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Event-Specific Cannabis Use and Cannabis Use Motives

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Abstract

Background: Specific events such as Mardi Gras (MG) and St. Patrick's Day (SPD) have been identified as high-risk events for cannabis use. Further, some campuses may have traditions that are associated with more event-specific cannabis use.

Objectives: Campus A has specific traditions regarding MG whereas Campus B has specific traditions regarding SPD and these campuses are differentially related to event-specific cannabis use (Buckner, Henslee, & Jeffries, 2015). Yet, little work has identified individual difference variables related to high-risk cannabis use events.

Methods: Current cannabis using undergraduates ($N=154$) at two campuses completed an on-line survey of event-specific cannabis use motives, cannabis use, and cannabis-related problems.

Results: Campus A endorsed more MG-specific social and enhancement motives than Campus B. Campus A reported more socially, enhancement, coping, conformity, and expansion motivated cannabis use on MG than on SPD, whereas Campus B reported more socially and enhancement motivated cannabis use on SPD than on MG. Campus A was indirectly related to more MG-specific cannabis use through MG-specific social and enhancement motives.

Conclusions/Importance: Event-specific cannabis motives are differentially related to specific high-risk cannabis use events and may be important therapeutic targets.

Keywords

cannabis; marijuana; cannabis problems; event-specific use; college students

Introduction

Cannabis use remains high on college campuses. Over one-third of college students endorse current cannabis use, a rate comparable to non-college same-age peers (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, Schulenberg, & Miech, 2014). Further, nearly one-fourth of past-year cannabis

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using first-year students meet DSM-IV criteria for a cannabis use disorder (Caldeira, Arria, O'Grady, Vincent, & Wish, 2008) and 67% of cannabis using undergraduates report experiencing at least one cannabis-related problem (Buckner, Ecker, & Cohen, 2010). The most commonly reported cannabis-related problems are those that can impact students' academic success such as procrastination, lower energy, lower productivity, memory loss, and missing days of work/class (Buckner et al., 2010).

Despite the risks associated with college cannabis use, little research has identified high-risk cannabis use situations. Emerging data indicate that cannabis use increases during specific events (Bravo, Pearson, Conner, & Parnes, 2017; Buckner et al., 2015; Hesse, Tutenges, & Schlieuwe, 2010; Ragsdale et al., 2012). Yet the majority of work on event-specific substance use examines high-risk events that occur on nearly all campuses (e.g., Spring Break; Ragsdale et al., 2012) and little attention has been paid to campus-specific high-risk substance use events. Given that these events tend to occur on a predicted schedule (e.g., annually), university officials can anticipate greater use during these events; thus, understanding psychosocial risk factors associated with use during these events could inform campus-wide intervention efforts. We recently identified that cannabis use and related problems increase during holidays with campus-specific celebratory traditions associated with the holidays (Buckner et al., 2015). Specifically, undergraduates at a campus that suspends classes for Mardi Gras (MG; Campus A) endorsed more cannabis use and related problems compared to a campus that does not suspend classes for MG (Campus B). Campus B suspends classes for St. Patrick's Day (SPD) and undergraduates at that campus reported more cannabis-related problems than Campus A (which does not suspend classes for SPD). Further, Campus A reported more cannabis-related problems during MG than SPD whereas Campus B reported more problems during SPD than MG. Notably, those that used on MG or SPD used more than a typical weekday or weekend use.

Although the identification of high-risk cannabis use events is an important first step in informing campus-wide prevention efforts, little research has identified individual difference factors associated with event-specific cannabis use. It may be that reasons for use are to some extent context specific and it may be that individuals use substances during specific events for reasons that increase the likelihood that they will use more and/or experience more use-related problems (see Neighbors et al., 2007). There is evidence that drinking motives are differentially related to drinking context. For example, the tendency to engage in more social and enhancement motivated drinking is more strongly related to drinking in social/convivial contexts than intimate or negative coping contexts (Terlecki & Buckner, 2015) and the tendency to engage in more enhancement-motivated drinking (but not the other motives) is uniquely related to more weekend drinking (Kuntsche & Cooper, 2010). Yet there has been only one known study of event-specific motives: spring-break specific motives were found to be related to more spring-break specific drinking and related problems than were typical drinking motives (Patrick, Lewis, Lee, & Maggs, 2013), indicating that an important next step in understanding high-risk, event-specific drinking is to identify high-risk reasons for drinking that could be the target for prevention and harm-reduction efforts.

