

## Personality and Drinking Motives: Delving into the Alcohol Consumption of Young Adults

Anuja Upadhyia\*

Educational Psychologist, Aran Center,  
Dubai, UAE

\*Corresponding author: Anuja Upadhyia,  
Educational Psychologist, Aran Center,  
Dubai, UAE

✉ anuja\_upadhyia@yahoo.com

Founder/CEO, The Trauma and Healing  
Foundation, USA.

Tel: 971 56 1011453

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### Abstract

Evaluation of the connections between personality variables as predictors towards the drinking behavior in adults. Exploration of associations between the Big Five Factor model of personality traits – extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness and the model stating predisposed susceptibilities to alcohol use and misuse. Based on the different personality aspects observed in individuals, strong links were displayed with drinking motives in adults. Drinking motives, positive or negative, and the subsequent existing alcohol use and exploitation, seen in young adults, was further assessed

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### Objective of the Paper

The focus of this article will mainly be onto the comparative discussion of contemporary views alongside past research, to better understand the connection between personality traits and drinking motives in young adults. The broad context will shed light on some theoretical models of personality characteristics along with a model conferring predisposed vulnerabilities to alcohol use; drinking motives and the resulting concrete alcohol use and exploitation. Primarily, emphasizing on the extraversion personality type, its related facets with evidence of recent facts and figures, plus their effects on drinking motives, mainly enhancement motives in the younger generation of adults.

Personality traits are said to be biologically inbuilt systems that control individuals' sensitivities towards the affective stimuli, positive or negative [1,2]. Alcohol use and misuse have been explored widely from a biopsychosocial perspective [3] alongside variables like the personality aspects and drinking motives [4,5]. Drinking motives are primary predictors of alcohol use and misuse, which has received noteworthy attention along with evidence in the literature. Motives refer to broad categories, dimensions, or subsets of behaviour that are intended or engaged into due to awareness, unawareness or due to some automatic processes of an individual, leading towards a desired and favorable outcome [6-8].

### Links Between Personality Traits and Drinking Behaviour

Personality factors and alcohol use have an association that is mediated by drinking motives. The research evidence shows a

strong link between drinking behaviour and personality traits such as extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness [4,5]. Moreover, a large body of evidence particularly shows a positive link between enhancement motives and the extraversion personality type [9,10]. The Big Five Factor model is an all inclusive and widely recognized approach to personality structure, which comprises of high order personality characteristics – extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. Facets of extraversion denote an individual's sociable nature, confidence in social situations and sensitivity towards positive emotions [11]. Upon drawing parallels between personality traits and drinking motives, higher extraversion traits in personality are inclined towards the regulation pathway with relevance to positive affects, i.e. individuals consume alcohol to be able to experience the positive reinforcement effects of alcohol [12].

Motivational theorists' view evaluates alcohol use and abuse is an outcome to the pathway of drinking motives, predominantly being affected by other factors such as personality traits [6,7]. Connections have been found between drinking motives and personality variables. According to Cooper [6] drinking motives are characterized not just based on their valence (positive or negative reinforcement) but along with that, the source of motivation (internal or external reinforcement) is also taken into account. The two types of reinforcement: positive, that aids in improving moods to experience more pleasurable emotions; and negative, that aids in relieving negative moods and emotions. Centered along these dimensions with a cross over, a four-factor model of drinking motives was formed: enhancement

motives (internal experiences with a positive valence, drinking to seek pleasurable emotions) often linked to extreme alcohol consumption; social motives (positive external experiences felt to feel socially affiliated) has links with reasonable levels of alcohol use, due to a controlled external environment to enhance social connection [8]. On the other hand, conformity and coping have a negative valence, conformity being an external experience, inducing drinking to achieve reduced social criticism, while coping being an internal experience, attempting to drink so as to alleviate negative affects or emotions. This four-factor model of drinking motives explains drinking behaviours, independent of age limits of people [8,13].

