

Alcohol-related terms can increase aggression

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New psychology research shows that exposing people to alcohol-related words can influence aggressive behaviour in ways similar to actually consuming alcohol.

Researchers found however that this [aggressive behaviour](#) occurred when people were subjected to provocation in a way that was not a clear-cut insult.

Although it has been long known that [drinking alcohol](#) can increase aggression, a team of five psychologists, including Dr Eduardo Vasquez of the University of Kent in the UK and others from two US universities, demonstrated in two experiments that participants exhibited aggression following exposure to alcohol-related words – known as alcohol priming. This effect was demonstrated in situations when they were provoked in a way that was ambiguous or not obvious.

These findings will have implications for understanding the way people behave in situations where alcohol is present, including bars sporting events and parties.

The study – titled, Are You Insulting Me? Exposure to Alcohol Primes Increases Aggression Following Ambiguous Provocation - was conducted via two experiments involving US undergraduates.

In the first, half of the students were exposed to alcohol primes – for example, the words 'wine', 'beer' and 'whisky' – while the other half were exposed to non-alcohol primes – for example, 'milk', 'water' and 'juice' –

prior to receiving feedback on an essay they had written. Participants demonstrated increased aggressive retaliation when provoked by the essay feedback, but only when the provocation could not be clearly interpreted as an insult. An unambiguous or clear provocation produced highly aggressive responses, regardless of whether a person was primed with alcohol or not.

The second experiment showed that the [effects of alcohol](#) priming are fairly short-lived – the effect begins to diminish after seven minutes and is gone after about fifteen minutes following exposure to alcohol words. It also showed that alcohol priming influenced aggression by making the ambiguous provocation appear more hostile.

Dr Vasquez, of Kent's School of Psychology, said: 'These results provide another strong demonstration that exposing someone to alcohol-related words alone can influence social behaviour in ways that are consistent with the effects of [alcohol consumption](#).

'Our research also examined the parameters within which alcohol priming is likely to affect aggression. These effects seem to occur primarily when the [provocation](#) is not clear-cut and obvious, and are thus more open to interpretation. Under alcohol priming, the interpretation becomes more negative, and people become more aggressive.

'We've shown that people attending events where alcohol is typically present do not have to drink to experience, or be subject to, the [aggression](#)-enhancing effects of [alcohol](#), a fact that would seem to suggest caution in all such environments.'

The paper, titled, Are You Insulting Me? Exposure to Alcohol Primes Increases Aggression Following Ambiguous Provocation, is published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

More information: [psp.sagepub.com/content/early/ ...
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