The current study sought to build upon our initial study finding that campuses with event-specific traditions have greater event-specific cannabis use and related problems than campuses without such traditions (Buckner et al., 2015) by elucidating the role of event-specific cannabis use motives in several ways. First, we compared Campus A to Campus B on event-specific motives. Specifically, given that Campus A is located in South Louisiana and has specific campus-wide traditions regarding MG (but not SPD), we predicted that Campus A would report more convivial MG-specific motives (i.e., social and enhancement motives) than would Campus B. Given that Campus B did not report more SPD-specific cannabis use than did Campus A (Buckner et al., 2015), we explored whether the campuses would differ on SPD-specific motives. Second, we tested whether Campus A would report more MG-specific cannabis use motives than SPD-specific motives and whether Campus B would report more SPD-specific motives than MG-specific motives. Third, we examined the relation of event-specific motives to event-specific use and related problems, regardless of campus. Fourth, given that Campus A reported more MG-specific cannabis use than Campus B (Buckner et al., 2015), we tested whether greater MG use at Campus A was due to endorsement of more social/enhancement MG-specific motives. In other words, we tested whether the relation between campus and MG cannabis use was mediated by social/enhancement MG-specific motives.

Method

Participants & Procedures

Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses to complete an online survey administered via [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) from 3/31/14–4/30/14, soon after the events of interest (MG, SPD) (Buckner et al., 2015). Participants received research credit for participating. Participants at both campuses completed the same measures. Eligibility criteria at both sites were identical and included being at least 18 years of age and endorsing cannabis use at least once during the time period of interest (2/1/14–3/28/14, chosen because this timeframe includes MG and SPD). Two participants' data from Campus A were excluded due to questionable validity (detailed below). Participants reporting greater than 3 SD above the mean for their university's cannabis use during the timeframe assessed were excluded (Campus A $n = 1$; Campus B $n = 1$). The campuses did not differ on the percentage of outliers (Buckner et al., 2015). The total sample consisted of 154 (58.4% female) cannabis users (see Buckner et al., 2015 for more details regarding the sample). Campus A reported somewhat more past-month cannabis use and Campus B had a greater percent of male participants (Buckner et al., 2015). Thus, campus was included as a covariate in relevant analyses.

Campus A.

Participants were 108 undergraduates from a large public university in southern Louisiana. Mardi Gras (French for "Fat Tuesday") day is the day before Ash Wednesday. The name refers to the practice of consuming high-calorie food on this Tuesday in preparation for fasting of some religions during Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday. MG season includes a series of carnival celebrations (characterized by parades, parties, etc.) that take place between the Christian holidays Epiphany (January 6) and MG day. Campus A has several

traditions related specifically to MG. The campus's school colors are thought to have derived from the colors that characterize MG. Celebrations in the region in which Campus A is located tend to culminate during the last week of the MG season; thus Campus A suspends classes for 2.5 days the week of MG. Campus A does not suspend classes for SPD.

Campus B.

Participants were 46 undergraduates from a Midwestern university. Campus B officially begins celebrating SPD approximately 10 days prior to March 17th. However, beginning approximately six months prior to SPD, students begin selling various memorabilia (e.g., t-shirts) on campus near a statue of St. Patrick next to a sign counting down the “daze” until SPD. In addition, classes are suspended for two days for SPD. Campus B does not suspend classes for MG.

Measures

Marijuana Motives Measure—(Simons et al., 1998). Event-specific cannabis use motives were assessed with a modified version of MMM, a 25-item measure assessing on a 1 (*almost never/never*) to 5 (*almost always/always*) scale the degree to which participants smoked cannabis for particular reasons. The original MMM has five subscales (conformity, enhancement, coping, and expansion) that have demonstrated adequate internal consistency in prior work (e.g., Chabrol, Ducongé, Casas, Roura, & Carey, 2005). The MMM was modified to assess reasons for cannabis use on MG and on SPD. Internal consistency for the MG-specific subscales were: conformity ($\alpha=.92$), enhancement ($\alpha=.91$), social ($\alpha=.85$), coping ($\alpha=.90$), and expansion ($\alpha=.94$). Internal consistency for the SPD-specific subscales were: conformity ($\alpha=.92$), enhancement ($\alpha=.92$), social ($\alpha=.86$), coping ($\alpha=.89$), and expansion ($\alpha=.94$).

