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Unrealistic optimism prompts risky behavior

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Unrealistic optimism about drinking behavior can lead to later alcohol-related problems, according to research published in the current issue of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (PSPB), the official monthly journal of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

Researchers interviewed 800 college students several times over the course of two years about whether their drinking resulted in hangovers, memory loss or trouble with police. They found that those who believed that they had a smaller chance than other students of having a drinking problem were actually the ones most likely to later experience problems.

Some research has suggested that unrealistic optimism is beneficial because it motivates people to take care of their health. The data in the PSPB study suggests the opposite.

"This is the first study to demonstrate unrealistic optimism at the individual level, in college student drinkers, about the likelihood of experiencing future problems with alcohol," write the authors Amanda J. Dillard, Amanda M. Midboe, and William M. P. Klein. "Future studies may provide insight into how to curb unrealistically optimistic perceptions and ultimately reduce risky health behaviors."

More information: "The Dark Side of Optimism: Unrealistic Optimism About Problems With Alcohol Predicts Subsequent Negative Event Experiences" in *Personality and* Social Psychology *Bulletin* (published by SAGE) is available free of charge for a limited time at psp.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/35/11/1540

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