Research has shown drink preference to be a factor in consumption rates of alcoholic beverages (Kidorf, Lang, & Pelham, 1990; Snortum, Kremer, & Berger, 1987). Snortum et al. (1987) have suggested the connotations of manliness and drunken excess given to beer drinkers provide subtle social reinforcements that promote alcohol use and abuse. Kidorf et al. (1990) noted women’s self-reports of consumption were poorly correlated with drinking under laboratory conditions, and women may actually be more restrained when consuming alcohol in the form of mixed drinks in a naturalistic social setting.

Several studies have attempted to establish a relationship between alcohol consumption and specific demographics which may be factors related to alcohol consumption (Hunter, Hannon, & Marchi, 1982; Kidorf et al., 1990; Plant, Kreitman, Miller, & Duffy, 1977; Snortum et al., 1987; Sykes, Rowley, & Schaeffer, 1993). These studies found alcohol consumption to be greater for men than for women, whereas other studies have shown an opposite relationship between sex and alcohol consumption (Banks & Smith, 1980; Engs, 1977; Gross, 1993; Hanson, 1974; Hughes & Dodder, 1984). However, these studies failed to address the possibility of a relationship between the day of the week and alcohol consumption.

Studies have shown that men drink more per drinking episode than women (Hunter et al., 1982; Geller, Russ, & Antomari, 1986; Kidorf et al., 1990) and that men also drink faster than women (Plant et al., 1977; Hunter et al., 1982). These researchers have suggested a sex difference in consumption rates may be due to a perceived social stigma associated with alcohol consumption for women. That is, women who drink heavily are seen as rejecting the traditional female role (Snortum et al., 1987).

Studies of alcohol consumption as a function of group size have shown men and women consume more alcohol when with a group of three or more (e.g., Sykes et al., 1993. Sykes et al. showed that people who drank alone tended to be more aware of the number of drinks they had consumed whereas people who drank with a group were often distracted by others in the group and were less likely to pay attention to their consumption rate, causing the average consumption of individuals in groups to be higher. This finding corroborates earlier studies (e.g., Geller et al., 1986) that indicated individuals in a group drank more than isolates.

Time of week is another potential factor that may relate to drinking behavior. Although research has been conducted using days of the week alcohol was consumed as a variable (Hunter et al., 1982; Sykes et
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al., 1993), there has been little emphasis placed on the time of week alcohol is consumed as a factor related to public drinking. The current research viewed time of week as a potential factor, in that alcohol consumption might be reduced during the workweek due to lack of leisure time in which to engage in public drinking.

The present study hypothesized that several variables are associated with alcohol preference and rate of consumption in a public bar. Our hypotheses included the following: (a) men will prefer beer rather than mixed drinks, whereas women will prefer mixed drinks; (b) rate of consumption will be influenced by sex, with men consuming more alcohol than women; (c) both men and women will consume more alcohol while drinking with a group than when alone; and (d) more alcohol will be consumed on weekend nights than on weekday nights due to increased leisure time on weekends. In addition, data concerning the possible interaction of these factors will be evaluated.

Method

Participants

Ninety participants (50 men, 40 women) were observed on the basis of their group status. Participants were arbitrarily chosen as they were seated in the establishment, either alone or as they joined a group that was already actively drinking. The participants (33 alone, 57 group) were observed for a period of no less than 30 min while drinking alone or in a group. A group was defined as three or more people together at one table. Of the 40 women observed, 13 (32.5%) were drinking alone and 27 (67.5%) were part of a group, whereas 20 men (40%) were observed drinking alone and 30 men (60%) were part of a group. Individuals were not made aware their behavior was being observed, and arbitrary selection of participants was done with ease of viewing given priority.

Participants who were initially observed to be alone but who joined a group before the 30-min observation period was completed were not included in the study. Those participants who were initially observed as part of a group but who were left alone before the 30-min observation period was completed also were not included in the study.

Procedure

The locations for observation were local bars and lounges in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the time periods of observation were weekday nights (Monday–Thursday) after 5:00 p.m. and weekend nights (Friday and Saturday) after 5:00 p.m. Sex, group status, time of week, drink preference, and number of drinks were recorded. Participants were arbitrarily chosen to be observed, and observation time began when a drink was placed before them. Sex, group status, time of week, and drink preference also were noted at this time. For participants who switched drink preference during the observation, a notation of “other” was made at the time the preference was changed. Each instance of a drink being placed in front of a participant was counted as one drink. The exceptions were 22-oz beers, which were counted as two drinks. This procedure was repeated throughout the evening until the 18 participants for that day had been observed for 30 min or more. The number of drinks consumed was tallied and an hourly rate of consumption was then calculated for each participant.

Results

The data showed men’s and women’s drink preference to be beer. However, this preference was more noticeable in men’s consumption. Of the 59 participants observed drinking beer, 23 were women and 36 were men. Fifteen participants consumed mixed drinks, of whom 11 were women and 4 were men. Sixteen participants (6 women, 10 men) were placed in the “other” category. Overall, 72% of men and 57.5% of women drank beer, 8% of men and 27.5% of women drank mixed drinks, and 20% of men and 15% of women were placed in the “other” category.

Results of a chi-square test for independence showed a significant relationship between sex and drink preference, $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 6.10, p < .05$.

