$). Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. Alcohol and social self-esteem did not interact.

friendship, $F(1, 45) = 9.27, p = .004, \eta^2 = .17$, and a romantic relationship, $F(1, 45) = 4.23, p = .046, \eta^2 = .09$, than did low SSE women. There were no other significant effects. These results support H2a, but not H4a.

H2b and H4b: Self-Disclosure

H2b and H4b were tested by analyzing participants' self-disclosure. Self-disclosure scores were entered into a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) \times 2 (behaviors before and after flirting onset) repeated measures analysis of covariance. The confederate's physical attractiveness was a significant covariate, $F(1, 45) = 11.28, p = .002, \eta^2 = .20$. Women self-disclosed significantly more during the flirting segment ($M = 5.07, SD = .83$) than during the nonflirting segment, $M = 4.24, SD = .80; F(1, 46) = 40.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .47$. In support of H4b, there was also an alcohol by SSE by before-after flirting behaviors interaction effect, $F(1, 44) = 4.45, p = .04, \eta^2 = .09$. Although there were no significant differences as a function of alcohol or SSE for the nonflirting segment, there was an alcohol by SSE interaction for the flirting segment, $F(1, 45) = 3.63, p = .06, \eta^2 = .08$, such that sober low SSE women self-disclosed significantly less than did sober high SSE women (see Figure 2). When intoxicated, the difference between low and high SSE women was not significant. There were no other significant effects. Thus, in response to the provoking cue, alcohol appears to have increased low SSE women's self-disclosure to a level similar to high SSE women, supporting H4b.⁸

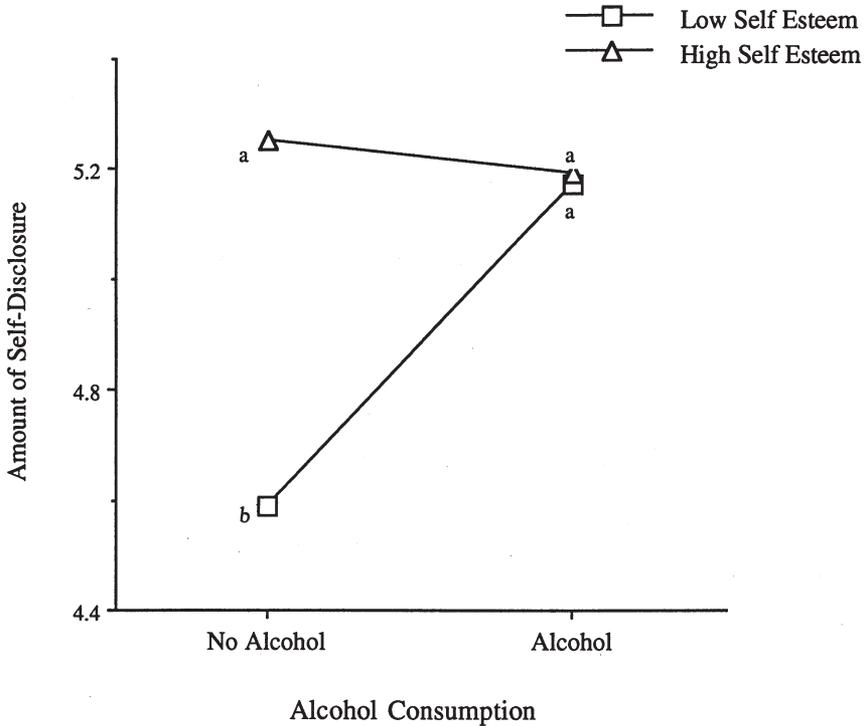


Figure 2: Self-Disclosure as a Function of Alcohol Consumption and Social Self-Esteem During the Flirting Segment of the Interaction

NOTE: Shared subscripts indicate means that are not significantly different using Student *t*-tests at $p < .05$. SSE stands for social self-esteem. Higher numbers indicate more self-disclosure.