## Alcohol Abuse: Coping-Depression and Coping-Anxiety

Contradictory views by Grant et al. [14] explained depression and anxiety as distinctive affective conditions with varying links to alcohol abuse. This gave rise to breaking up the coping motives category into two subsequent categories: coping-anxiety, involving alcohol use leading to reduction of anxious moods and coping-depression, involving alcohol use leading to reductions in depressed moods. Therefore, a resultant five-factor model was formed by Grant et al. [14] with clear justification of the model as a superior fit of data that presented better predictive validity as compared to the four-factor model. A study conducted by Simons et al. [15] with young adults (adolescents and under graduates) as the participants, relying on [14] five-factor model, revealed outcomes showing a significant relationship between drinking motives and alcohol abuse, to varying challenging concerns. Furthermore, enhancement motives showed strong ties with drinking and alcohol related problems. The four-factor model [16] akin to the five-factor model of personality suggests sensation seeking as a discrete construct, independent of any relations with the high order impulsivity concealed variable. Rather, sensation seeking is a feature of the higher order personality trait of extraversion, wherein there is an inclination to express positivity outwards into the social world. Zuckerman advocated sensation seeking as a trait quality that shows a dire need for stimulation through gaining new, powerful and exhilarating experiences. It is posited to being perceptive to the gratifying properties of alcohol, thus they seek to optimize their gratification of alcohol aimed at fulfilling their enhancement motives, often by delving into dangerous drinking habits [16]. Drinking behaviours displayed by individuals with sensation seeking traits are risky and fairly related to heavy alcohol consumption and enhancement motives, hence, it is noteworthy to distinctively separate sensation seeking from impulsivity, as the predictive value of these outcomes differ from impulsivity entirely.

Negative reinforcing drinking motives are associated with problematic drinking issues [6,8]. Adding on, there are theories of motivation [1,2], that advocate a connection between certain risky internal drinking motives and personality types that are generally predisposed in individuals. Studies suggest a stronger relationship between personality variables and internal drinking motives (coping and enhancement) as compared to external drinking motives (social and conformity) [4,9]. Motives that lead to motivations to perform a behaviour is a crucial basis of intended risk taking behaviours [17,18]. Lac and Donaldson [19] in a contemporary study added to the existing research knowledge,

by putting forth their findings: alcohol usage is induced in different ways by motives that initiate consumption of alcohol.

Most studies demonstrate evidence from cross sectional outcomes, which may not be considered very direct since the associations could be a result of the effect of personality on the amount of alcohol use as well as the effect of excessive alcohol consumption on personality [20]. Although until 2015, only two studies conducted in the United States, investigated associations between alcohol use and personality, longitudinally; wherein high extraversion traits were linked to developing alcohol related behavioural problems in the future [21,22]. This brings us to a conclusion about the unclearness of the generalizability of the associations, with respect to traits of personality and drinking motives.

Cross sectional research points out an indirect relationship between sensation seeking and drinking problems. Explicitly, a chain of events is observed in the indirect effects of sensation seeking with alcohol misuse; basically, alcohol problems are a result of over consumption of alcohol due to heightened enhancement and social motives, that occur because of a need for stimulation or in other words, sensation seeking characteristics of personality [15]. Conversely, a much recent meta-analysis of longitudinal studies conducted by Stautz and Cooper found sensation seeking to pose a threat for alcohol consumption in the future, leading to alcohol problems in individuals. Nonetheless, as much evidence argues at sensation seeking to be a peril in the alcohol consumption and related issues [23], some studies have been found to indicate unreliable or even null outcomes due to inconsistency in data analysis longitudinally. Generally, sensation-seeking presents a receptiveness of positive reinforcement of alcohol, discerning it from the vulnerability to the negative reinforcement presented by anxiety sensitiveness or hopelessness, more so to the general notion of risky drinking behaviours deliberated by impulsivity. Positive and negative reinforcement processes influence distinct aspects of drinking behaviour in an unambiguous assessment of consequences; coping motives are specifically related to alcohol abuse whereas enhancement motives are particularly related to drinking excessively, which in turn often is a pathway to alcohol overuse and abuse [24]. In a study conducted by Hakulinen et al. [20] similar converging results were obtained between increased extraversion and alcohol consumption [21,25]. Such evidence has not been established in other smaller studies or meta-analyses conducted previously [26,27]. A fast changing trend is thus noted within a span of six years.

