

Video Podcast Script: Effects of Alcohol on Attractiveness and Risky Behaviours

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Scene 1

Camera focused on ME sitting behind a "bar" with a glass in her hand.

ME: Turning 18 is a highlight in many young people's lives: we are given the right to vote, can go to bars and can purchase liquor for ourselves. With this privilege however, comes responsibility. We enter into a world where we need to make tougher and more difficult decisions for ourselves. The fact that this can happen while we are under the influence of alcohol can make decision-making that much more difficult.

Findings have suggested that alcohol causes a restriction in cognitive abilities that can lead to inhibited processing of cues that are not psychologically important. This, it has been argued, can lead to an increase in risky sexual behaviours as well as an increase in attractiveness ratings of opposite-sex faces.

(receives a new drink from the bartender across the bar) This, as many people have heard, or even used as an excuse is called "beer goggles": we tend to find someone more attractive when we are under the influence of alcohol than if we were not. So the question is, is there evidence that alcohol increases our ratings of facial attractiveness, and does this lead to an increase in risky sexual behaviours? *(smiles, holds up glass "cheers" and takes a sip).*

Scene 2

Video focused on Me still behind the bar, with a glass in hand.

ME: A 2003 study by Barry Jones and colleagues looked at the influence of alcohol on mate attractiveness.

Camera on ME sitting behind the "bar".

ME: Throughout evolution the ability to attract a mate has been of great importance. It is important to attract someone but also for you to be attractive to someone. Without attracting a mate and being differentially reproductively successful, one cannot pass on their genes. So, how does alcohol play into this?

ME: Previous research has found support that physical attractiveness can play a role in risky sexual behaviours, and that for short-term relationships (as we know them: “one-night stands”, physical attractiveness is more important. Thus, factors that affect people’s perceptions of physical attractiveness might also impact their willingness to engage in risky sex.

Barry Jones and colleagues found that participants who had consumed alcohol rated opposite-sex faces as more attractive than those who had not. Other research has found that the more attractive a face is perceived to be, the more likely someone is to engage in risky sex with that person. This combined research suggests that alcohol consumption causes an increase in the perceived attractiveness of someone of the opposite sex and can increase the likelihood of risky or unsafe sex occurring.

A study from Kruse and Fromme’s in 2005 suggests that people have greater intentions to have intercourse with someone they perceive as more sexually desirable. If we compare this with the earlier study, both together could suggest that perceiving someone as more attractive under the influence of alcohol would lead to greater intentions of having intercourse with them. From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense. We have a drive to engage in intercourse with someone we find attractive, someone that displays good genes to us at the time. The downside to this may be that while intoxicated, the short-term gain may lead to long-term repercussions.

Scene 3

Standing behind the “bar”.

ME: So what does this mean in terms of evolution? Perhaps people under the influence of alcohol are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex because at the time, we perceive them as more attractive than they really are and it seems worthwhile to just “go for it”.

In the long-term however, at the level of gene selection, it does not seem beneficial for someone to engage in this type of behaviour. They perceive someone to be more attractive than they would if not under the influence of alcohol. This means that due to being cognitively compromised by alcohol, they are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours. As such they increase their chances of reproducing, but they will not create a high fitness child.

Research shows that the “beer goggles” phenomenon actually does exist but it is not some sort of advantage from an evolutionary perspective in the long-term for males or females.

Makes a “cheers” motion with a drink towards the camera.

End Scene