Timeline Followback—(TLFB; Sobell & Sobell, 1992). Each campus received versions of the self-report TLFB on which important campus events, federal holidays (e.g., Presidents' Day), and other campus (e.g., campus closures) and local (e.g., parades) events specific to each campus were labeled. Each assessment timeframe was from February 1st–March 28th, 2014 and thus included assessment of MG and SPD at both campuses. Participants reported the number of “joints” (i.e., cannabis cigarettes as opposed to something cigar-sized or bigger) used per day. The TLFB is considered a reliable and valid self-report measure of cannabis use (O'Farrell, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2003; Robinson, Sobell, Sobell, & Leo, 2014). Given that the celebratory periods for MG and SPD may vary by region and celebratory events can occur on different days in the week leading up to MG and SPD, we tallied the number of times cannabis was used during the 7-day period leading up to each event, including the event day (per Henslee, Buckner, & Irons, 2015).

Marijuana Problems Scale-Event Specific (MPS-ES).—This measure was adapted from the original *Marijuana Problems Scale* (MPS; Stephens, Roffman, & Curtin, 2000) for use in this study. The MPS-ES was used to assess 19 negative consequences related to cannabis use during the most recent MG and SPD. Endorsed items were summed to create a total number of cannabis-related problems. This measure has demonstrated adequate internal

consistency in prior work (e.g., Buckner et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2000) and in the present sample (MPS-MG $\alpha = .90$; MPS-SPD $\alpha = .90$).

Infrequency Scale.—To identify responders who provided random or grossly invalid responses, we included four questions (e.g., “Driving from New York to San Francisco is generally faster than flying between these cities”) from the Infrequency Scale (Chapman & Chapman, 1983). As in prior studies (e.g., Cohen, Iglesias, & Minor, 2009), individuals who endorsed three or more infrequency items were excluded ($n = 2$).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Skewness and kurtosis values, means, and standard deviations of study variables are presented in Table 2. Conformity motives for MG and for SPD violated assumptions of normality; thus, these variables were transformed using log transformation, reducing skew and kurtosis of these variables to below 3 and 10, respectively. Thus, the log-transformed values of these variables were used in analyses.

The most common MG-specific problems reported were lower productivity (endorsed by 46.1% of the sample), procrastination (40.9%), and lower energy (31.2%). The most common SPD-specific problems reported were procrastination (44.8%), lower productivity (39.0%), and memory loss (30.5%).

Campus Differences on Event-Specific Cannabis Use Motives

Multivariate analysis of variance indicated that campuses differed by event-specific motive endorsement, Wilks' Lambda=.87, $F(10, 143)=2.60$, $p=.006$. Table 1 details event-specific motives by campus. Campus A endorsed more MG-specific social and enhancement motives than Campus B. The two campuses did not differ on SPD-specific motives.

Event-Specific Cannabis Use Motives by Campus

Campus A reported more socially motivated cannabis use on MG than on SPD, $t(107)=2.84$, $p=.005$, $d=0.11$, whereas Campus B reported more socially motivated cannabis use on SPD than on MG, $t(45)=2.19$, $p=.032$, $d=0.27$. Campus A reported more enhancement motivated cannabis use on MG than on SPD, $t(107)=2.03$, $p=.045$, $d=0.09$, whereas Campus B reported more enhancement motivated use on SPD than on MG, $t(45)=2.26$, $p=.029$, $d=0.21$. Campus A also reported more coping motivated cannabis use on MG than on SPD, $t(107)=3.16$, $p=.002$, $d=0.14$, whereas Campus B did not differ on these motives, $t(45)=1.93$, $p=.060$, $d=0.15$. Campus A reported more MG-specific than SPD-specific conformity motives, $t(107)=2.43$, $p=.017$, $d=0.23$, whereas Campus B did not differ on these motives, $t(45)=-1.67$, $p=.103$, $d=0.25$. Campus A also reported more MG-specific than SPD-specific expansion motives, $t(107)=2.89$, $p=.005$, $d=0.09$, whereas Campus B did not differ on these motives, $t(45)=0.00$, $p=1.000$, $d=0.00$.

