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Sensation Seeking and Attitudes Toward Substance Use in Athletes and Non-Athletes

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Abstract
We examined differences between college athletes and non-athletes on sensation seeking and attitudes towards substance use. We found that there was no significant difference between athletes and non-athletes on sensation seeking nor on attitudes about alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, marijuana, or ecstasy. However, athletes trended toward more favorable views about alcohol use than non-athletes. Overall, college students higher in sensation seeking had more positive attitudes about substances. Given the present findings, continued examination about substance use among college athletes with larger sample sizes is warranted.

Background
Substance use among college athletes and non-athletes is common (Johnston, O’Malley, Miech, Bachman & Schulenberg, 2015; Yusko, Buckman, White & Pandina, 2008). Previous research showed that athletes had higher rates of alcohol consumption than non-athletes, while non-athletes showed higher rates of tobacco, marijuana, cocaine and ecstasy use (Yusko et. al., 2008). Prior research has also shown that athletes tend to score higher in sensation seeking than non-athletes. Differences in substance use between college athletes and non-athletes may be related to sensation seeking.

Hypothesis
In the present study, we examined differences between athletes and non-athletes in regards to sensation seeking and attitudes towards substance use. We hypothesized that:

- athletes would score higher on measures of sensation seeking than non-athletes;
- athletes would have more positive attitudes towards alcohol than non-athletes;
- non-athletes would have more positive attitudes toward tobacco, cocaine, marijuana and ecstasy than non-athletes.

Method
Participants
Twenty-five college students (8 male, 17 female) were separated into two groups by athletic status (10 athletes, 15 non-athletes). Ages ranged from 18-29 years old (M = 19.82, SD = 3.10).

Measures
Sensation Seeking Survey V (SSSV). Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking Survey (1994) was used to assess sensation seeking behaviors in athletes and non-athletes. The scale consists of 40 items where higher scores indicate strong sensation seeking behavior tendencies.

Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking Scale Form V
1. Please indicate which of the following scenarios you would prefer.
   a. I like "wild" uncontrolled parties
   b. I prefer quiet parties with good conversation
2. