

In teen drinking it's not who you know, it's who knows who you know

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Teenage alcohol consumption may be influenced more by a date's friends than his or her own friends, according to Penn State and Ohio State criminologists.

"In this analysis, a partner's friends were more influential on the drinking habits of adolescents than their friends and their [romantic partners](#)," said Derek Kreager, associate professor of crime, law and justice, Penn State.

Prior drinking by the friend of a date significantly increases the odds of future [binge drinking](#) -- consuming a large amount of alcohol at one time -- by 80 percent. The drinking habits of the date increase the odds of binge drinking by only 32 percent and friends' drinking habits increase it by approximately 30 percent.

In addition to increasing the probability of binge drinking, friends of romantic partners significantly influence the frequency of drinking.

"Dating connects adolescents to new groups and that connects them to new behaviors, such as drinking," Kreager said.

Kreager said that a date's friends may have more of an influence on drinking behaviors because teens can select dates and friends, but have little influence on who their dates choose as friends.

"The theory is that you are already like your friends, so you may already have similar drinking behaviors than them, but you can't pick your

romantic partner's friends," said Kreager. "So, our argument is that friends of partners have no real incentive to change for you, but you have an incentive to change for them so as to strengthen the [romantic relationship](#)."

Access to new social networks may also increase the opportunities to drink, he added.

Kreager, who worked with Dana Haynie, professor of sociology and director of the Criminal Justice Research Center, Ohio State, said that non-drinking friends of a date can similarly lower the odds of binge drinking and limit the frequency of drinking.

The researchers, who reported their findings in the current issue of [American Sociological Review](#), analyzed data on the drinking behaviors of 449 couples taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a survey of [adolescents](#) enrolled in grade 7 through 12 in the 1994-1995 school year.

The influence of a date's friends on drinking affected the drinking of both males and females, Kreager said, although males showed a slightly higher susceptibility to the influence of a romantic partner's friends.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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