Relation of Event-Specific Motives to Event-Specific Use and Problems

After controlling for campus, MG-specific cannabis quantity was positively, significantly correlated with social, enhancement, expansion, and coping MG-specific motives (Table 2). MG-specific cannabis-related problems were significantly correlated with conformity and coping MG-specific motives. After controlling for campus, SPD-specific cannabis quantity was positively, significantly correlated with social, coping, enhancement, and expansion SPD-specific motives. SPD-specific cannabis problems were significantly correlated with conformity and coping SPD-specific motives.

Mediational Analyses

To test whether the relation between campus and MG-specific use was accounted for by relevant MG-specific motives, mediational analyses were conducted using PROCESS, a macro used with SPSS 22.0 that utilizes an ordinary least squares regression-based path analytical framework to test for both direct and indirect effects (Hayes, 2013) using bootstrap analyses with 10,000 resamples from which bias-corrected 95-percentile confidence intervals (CI) were estimated (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008). Given observed gender differences between campuses (Table 1), gender was included as a covariate in each model. For the model concerning MG-specific social motives, the total effects model accounted for significant variance ($R^2=.105$, $df=2$, 151 , $F=8.87$, $p=.0002$) and the full model with MG-specific social motives accounted for significant variance ($R^2=.170$, $df=3$, 150 , $F=10.227$, $p<.0001$). The indirect effect was estimated and revealed that Campus A was indirectly related to more MG-specific cannabis use through MG-specific social motives ($B=1.208$, $SE=.513$, $95\% CI: .404, 2.455$).

For the model concerning MG-specific enhancement motives, the full model with MG-specific enhancement motives accounted for significant variance ($R^2=.222$, $df=3$, 150 , $F=14.240$, $p<.0001$). The indirect effect was estimated and revealed that Campus A was indirectly related to more MG-specific cannabis use through MG-specific enhancement motives ($B=1.297$, $SE=.637$, $95\% CI: .178, 2.699$).

Discussion

Although some research has identified event-specific motives for drinking (Patrick et al., 2013), this is the first known study to identify event-specific motives for cannabis use during high-risk holidays for cannabis use (i.e., MG, SPD; Buckner et al., 2015). Campus differences in event-specific cannabis use motives were observed. Specifically, consistent with Campus A's campus-wide celebratory traditions specific to MG, Campus A reported more MG-specific social and enhancement motivated cannabis use than did Campus B. Although some effect sizes of between campus differences were small, Campus A's greater cannabis use on MG compared to Campus B (Buckner et al., 2015) occurred indirectly via MG-specific social and enhancement motives, suggesting clinical utility of these differences (Abelson, 1985). Lack of difference between campuses on SPD cannabis use (Buckner et al., 2015) may be due to lack of differences between campuses on SPD-specific cannabis use motives.

It is noteworthy that MG-specific motives and SPD-specific motives were differentially related to event-specific cannabis use and related problems. Specifically, social, coping, enhancement, and expansion event-specific motives were significantly correlated with event-specific use whereas coping and conformity motives were significantly correlated with event-specific problems. These results differ somewhat from the literature on typical cannabis use motives' relations with cannabis use and related problems. For example, social, coping, enhancement, and expansion motives are correlated with typical cannabis use and with typical cannabis-related problems, with typical conformity motives unrelated to typical cannabis problems (Buckner, 2013).

It is also noteworthy that event-specific use was not correlated with event-specific problems, given the robust relation between use and problems observed in typical use (Buckner, 2013). However, this finding is consistent with the only other known study of event-specific (4/20) cannabis use problems (Bravo et al., 2017). It may be that the event-specific problems reported are less chronic than problems reported on typical measures. The most common event-specific problems noted in our sample are similar to those reported as typical problems in another sample of cannabis users (Buckner et al., 2010), but the rates at which event-specific problems were experienced were lower than the rates of typical problems experienced by frequent users. Thus, future work is necessary to determine whether event-specific problems are not necessarily indicative of more use but of the nature of the celebratory event (e.g., students were less productive because classes were cancelled so they did not have as much external motivation to complete work).