H2c and H4c: Responses to Flirting

To test H2c and H4c, coder’s perceptions of how flattered and flirtatious the participants appeared during the flirting segment were entered into a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) multivariate analysis of covariance (see Table 1). The multivariate main effects for alcohol, Wilks’s $\Lambda = .98$, $F(2, 43) = .46$, $p = .63$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and SSE, Wilks’s $\Lambda = .89$, $F(2, 43) = 2.72$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2 = .11$, were not significant. The confederate’s physical attractiveness, $F(2, 44) = 3.39$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .21$, and level of warmth displayed by the confederate, $F(2, 44) = 2.48$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .12$, were significant covariates for the flirtatiousness dependent measure. High SSE women were more flirtatious, $F(1, 44) = 4.80$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .12$, and

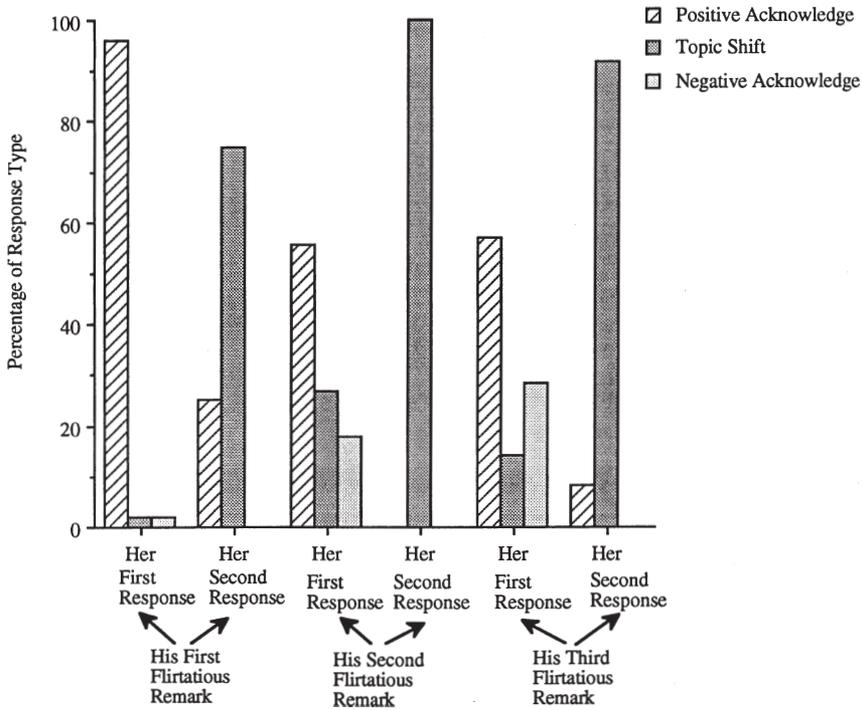


Figure 3: Participants' Responses to Confederate's First Three Flirtation Attempts

NOTE: Figure shows type of responses made to confederate's flirtation attempts. Her first response denotes the woman's first reply to a specific flirtation attempt. Her second response denotes the woman's second reply to the same flirtation response. The confederate engaged in a first flirtation attempt with all participants, a second flirtation attempt with 45 of them, and a third attempt with 28 of the participants. Data are presented as percentages of responses within each response to a flirtation attempt.

somewhat more flattered, $F(1, 44) = 2.93, p = .09, \eta^2 = .07$, than low SSE women, supporting H2c. No other effects were found.

Second, participants' specific responses to the confederates' flirting for the first three flirtation attempts were examined (see Figure 3). As a manipulation check, a 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) analysis, with number of confederate's flirtatious comments as the dependent variable, was utilized. The results were not significant, indicating that the number of flirtation attempts the confederate made did not significantly vary due to the independent variables.

Women were most likely to begin their responses by acknowledging the confederate's flirtatious comment (e.g., "Thank you," "Yes, I do have a boyfriend"). The second most popular response was a negative acknowl-

edgment (e.g., "That will never happen"). Topic shift was the least popular initial strategy; however, it was often paired with an acknowledgment (e.g., "Yeah, right, that'll never happen . . . so, anyway, did you enjoy the Olympics?"). Whereas negative acknowledgments ("No, I don't think so") were rare in response to the confederate's first flirtation attempt (as illustrated in Figure 3), participants were more likely to use this response with each subsequent flirtation attempt made by the confederate. These responses were examined with chi-square tests using alcohol consumption, SSE, and participants' relational status as predictors.⁹ There were no significant associations; H2c and H4c were not supported.

