Social Norms Predict Students’ Intentions to Drink and Drive

Nancy Rhodes1,2, PhD, Nita Hestevold3, MS, Kelly Pikiv3, MS & Aimee Edison4, PhD
1Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis, 2UAB Injury Control Research Center, 3The University of Alabama, 4Indiana University Southeast

Abstract
A phone survey of approximately 400 college students was conducted to determine the relative importance of various social norm constructs on intention to drive after drinking. Intention to drive after drinking the next time the subject went out drinking was assessed, in addition to social norms and attitudes toward drinking and driving. Regression analysis revealed that proximal injunctive norms (what my friends want me to do) and proximal descriptive norms (the percent of my good friends who drive after drinking) were significant predictors of drinking and driving intention after accounting for past behavior and attitude. The distal descriptive norm (the percent of students at your university who drink and drive) was not a significant predictor of drinking and driving intention. These findings may shed light on the lack of success of social norms interventions that focus on messages conveying campus-wide statistics. Approaches that target subgroups of campus populations (e.g., fraternities, clubs) may be more appropriate.

Method
Participants and procedures
• 400 students enrolled in the University of Alabama
• Approximately 100 participants each from Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior classifications
• Average age 21.1
• 8% African-American, 86% White, remainder unknown or other
• 51% female
• Surveys administered by trained phone interviewers
• Participants recruited at random from all students enrolled at University of Alabama in Spring Semester 2008

Measures
Control Variables
• Sex
• Number of past heavy drinking episodes in the past month
• Number of times drinking and driving in the past month
• Attitude toward drinking and driving,

Predictor Variables
• Descriptive norm for drinking and driving for close friends (proximal)
• Descriptive norm for drinking and driving for students at the university (distal)
• Injunctive norm for drinking and driving (i.e., do their friends want them to drive after drinking)

Dependent Variable
• Behavior intention (i.e., how likely they will drive after drinking the next time they party with friends)

Results
Regression analyses indicated that normative variables significantly increased the variance accounted for in intentions to drive after drinking even after controlling for sex, prior heavy drinking behavior, prior driving and drinking behavior and attitude toward drinking and driving (see Table 1). More prior drinking and driving, prior drinking behavior, and more positive attitudes toward drinking and driving all significantly predicted drinking and driving intentions. Importantly, high proximal descriptive norm and injunctive norms all predicted greater intention to drink and drive after accounting for prior behavior and attitudes. The distal descriptive norm (percent of students at the university who drink and drive) was not a significant predictor of intention.

Table 1 Intention to Drive after Drinking
Final multiple regression model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR² = .212</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13,390) = 35.04</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR² = .026</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13,390) = 35.04</td>
<td>.369</td>
<td>7.71</td>
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<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR² = .076</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.006</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13,390) = 25.29</td>
<td>.282</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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</table>

Proximal injunctive norm (what my friends want me to do)
Proximal descriptive norm (what my friends do)
Distal descriptive norm (what students at your university do)

Proximal norms, both descriptive and injunctive, were important predictors of intention beyond prior drinking behavior, positive affect, and attitude. Distal norms, that is, those involving the typical behavior of other students at the same university, were not predictive of drinking and driving intention. These findings suggest that social norms interventions are more likely to be effective if they focus on proximal rather than distal norms.

Conclusion
Proximal norms, both descriptive and injunctive, were important predictors of intention beyond prior drinking behavior, positive affect, and attitude. Distal norms, that is, those involving the typical behavior of other students at the same university, were not predictive of drinking and driving intention. These findings suggest that social norms interventions are more likely to be effective if they focus on proximal rather than distal norms.

References

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