

THE PERSONALITIES OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS IN ASSOCIATION WITH REGULAR DRINKING IN ADOLESCENCE

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Summary

It is well known that some psychological features of adolescents are positively associated with alcohol drinking but less attention is paid to the psychological features of their significant others. The aim of the study was to describe a common psychological profile of significant others to regularly alcohol drinking adolescents. A survey was conducted using an original questionnaire, which classifying alcohol drinking as regular, social (incidental) and abstinence. Of 903 students (aged 15-19), 169 identified themselves as regular drinkers (RDA) and 279 - as abstainers (NDA). The significant others of these two groups were compared statistically in terms of a wide range of psychological features. It was found that RDAs were significantly more likely to have: fathers (OR=1.94; 95% CI 1.04-3.62) and friends (OR=1.55; 95% CI 1.02-2.36) that tended to avoid obligations in favor of pleasure; extravert friends (OR=1.55; 95% CI 1.06-2.28) and lovers (OR=1.72; 95% CI 1.14-2.59); impulsive lovers (OR=1.76; 95% CI 2.86-1.08), and obeying (OR=1.95; 95% CI 1.01-3.80) friends; conventional fathers (OR=2.17; 95% CI 1.27-3.72) and less likely to have independent mothers (OR=0.57; 95% CI 0.32-0.99) and hardworking friends (OR=0.58; 0.35-0.95). It seems that significant others of RDAs are less likely to exhibit models of rational reactions in everyday life that prevent adolescents from developing rational personality, thus making it possible to increase the probability of regular drinking in adolescence.

Key words: significant others, personality, alcohol, adolescence

Introduction

Many investigations have found association between adolescents' drinking and risky behavior of significant others [1-6] but little is known about the role of significant others' personality in association with alcohol use in adolescence.

Personality is a questionable matter in psychology and basic psychological theories are not primarily designed to explain personality in connection with alcohol use. Although, in confirmation of the psychoanalytic strategy [7, 8], numerous investigations have found association between sexuality and alcohol use [9-12].

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Association of impulsivity [13-17] and extraversion [18] with alcohol use confirms dispositional strategy. Behaviorists emphasise the role of significant others in terms of social learning [19-21] and social control [22-25] theories and phenomenologists lay stress on the role of self-control [26].

In a previous work [27] we introduced a three-dimensional model that interprets personality as an individual combination of three motivational streams: egocentric, conformist and transcendental. We found a positive association between egocentrism and adolescents' regular alcohol drinking. The aim of this article was to investigate the role of significant others' personality in adolescents' alcohol drinking in terms of the three-dimensional model.

Patients and Methods

Conception

The three-dimensional personality views psyche as bonded with three-dimensional reality: biological, dialectical and transcendent. Events arising in the body become conscious as needs and form the core of egocentric concept about the live-need satisfaction. Events in the interactive sphere are conditionally bonded with the ego – ego will receive what is needed only if this is expected, so the core of conformist concept is consideration of other acting actors and things. The transcendental world consists of relationships that may convert into real interactions and the main transcendental concept is chance control by actions based on knowledge about natural and social laws. The three-dimensional personal strategy is an individual imaginary definition about the essence of a situation and as a consequence – the right actions in this situation. Egoists tend to define all the situations as egocentric and their consciousness is occupied with satisfying needs. Conformists tend to see the world as dialectic matter and their minds are occupied with the necessity to counter-react adequately. Idealists predominantly perceive life as a consequence of transcendental laws and are determined to follow the rules. In this context, risky behavior may be biologically and socially motivated although it is transcendently bad and egocentrics and conformists should be motivated to drink alcohol more than idealists. However, it is not clear how different personal concepts will interact and how significant others' personalities will impact adolescents' drinking behavior. The aim of this

article was personality description of significant others to regularly alcohol drinking adolescents.

Measurements

We developed a self-reported questionnaire for self-evaluation by means of adjectives and preferred statements [27]. Ego drive was indicated by statements and adjectives confirming the leading role of the ego in the form of hedonism (likes pleasant experiences, delicious food and pleasures of life) and impulsivity (impulsive and emotional; easily changes desires; easily changes mood; disorganized, scattered, unmotivated). Conformists were indicated as conventional (religious, sincere believer; conventional, predictable, uniform person), and sociable (cannot bear to be alone, likes parties and merriment; reclusive, strange). Idealists was indicated as rational (smart, clever, an erudite; calm, reasonable, thoughtful; persevering in the pursuit of goals; standing in goals) and committed (ambitious, hardworking, exhausted, disorganized, scattered, unmotivated; on achievement of one goal, there is a switch to another), and antisocial (prefers to be alone). Additionally, several statements and adjectives were introduced to reveal contradictions between the three concepts: transcendental rejection (pleasure first, then what is necessary), authoritative attitudes (prefers to lead; prefers to obey; prefers to be autonomous and independent), social control-providing abilities (handsome, charming, sexy; glamorous; pleasant, friendly, cheerful; original and intriguing; convincing), moral attitudes (not tolerating refusal or objections, being defeated or underestimated; selfish, stubborn, unyielding; unjust, unfair, grumpy; principled, fair; good, caring, generous). In order to reveal which concept was most successful, some adjectives and statements about effectiveness of behavior were introduced: self-efficacy (successful, prosperous; unsure), self-esteem (vital, energetic, motivated; nervous, irritable, aggressive; depressed or desperate).

Study design

All students from 9th to 12th grades (16-19 aged) in three secondary schools of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria were invited to participate in the survey. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee for Clinical Research of the Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria and the Regional Inspectorate of the

Ministry of Education of Bulgaria. To increase the response rate, the survey was conducted in class hours in cooperation with the school authorities. The students were placed in large rooms, seated at sufficient distance from each other to provide independent and anonymous answers to the questions. To provide maximum reliability of the data, the responses were collected in a sealed urn and each student was free to refuse participation.