In summary, the results for the self-protection measures were mixed. For H2, high SSE women thought the confederate was more interested in both a friendship and a romance with them than did low SSE women. High SSE women also appeared more flirtatious and somewhat more flattered in response to flirting, but they did not self-disclose significantly more than did low SSE women. Supporting H4, inebriated low SSE women self-disclosed more than did sober low SSE women. The inebriated low SSE women, however, did not act more flirtatious or flattered and did not view the confederate as more interested in them than did the sober low SSE women. Finally, women, regardless of SSE or alcohol, were remarkably similar in what they said in response to the confederate's flirting.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how alcohol influences a woman's perceptions and communication behaviors during an initial interaction with a flirtatious man. The hypotheses test alcohol myopia and self-presentation theories in a new context and extend the range of communication behaviors accounted for by these theories.

Alcohol Myopia Theory

Alcohol myopia theory predicts that alcohol causes people to act in a disinhibited manner only when a provoking cue suggesting action is in opposition to an inhibitory cue that suggests one should not act. Under these circumstances, alcohol blocks processing of the inhibitory cue, resulting in less inhibited behavior. Low social self-esteem women were expected to experience a strong conflict between the provoking cue (a flirtatious man) and their inhibitions. As predicted, low SSE women were less anxious and more talkative when

intoxicated than when sober. Critical for alcohol myopia theory, alcohol consumption interacted with SSE, resulting in a change in self-disclosure behaviors only in response to the confederate's flirtatious behavior; there was no such effect for participants' self-disclosure prior to the flirtatious behavior. High SSE women were not expected to experience a strong inhibition conflict, and, as expected, alcohol did not affect their anxiety or self-disclosure. Thus, alcohol seemed to have lifted the inhibitions of low SSE women such that they behaved more like high SSE women.

Previous studies examining the effects of alcohol consumption on self-disclosure and talk time have produced mixed results, with some studies finding more disclosure, others finding less, and still others finding no effects of alcohol consumption at all (Caudill et al., 1987; Rohrberg & Sousa-Poza, 1976; Smith, Parker, & Noble, 1975). For self-disclosure theories, the present results suggest that it is important to understand the context of the interaction in order to make predictions about how alcohol affects self-disclosure behaviors. The direction of the effect (increased or decreased self-disclosure) may depend on the provoking cue that triggers an inhibition response conflict. A similar point can be made about the effects of alcohol on relationship initiation. Individuals often feel that others are more open to forming new relationships when drinking alcohol. However, Murphy et al. (1998) found that women rated men as better potential partners only when a provoking cue to respond to the man (he is attractive) was in conflict with an inhibitory cue (he suggests a sexually risky first date). When the man was attractive and did not suggest a risky first date or when he was unattractive, both sober and drinking women rated him similarly. These results suggest that, in the absence of an inhibition response conflict, the effects of alcohol consumption on relational processes may be relatively minor.

Related to these findings, there have been several diary and survey studies examining the relationship between alcohol consumption and risky sexual behaviors (such as having unprotected sex on a first date). Several studies find no relationship between alcohol consumption and risky behaviors (e.g., Cooper, 1992; Leigh & Miller, 1995), whereas others find that drinking increases the likelihood that one will engage in risky sexual behavior (e.g., Bagnall, Plant, & Warwick, 1990; Mahoney, Thombs, & Ford, 1995). Leigh and Schafer (1993) may have an answer to explain this mixed bag of results. They found alcohol consumption did result in increased risky sexual activity, but only when it was the first sexual experience with a new partner; otherwise, alcohol consumption had little effect on the likelihood of an individual engaging in risky sexual behavior. Leigh and Schafer's results are consistent

with alcohol myopia theory in that the first time with a new partner is a situation where the desire for sexual activity works in opposition to strong inhibitions (e.g., insecurity, fear of rejection, uncertainty about relational status). Once the initial sexual experience has occurred, there are significantly fewer inhibitions that need to be overcome, and the effect of alcohol consumption on sexual decision making may be less important.

