


# ALCOHOL DRUG FINDINGS *Research abstract*

This entry is for a study added to the Effectiveness Bank but not (or not yet) fully analysed. Usually the entry consists only of the reference and if available the original abstract with no comments or material changes. The original study was not published by Findings; click [Title](#) to order copy. Free reprints may be available from the authors – click [prepared e-mail](#). [Links](#) to other documents. [Hover over](#) for notes. [Click to highlight passage](#) referred to. [Unfold extra text](#) .

Send email for updates

[SEND](#) [About updates](#)

▶ [Title and link for copying](#) ▶ [Comment/query to editor](#) ▶ [Tweet](#)

## ▶ [The effects of social and health consequence framing on heavy drinking intentions among college students.](#)

**Kingsbury J.H., Gibbons F.X., Gerrard M.**

**British Journal of Health Psychology: 2015, 20, p. 212–220.**

Unable to obtain a copy by clicking title? Try asking the author for a reprint by adapting this [prepared e-mail](#) or by writing to Dr Kingsbury at [john.kingsbury@state.mn.us](mailto:john.kingsbury@state.mn.us).

*To moderate student drinking, tell them about the embarrassment and social losses they might suffer from heavy drinking, but when it comes to health, focus on the gains from not drinking heavily.*

**SUMMARY** Many interventions targeting college student drinking have focused on the negative health effects of drinking heavily. However, some research suggests that heavy drinking among college students is frequently socially motivated. The featured study tried to use this same social motivation to reduce drinking, and at the same time tested whether it was more effective to frame messages in terms of the positive gains to be anticipated from light or non-drinking ('positive frame') versus avoidance of negative consequences from heavy drinking ('negative frame').

After being offered course credits in return, at a US university 124 psychology students (averaging about 18 years of age) joined the study. They were allocated at random to read either a non-alcohol-related vignette (the **control** procedure used to benchmark the effects of the other procedures), or one of four alcohol-related vignettes (▶ [box](#)) ostensibly written by a recent graduate from the university. The former student described an episode of drinking in which he or she experienced either social or health consequences, in each case framed as either a gain (ie, positive consequences of not drinking heavily) or a loss (ie, negative consequences of drinking heavily). After reading the vignettes, participants answered a questionnaire which included a [question](#) about their future intention to resist heavy drinking.

Compared to students who read only the vignette unrelated to drinking, reading about the *negative* social consequences of heavy drinking weakened intentions to drink heavily in future, as did reading about *positive* health effects attributed to not drinking heavily. There were no such impacts from reading about the positive social consequences of not drinking heavily or the negative health consequences of drinking heavily. In other words, for social consequences, a negative frame worked best, for health consequences, a positive frame. These effects were stronger the more heavily the student drank before the study, leading to statistically significant advantages among the heavier drinkers for a negative versus positive frame for social messages, and the reverse in respect of health messages.

The results suggest that interventions which typically focus on the negative health effects of heavy drinking may be made more effective by instead emphasising the negative social consequences of drinking heavily and the positive health consequences of avoiding this behaviour. An important limitation of this study is that it did not assess actual changes in drinking, though a [previous similar study](#) did detect such changes one month after the intervention.

**FINDINGS COMMENTARY** The authors accounted for their findings in terms of how probable the students would see the consequences described in the short stories they read. When the consequences are relatively probable, it is thought that people react most to anticipated positive consequences, as in health gains from not drinking heavily. When the consequences are seen as relatively improbable, people react most to anticipated negative consequences, such as the risk of committing a serious social *faux pas* like vomiting in front of a potential girlfriend or boyfriend after heavy drinking.

[Another study](#) but among college students in Britain has also indicated that how health-promotion messages are 'framed' affects their impact, in this case whether the amount they drink is compared to the student average, or they are told that (for example) that they more than 80% of other students.

Last revised 22 March 2016. First uploaded 14 March 2016

- ▶ [Comment/query to editor](#)
- ▶ [Give us your feedback on the site \(two-minute survey\)](#)
- ▶ [Open Effectiveness Bank home page](#)
- ▶ Add your name to the [mailing list](#) to be alerted to new studies and other site updates

**Top 10 most closely related documents on this site. For more try a [subject](#) or [free text search](#)**

STUDY 2010 [Emotional compatibility and the effectiveness of anti-drinking messages: a defensive processing perspective on shame and guilt](#)

DOCUMENT 2012 [The government's alcohol strategy](#)

DOWNLOAD PDF  
for saving to  
your computer

### What the students read

Alcohol vignettes featured a former student who went out with friends and experienced social or health consequences from drinking. The consequences were presented using either a gain frame (ie, positives of not drinking heavily) or loss frame (ie, negatives of drinking heavily). The social-gain frame vignette featured a student who was able to more easily converse with others, leading to a future date with an attractive member of the opposite sex. The student in the health-gain frame vignette talked about feeling good the day after going out, and the health benefits of moderate drinking (eg, lower risk of heart disease). The social-loss vignette featured a student who drank so much that he or she vomited in front of an attractive member of the opposite sex. The student in the health-loss vignette blacked out and was taken to the hospital for fear of alcohol poisoning.

DOCUMENT 2012 [The government's alcohol strategy](#)  
STUDY 2005 [Normative education works in school but often fails to reduce drinking at college](#)  
REVIEW 2012 [An overview of prevention of multiple risk behaviour in adolescence and young adulthood](#)  
STUDY 2014 [Web-based alcohol screening and brief intervention for university students: a randomized trial](#)  
DOCUMENT 2011 [European drug prevention quality standards: a manual for prevention professionals](#)  
STUDY 2009 [Dismantling motivational interviewing and feedback for college drinkers: a randomized clinical trial](#)  
STUDY 2011 [Achieving positive change in the drinking culture of Wales](#)  
STUDY 2008 [Independent review of the effects of alcohol pricing and promotion](#)  
REVIEW 2015 [Prevention of addictive behaviours](#)