There are limitations to this study that suggest the need for further research. As discussed in the original manuscript (Buckner et al., 2015), Campus B had a smaller n than Campus A and Campus A was comprised of significantly more women than Campus B. Further, both samples were predominantly Caucasian. Thus, replication with larger, more diverse samples is necessary. Also, future work could benefit from multi-method (e.g., biological verification of cannabis use, prospective designs) and multi-informant approaches. Specific to the current study, we did not assess typical cannabis use motives and given that event-specific motives have been found to differ from typical motives (Patrick et al., 2013), an important next step will be to test whether event-specific cannabis motives differ from typical cannabis motives and if so, how any differences impact cannabis use and related problems. Further, although campuses did not differ on SPD-specific motives, future work is necessary to rule out the possibility that between-campus differences on MG-specific motives were not due to differences in typical motives.

Despite these limitations, these findings add to the small body of research on the importance of event-specific substance use motives generally. As in the current study, event-specific social and coping (relaxation) drinking motives are related to more event-specific drinking and drinking-related problems (Patrick et al., 2013). Taken together, results from these studies highlight the importance of testing event-specific motives to aid in understanding of high-risk event-specific drinking, given that specific events are high-risk for substance use even among individuals who do not generally engage in risky substance use (see Neighbors et al., 2007) and thus may not endorse high-risk typical substance use motives.

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Table 1

Event-Specific Motive Endorsement for Campus A (n=108) and Campus B (n=46)

	Campus A <i>M (SD)</i>	Campus B <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Mardi Gras					
Social motives	11.08 (4.97)	9.17 (3.77)	5.44	.021	0.41
Coping motives	8.69 (4.48)	7.41 (3.73)	2.90	.091	0.30
Enhancement motives	14.80 (6.64)	12.57 (6.38)	3.73	.055	0.34
Conformity motives	0.79 (0.16)	0.79 (0.14)	0.00	.970	0.01
Expansion motives	9.19 (5.01)	8.28 (4.90)	1.06	.304	0.18
St. Patrick's Day					
Social motives	10.54 (5.13)	10.20 (3.78)	0.17	.685	0.07
Coping motives	8.06 (4.21)	7.98 (3.82)	0.01	.915	0.02
Enhancement motives	14.17 (7.07)	13.85 (5.88)	0.07	.789	0.05
Conformity motives	0.78 (0.15)	0.81 (0.14)	1.71	.193	0.23
Expansion motives	8.74 (4.94)	8.28 (4.34)	0.30	.586	0.10

Table 2

Means, and Standards Deviations, and Partial Correlations (Controlling for Campus) among Event-Specific: Cannabis Use, Use-Related Problems, and Motive.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mardi Gras		Kurtosis	Skewness
								<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1. Quantity	-	.14	.27**	.42***	.36***	.08	.34***	7.60	9.47	7.08	2.34
2. Cannabis Problems	.10	-	.14	.24**	.15	.24**	.12	3.57	3.79	11.70	2.71
3. Social Motives	.17*	.12	-	.68***	.69***	.52***	.63***	10.51	4.72	0.49	0.83
4. Coping Motives	.38***	.20*	.68***	-	.47***	.56***	.65***	8.31	4.30	2.87	1.68
5. Enhancement	.30***	.11	.68***	.48***	-	.20*	.54***	14.13	6.62	-1.34	-0.05
Motives											
6. Conformity Motives	.10	.22*	.55***	.57***	.19*	-	.45***	0.79	0.15	11.31	3.10
7. Expansion Motives	.27**	.08	.63***	.68***	.52***	.48***	-	8.92	4.98	1.27	1.38
St. Patrick's Day <i>M</i>	5.62	3.06	10.44	8.03	14.07	0.79	8.60				
<i>SD</i>	7.60	3.59	4.76	4.08	6.72	0.15	4.76				
<i>Kurtosis</i>	4.26	13.45	0.45	3.65	-1.37	13.33	1.95				
<i>Skewness</i>	2.00	2.83	0.83	1.82	-0.53	3.35	1.55				

Note. Intercorrelations for Mardi Gras are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for Saint Patrick's Day are presented below the diagonal. Means and standard deviations for Mardi Gras are presented in the vertical columns, and means and standard deviations for Saint Patrick's Day are presented in the horizontal rows.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$