The results for self-disclosure and anxiety are consistent with previous research on the importance of inhibition response conflicts in mediating the effects of alcohol on social behaviors. A meta-analysis of 34 studies of 12 different social behaviors found the strongest determinant of alcohol's effect on behavior was the variation in the inhibitory conflict (Steele & Southwick, 1985). In addition, other theories might also prove useful in interpreting our data. One theory that examines alcohol and self-processes is self-awareness theory (Hull, 1981; Hull & Young, 1983). Hull proposed that one reason people drink alcohol is because they want to reduce their self-awareness. This theory suggests that the more self-conscious people feel, the more they drink. Alcohol purportedly lessens self-awareness by blocking cognitive processing that encodes self-relevant information, resulting in fewer uses of self-references after alcohol consumption (Hull, 1981). The results for anxiety are consistent with this theory; however, self-awareness theory predicts that participants self-disclose less when drinking alcohol, the opposite of what was found in the present research.

The appraisal-disruption model (Sayette, 1994) suggests that alcohol diminishes the power of a stressor by interrupting the cognitive processing that links it to stressful events a person has experienced in the past. Sayette (1993) views inhibition response conflicts as potential stressors, and the appraisal-disruption model accounts for the result that low SSE women were less anxious and more talkative when intoxicated (because low SSE, rather than high SSE, women would be under more stress). The mediating variable between alcohol and social behavior for the appraisal-disruption model is stress, whereas in myopia theory the mediator is a more general class of responses (any form of inhibition response conflict); thus, myopia theory may have the potential to explain a wider range of communication behavior. It is important to note, however, that both theories predict that behavior does not change as a function of alcohol consumption, unless the person is experiencing an inhibition conflict or stressor.

A finding that did not support alcohol myopia theory was how flirtatious and flattered the women appeared when the confederates flirted with them. Because these behaviors of the low SSE women did not change as a function of alcohol, it may seem that they did not have many of their

social inhibitions lessened. Caution should be used in making such an interpretation, because acting flirtatious is not a simple matter of desire to behave in a certain way; it also involves having the skill to do so. Low SSE women simply may not have these flirtation skills; thus, one interpretation of this null finding is lack of skill, rather than inhibition. Alcohol may dispel inhibitions, but it is not a fairy godmother, magically creating excellent social skills. The flirting and flattered behavior findings may reveal more about the nature of SSE than does alcohol myopia. Future research might test this explanation by examining multiple behaviors that require different levels of skill to accomplish. If the lack of social skills explanation is correct, then behaviors that require little skill should show the predicted alcohol by SSE interaction, whereas behaviors requiring more finesse may result in only a main effect for SSE.

Perception of Intent

Intoxicated women, regardless of self-esteem, thought the male confederate was more interested in a friendship than did sober women, yet they did not view him as more interested in a romantic relationship. Thus, even when there is no inhibition conflict present (i.e., for the high self-esteem women), alcohol still limits the ability to perceive and interpret cues. Why did the intoxicated women perceive the confederate's intent as friendly, but not necessarily romantic? Previous research found that, when participants were asked to evaluate an opposite sex interaction, men more frequently attributed behavior as signifying sexual interest than did women, whereas women interpreted the same behavior as friendly and as having little sexual connotation (Abbey, 1987; Shotland & Craig, 1988). Our results are also consistent with Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, and McAuslan's (1996) findings that women believe they are more vulnerable to a sexual assault when intoxicated because they are less likely to perceive men's intentions as sexual. If a sober woman is talking with a man who is indicating sexual interest, she may recognize the sexual interest cues (i.e., he wants a one-night stand) and withdraw early from the interaction. However, when intoxicated, she may not be aware of these cues until later, if at all. Research has found that almost half of sexual assaults involve alcohol consumption by either the man, the woman, or both partners (Abbey et al., 1996; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Our results suggest that intoxicated women may find themselves in unwanted sexual situations not only because their sexual inhibitions may be lowered, but because their perceptions of men's communication behavior may be distorted.