The data obtained on group status as a factor in drink preference showed no relationship between the two variables, $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 3.22, p > .05$. Of the 59 participants observed drinking beer, 32% were drinking alone whereas 68% were associated with a group. Of the 15 participants observed drinking only mixed drinks, 33% were alone and 67% were in a group. Of the remaining 16 participants in the “other” category, 56% were drinking alone and 44% were drinking as part of a group. Finally, there was no significant relationship between drink preference and time of week, $\chi^2(2, N = 90) = 1.33, p > .05$.

A three-way analysis of variance between sex, group status, and time of week showed that consumption on weekday nights was higher than on weekend nights, $F(1, 82) = 4.34, p < .05$. Even though men tended to drink more than women and those drinking in groups tended to drink more than isolates, our findings do not support the hypotheses that sex, $F(1, 82) = 2.62, p > .05$, and group status, $F(1, 82) = 3.17, p > .05$, are factors of consumption. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the number of...

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drinks per hour by sex, group status, and time of week. None of the interaction effects was significant.

To determine whether the above analyses were confounded by a disproportionate number of men and women in the various conditions, two chi-square analyses were performed. Neither group status, $\chi^2(1, N=90) = .54, p > .05$, nor time of week, $\chi^2(1, N=90) = .19, p > .05$, was significantly related to sex.

**Discussion**

Our results indicate neither time of week nor group size was related to drink preference. The data support our hypothesis that men’s drink preference would be beer. However, the hypothesis that women would prefer mixed drinks was not supported. The data show over half the women observed (57.5%) preferred beer over mixed drinks. Kidorff et al. (1990) have suggested that preference for beer may be due to a lower alcohol level which allows more beverage to be consumed before reaching the same volume of alcohol as found in mixed drinks. However, Archer and Dawson (1992) found a high positive correlation between social factors and drink preference, such as the type of social function at which alcohol was being served rather than a correlation between actual taste and preference. Archer and Dawson found women’s ethanol consumption was evenly divided among beer, wine, and liquor whereas almost two-thirds of men’s ethanol intake was in the form of beer. The added problem of not being able to determine the alcohol content of a mixed drink in a naturalistic setting increases the confusion in light of Kidorff et al.’s (1990) suggestion that women may be more restrained in consuming alcohol in a naturalistic social setting. Thus, the indicators are not clear, and the relationship between sex and drink preference as a factor in alcohol consumption deserves further research. The present results indicated both men’s and women’s drink preference to be beer, but the preference was more distinct in men’s consumption.

Previous studies have disagreed regarding the role of sex in rate of alcohol consumption (Banks & Smith, 1980; Engs, 1977; Gross, 1993; Hanson, 1974; Hughes & Dodder, 1984). Although men drank more in the present study, the results did not indicate a significant effect due to sex, whether the drinker was isolated or in a group. Recent reports in the media suggest an increasing number of young women are drinking more alcohol, and the present findings may reflect this trend. In contrast to previous research (e.g., Snortum et al., 1987), our findings do not show men drinking a significantly larger amount of alcohol than women, suggesting that women are currently drinking more than had previously been reported. Whether the increase in consumption for women is characteristic of all age groups or is restricted to a younger group deserves further research.

Time of week was shown to be a significant factor in alcohol consumption. We hypothesized more alcohol would be consumed on weekend nights; however, higher rates of alcohol consumption occurred on weekday nights rather than weekend nights. This effect could be a result of drink specials offered during the week. Such specials might induce people to consume more due to the price difference. Another possible factor might be tension relief following a stressful workday during the week.

The data suggest that group size has no effect on alcohol consumption. We hypothesized more alcohol would be consumed by those drinking as part of a group than those drinking alone (Geller et al., 1986; Sykes et al., 1993). Although our results reflect the tendency to drink more as part of a group, suggesting that peer pressure or a desire to be included in a group may affect alcohol consumption, statistical significance was not achieved.

No interaction between sex and group status was found with respect to rate of consumption. This finding is somewhat contrary to data reported by Sykes et al. (1993) who found level of group consumption was positively correlated to the proportion of men in the group. One possible reason we were not able to support the previous research may be found in differences in the focus of the research. Sykes et al. (1993) focused on the entire group’s rate of consumption as a function of group composition, whereas the current study focused on the individual’s consumption within the group as a function of group size. That is, the current study assessed group size but not group composition. Future research should address both of these factors in determining their relationship to alcohol consumption.

**TABLE I**

| Mean Number of Alcoholic Drinks per Hour by Sex, Group Status, and Time of Week |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Factor                          | N   | Mean| SD  |
| Female                          | 40  | 2.97| 1.11|
| Male                            | 50  | 3.40| 1.50|
| Alone                           | 33  | 2.85| 1.20|
| Group                           | 57  | 3.42| 1.39|
| Weekday Night                   | 54  | 3.48| 1.36|
| Weekend Night                   | 36  | 2.81| 1.23|
In conclusion, the current study generally supports previous research on alcohol consumption (Geller et al., 1986; Plant et al., 1977; Snortum et al., 1987; Sykes et al., 1993). The results should be combined with other factors and studies to obtain a more complete picture of drinking behavior. Because it is almost impossible to address all the variables that affect drinking behavior at one time, additional research must be conducted before we can begin to approach an understanding of the factors influencing drinking behaviors. Variables such as social interaction, drink preference, and the time of week alcohol is consumed deserve more attention to determine their relation to drinking behavior. In addition, regional data should be compared to correlate prevalence rates with the above-mentioned variables. By performing such projects, health professionals would be able to target specific demographics and possibly reduce the occurrence of alcohol-related illness.

References