Participants

A total of 1077 students were invited to participate in this study. Of these, 1051 accepted to participate and 903 filled out the questionnaire correctly (response rate: 83.8%). According to their answers, 169 students (18.72%) were identified as regular alcohol drinkers (RDA), and 279 (30.9%) - as abstainers (NDA).

Data analysis

We applied descriptive statistics, Chi-square test and logistic regression for statistical comparison

between the RDA and NDA groups. The data were calculated by means of statistic software product SPSS.

Results

The significant differences between RDA and NDA significant others are shown in Table 1. RDAs were more likely to perceive their fathers as conventional (OR=2.17) and transcendence ignoring (OR=1.94) persons. They were more likely to describe their mothers as introvert (OR=3.24) persons and less likely - as independent ones (OR=0.57). RDAs were more likely to describe their beloved persons as pleasure oriented (OR=1.59), impulsive (OR=1.76), disorganized (OR=2.68), and extravert (OR=1.72) ones. RDAs were more likely to think that their friends were extraverts (OR=1.55), ones that prefer to obey (OR=1.95) and postpone obligations in favor of pleasures (OR=1.55) and less likely that they were hardworking persons (OR=0.58).

Table 1. Significant differences in personality of significant others of RDAs and NDAs

	RDA (n=169) % (SE)	NDA (n=279) % (SE)	p<	OR	95% CI
My father:					
Conventional, predictable, uniform	20.12±3.08	10.39±1.83	0.01	2.17	1.27-3.72
One of his rules is: „Pleasure first, then what is necessary”	13.61±2.64	7.53±1.58	0.05	1.94	1.04-3.62
My mother:					
Reclusive, strange person, prefers to be alone	7.69±2.05	2.51±0.94	0.05	3.24	1.27-8.29
Prefers to be autonomous and independent	11.24±2.43	18.28±2.31	0.05	0.57	0.32-0.99
My beloved person:					
Likes pleasant experiences, delicious food and the pleasures of life	48.80±3.88	37.45±3.16	0.05	1.59	2.38-1.06
Impulsive and emotional	25.90±3.40	16.60±2.43	0.05	1.76	2.86-1.08
Disorganized, scattered, unmotivated	9.64±2.29	3.83±1.25	0.05	2.68	6.22-1.15
Cannot bear to be alone, likes parties and merriment	37.87±3.73	26.16±2.63	0.01	1.72	1.14-2.59
My friends:					
Cannot bear to be alone, like parties and merriment	55.03±3.83	44.09±2.97	0.05	1.55	1.06-2.28
Prefer to obey	11.83±2.48	6.45±1.47	0.05	1.95	1.01-3.80
Hardworking	15.38±2.78	24.01±2.56	0.05	0.58	0.35-0.95
One of their rules is: „Pleasure first, then what is necessary”	33.73±3.64	24.73±2.58	0.05	1.55	1.02-2.36

Discussion

The role of significant others in alcohol drinking in adolescence has been the subject of many articles [1-6, 28, 29], but mainly in the context of social learning [19-21], social control [22-25] and personal dispositions [13-18]. Less attention

has been paid to connections between adolescents' alcohol consumption and significant others' personalities. In this study, it was found that some personality traits of significant others were related to regular alcohol drinking. It was revealed that RDAs came from families characterized by transcendence-ignoring

conventional fathers and poorly communicative and independent mothers. When combined, these characteristics suggest insufficient level of communication about transcendence and correct intimate relations, i.e. topics very important for adolescents. Without such instructive support, adolescents should rely on other sources of information (peers) and their own experience and intuition. As we found in our previous work [27] RDAs could be classified as egocentrics in a three-dimensional model of personality (3DMP) with increased motive of power and transcendental ignorance. Such personal profile could be a result of instructional insufficiency in the family and may suggest the context of lovers and friends selection. The personalities of RDAs' lovers were characterized by egocentric traits similar to those we found in RDAs: impulsivity, disorganization and pleasure-orientation [27]. These traits could be also attributed to spontaneous, uncultivated human nature without transcendental „encumbrances”. Transcendence neglecting of RDAs (postponing obligations in favor of pleasure) could be also seen in the description of friends' personalities, but instead of fully „replicate” personality of lovers, friends seem to „add” personality, and while RDAs prefer to dominate [27], their friends prefer to obey.

This is the first application of the three-dimensional model of personality to explain the role of significant others in adolescent alcohol drinking. It adds a new perspective to social learning and social control theories. At present, it is hard to say how productive this new approach will be, as additional confirmations are needed. Yet we insist that personal interactions in the 3D vision are much easier to change by education and psychological help than in social-cognitive models, ego drives and personal dispositions. Education in adolescence should just add instructions that are lacking, thus helping with personality construction, and build transcendental perspective in order to establish proper self-control for alcohol prevention.

Conclusions

According to data, the personal relations with significant others that increase the chance of adolescents to become regular drinkers could be classified as determining and selective.

Determining relations come from parents and form an adolescent's personality. In this regard, lack of instructive communication about

transcendental reality and proper intimate relations (love) allows for spontaneous personality development without cultivation and predisposes to the development of egocentric personality.

Selective relations are the result from the selection of complementary personalities among peers (friends and lovers) that allow for achieving personal completeness. In this regard, lovers function as „similar, same level person” and friends – as „willing to complement, lower level person”. Extraversion is a common trait in this adolescent circle of dependences, maybe because of shared incompleteness of personality. Against this psycho-social background, alcohol may function as an additional interpersonal bond, strengthening the insufficient depth of interpersonal relations.

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