Self-Presentation or Self-Protection: Effects of Social Self-Esteem

Baumeister and his colleagues (Baumeister, 1993; Tice, 1993) found that high SSE women are characterized by a belief that they are socially competent and liked and are motivated to have others share in these beliefs. Low SSE women believe that they are not socially competent and are motivated to avoid failure in social situations. Our results support these characterizations. High SSE women believed the man was more interested in both a romance and a friendship with them than did the low SSE women. This is compelling evidence, because the man was purposefully demonstrating interest in the woman by flirting; yet, low SSE women still thought the man was less interested. It may be that low SSE women were poor decoders of the confederate's flirting behavior. If the low SSE women were less accurate decoders than the high SSE women, we might have expected that their verbal responses would have reflected this decoding error. However, low and high SSE women did not differ in what they said in response to the confederate's flirting, suggesting the two groups may have decoded the message similarly.

A related interpretation is that low SSE women interpreted the intent behind his flirting differently than did high SSE women. Blaine and Crocker (1993) point out that low SSE women are often distrustful of positive events, such as receiving compliments. To accept such events would force a change in their view of themselves (see also, Swann & Read, 1981). Low SSE women may accept a compliment (and recognize it as a compliment), but think to themselves that the person was insincere. Thus, low SSE women may have realized that the confederate was flirting, but, when asked about his intentions, reinterpreted (e.g., he acts that way with everyone), because viewing it as evidence of his romantic interest would threaten their self-concept.

Although both low and high SSE women said similar things when responding to the confederate's flirting, the way they said them differed. In general, high SSE women acted more flirtatious and flattered than did low SSE women and responded to the confederates' flirting with a show of social grace. In response to similar flirtatious comments, low SSE women often appeared flustered. These data support prior research that found high and low SSE women are characterized by different interpersonal styles.

Limitations

Laboratory studies of alcohol's effects on women are far fewer than similar studies on men (Norris, 1994). Nonetheless, existing studies suggest that men and women have different motivations for drinking, re-

spond differently both physiologically and psychologically to alcohol, and hold different expectations for how to act when drinking (see Crowe & George, 1989; Norris, 1994). Just as the findings of studies done with only men should be applied to women with caution, the same caution should be used by those extrapolating the present findings to men. Caution also should be exercised when generalizing from these results. Although randomly assigned to experimental condition, all participants were volunteers, and only social drinkers were chosen. Future research needs to examine how women's reasons for drinking affect their inhibitions, because women who drink to escape from their problems may respond differently to flirtatious men than do women who drink for entertainment. A final limitation is that conversations in controlled settings may differ from those that occur in bars and at parties.

General Conclusions

Although much research in interpersonal communication has focused on initial interactions and relational formation, researchers have neglected any serious consideration of how alcohol might affect communication processes in these fledgling relationships. Although scant research has been conducted on this topic, social drinkers believe that alcohol acts as a social lubricant that makes interactions go smoothly. The present research provides some limited support for this belief. Only when there was a strong inhibition conflict did alcohol consumption significantly affect conversational behaviors. Under these circumstances, alcohol appeared to lift some of the inhibitions of women with low social self-esteem, such that they became less anxious and self-disclosed more. Women who already felt confident in their social skills behaved similarly, whether sober or under the influence of alcohol.

NOTES

1. A cue that provokes behavior in one situation may serve to inhibit behavior in another situation. In our example, the presence of the ex-partner provokes the individual to act to rekindle the relationship. Imagine, though, the inhibitory effect of the presence of an ex-partner if the individual were attempting to initiate a new relationship with a different person.

2. We examined single females in this age range so the women and male confederates would be in the same age range. We assumed that if the confederates flirted with a woman after learning she was married, his behavior would be viewed as inappropriate. We recruited white, heterosexual women based on prior work (Murphy et al., 1998), where, when women of color and homosexual women viewed videotapes of white men suggesting a first date, they reported that they could not make the attraction and relational judgments, because they would never date him, no matter how attractive or nice he was.