A cause and effect relationship is found between the psychological functioning of an individual and their level of alcohol consumption, which are driven by drinking motives and often times result in conduct or alcohol use related disorders. Not only does alcohol consumption have encumbering effects for the individual alone, it is also seen to affect the society as a whole. Substantial economic and social liabilities are inflicted in terms of causing deliberate or non-deliberate injury, pregnancy complications in most women who drink excessively during their trimesters leading to fetal alcohol syndrome. Additionally, unemployment is prevalent and a burden on law executing bodies of the country is laid [28-32]. In 2010, alcohol abuse was considered a prominent risk factor globally after high blood pressure and tobacco smoking, for the burden of diseases and consequent injuries [33].

Alcohol problems are related to certain personality characteristics that are predictors of susceptibility to drinking commencement at earlier stages [16,23,34]. Four-factor Model of Personality Vulnerability to Alcohol Misuse has a grounded framework and has emerged from Pihl and Peterson's [35] work. This model carefully reviews standing research about alcohol misuse and drinking motives of individuals and can be explained using predictions made about the interaction between alcohol misuse and personality traits. The model encases four personality characteristics – anxiety, hopelessness, sensitivity, impulsivity and sensation seeking relative to enhancement motives. Each of these traits are associated with alcohol misuse reasons, corresponding to specific forms of drinking motives, biological foundations and the tendency towards misusing alcohol consumption for health outcomes. Some earlier studies show combined evidence for enhancement as well as coping motives to particularly be consistent predictors of drinking problems or different alcohol based problems [36,37].

Robust results were found in alcohol consumption levels and its relative problems through enhancement motives, in an indirect way considering effects from impulsivity of individuals [38]. Many a times people engage in activities whilst being ignorant or unaware of the facts that their actions and behaviours are jeopardizing due to their predisposed personality traits [39]. Specific traits have been identified as possible health hazards that foster alcohol harms or even disorders [40,41]. A rising worry for researchers is ways to deal with risky drinking behaviour among young adults. Additionally, devising interventions to target this health behaviour problem [42], while understanding the underlying pathways that lead to such issues, finally educating or coaching young adults to act responsible based on their personality types while consuming alcohol.

## Tapping Individual Drinking Motives

Inventories such as the Drinking Motives Questionnaire [6] is most commonly used to tap the drinking motives of individuals. The revised version of the by Grant et al. [14] is a self report measure derived from the DMQ by Cooper [6] to identify the intensity along with valid reasons under each category of drinking motives in the last 6 months. Five sub scales were identified: enhancement motives "drinking for excitement"; social motives

"to feel affable"; conformity motives "feeling of not being left out"; both coping-anxiety and coping-depression motives sub scale included, "to lower anxiety related feelings" and "to deal with depressing or sad feelings" respectively. The Modified-DMQ-R used a 5-point likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost never/never) to 5 (almost always/always). Grant et al. [14] proves the efficacy of the measure by establishing internal consistency, a good reliability (test-retest) and shows factorial validity. Morral et al. views suggest that self-report measures are a typical way to measure alcohol use or misuse but future directions in research should consider ways of examining the nature of this issue.

From a health behaviour intervention change perspective of addressing alcohol use disorders, relapse of alcohol abuse is a possibility. Likelihoods of a pathway leading to alcohol exploitation from drinking motives with distinct personality traits may contribute to relapse of alcohol use to varying extents. There is not much research evidence on the interaction of personality motives with alcohol use in the context of relapse motivations [43]. Regarding practical implications for future directions, investigating the true reasons of people engaging in alcohol abuse along with gaining an insight into drinking motives [14] may lend a deeper understanding of personality traits and their related self-induced hazardous drinking behaviour. Furthermore, not much research has delved into the qualitative analysis methods of addressing this issue that could be used alongside statistical data to better equip this topic in depth.

## Summary of Research Evidence

Positive affect or positive reinforcement such as an inclination towards drinking behavior is seen as a result of a regulation pathway arising from the higher extraversion personality traits [12]. Positive links have been found between enhancement motives and the personality trait – extraversion [10]. A clear distinction is made between sensation seeking and impulsivity with regards to alcohol usage that are driven by internal motives [19]. There has been inconsistency in the data analysis of alcohol consumption and the related issues, longitudinally. However, according to contemporary studies, the consequences of indulging in alcohol use and misuse has substantial evidence resulting in conduct disorders and other alcohol related disorders.

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