

Researcher finds link between drinking patterns, alcohol 'vues'

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(Medical Xpress)—The motivations for one to drink alcohol and patterns of future drinking can be related to the attentional narrowing – or zeroing-in – one has to a photograph of an alcoholic beverage, according to a psychology professor at The University of Alabama.

Drinking alcohol can lead to myopia, or a narrowing of focus. It's a key reason why drinking and driving is dangerous and illegal. But people can experience the same myopic state without ingesting alcohol – a picture of a cocktail or a beer ad in a magazine can trigger the same narrowing of attention and can predict future drinking patterns, according to a study recently conducted by Dr. Philip Gable, assistant professor of [social psychology](#) at UA.

"The idea that alcohol narrows attention has been around for a long time," Gable said. "But the idea that these cues can cause the same narrowing of attention is pretty novel. When people have a strong desire to drink, they tend to focus on the goal to drink (alcohol cues), possibly to the detriment of negative consequences associated with drinking."

Gable and colleagues in the psychology department at UA recently measured the psychological processes related to urges to drink of 42 college students by using Electroencephalography (EEG), a recording of the brain's [spontaneous] electrical activity over a short period of time.

"We want to know why this happens, neurologically," Gable said. "It could lead to improved treatments."

Gable said the study is built on other works indicating that alcohol cues change the way we think about ourselves, like feeling more attractive or dominant. But Gable's recent findings illustrate that even the idea of alcohol may change the way we see the world around us.

"Over time, the cue itself may change our perception of the world around us," Gable said.

Gable concluded that the more a person drinks, the stronger the effect of alcohol cues. Heavy drinkers will suffer a greater myopic effect in response to alcohol cues. Additionally, responses to alcohol cues could serve as a motivation to abuse alcohol, but due to the complex nature of identifying and treating addictions Gable said he's hesitant to attribute this as a cause of alcoholism.

Provided by University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa

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