3. Each of the interactions was examined by coders for at least one of the measures. To assess reliability of the confederate's behavior, at least 20% of each confederate's interactions were selected from across the 50 interactions. For measures of participants' flirtatious, flattered, and self-disclosure behaviors, the two coders coded the middle 40% of the interactions. Reliability checks for the verbal responses made to the confederate's flirting used the last 20% of the videotaped interactions. Previous research found gender differences in the perceptions of alcohol's effects on nonverbal behavior (Woolfolk, Abrams, Abrams, & Wilson, 1979) and perceptions of flirting in interactions (Koeppel, Montagne-Miller, O'Hair, & Cody, 1993). This cited research suggests that coders should be of the same gender and that the coders' gender matches the participants to avoid gender-related inconsistencies. Therefore, only females were employed as coders.

4. The correlations for the different measures of self-protection were all positively associated. First, the two metaperceptions were significantly and positively correlated ($r = .57, p < .001$). The metaperceptions were also positively correlated with two measures of self-protective behaviors: how flirtatious she was, and her self-disclosure (correlations ranged from .30 to .46, $p < .05$). The metaperceptions were not significantly correlated with how flattered she appeared in response to his flirting (correlations of .18 for liking, .21 for the romantic interest metaperception, $p > .05$). Finally, although the flirtatious and flattered behaviors were positively correlated ($r = .46, p < .001$), neither was significantly associated with self-disclosure (flirtatious $r = .17$ and flattered $r = .16$). That the metaperceptions, self-disclosure, and flirtatious measures are significantly correlated indicates that the statistical tests are somewhat dependent.

5. In the alcohol conditions, BAL scores ranged from .049 to .118. The participant with the average BAL of .049 was unable to keep drinking past that point. Because this participant's responses did not differ significantly from others in the alcohol condition on the dependent measures, she was included in the analysis. The next lowest average BAL was .062.

6. The effect of the drinks for women in the no alcohol condition was not zero, because one participant reported that the sugar in the mixed drinks affected her behavior.

7. Several nonverbal measures were also included to examine participants' responses to the confederates' flirting behaviors. Coders examined the videotapes (without sound) and recorded how often participants shifted, self-touched, blocked body or face, smiled, interjected nonfluencies, and adjusted their body orientation. Although intercoder reliabilities were quite high, the results did not demonstrate a consistent pattern; therefore, these analyses were not included in the present study. However, in within-subjects analyses, participants hid their faces, shifted, smiled, and appeared nervous significantly more during the flirting segment than during the nonflirting segment. These data also suggest that the provoking cue was discerned by participants.

8. As a comparison to prior research, we examined the number of words that the women used during the interaction. Two coders watched the first and second 2-minute segments of the interaction and counted the total number of words uttered by the participant ($\alpha = .98$). A 2 (alcohol) \times 2 (SSE) \times 2 (behaviors before and after flirting onset) repeated measures analysis of variance revealed that intoxicated women used more words ($M = 221.75, SD = 33.13$) than did sober women, $M = 127, SD = 36.91, F(1, 45) = 10.71, p = .002, \eta^2 = .19$. This main effect was qualified by an alcohol by SSE interaction, $F(1, 45) = 3.76, p = .059, \eta^2 = .08$. Intoxicated low SSE women used significantly more words than did sober low SSE women in both the flirting, $M = 233, SD = 40.81$, and nonflirting segments, $M = 176, SD = 48.36, t(21) = 18.6, p = .006$, and nonflirting segments, $M = 220, SD = 27.45$ and $M = 179, SD = 34.33, t(21) = 12.9, p = .004$. High SSE women's words per segment did not change as a function of alcohol. Thus, the main effect for alcohol is primarily accounted for by the low SSE women.

9. Because approximately half of the women had a boyfriend, the analyses for the dependent measures also used relational status (had a boyfriend or not) as an independent variable. The only significant effect was for the metaperception of romantic interest. Women

who did not have a boyfriend thought the confederate displayed more romantic interest than did women who had a boyfriend, $M = 3.64$, $SD = 2.11$ and $M = 2.68$, $SD = 2.5$, respectively; $F(1, 48) = 8.27$, $p = .006$. Relational status did not interact with either alcohol or SSE.

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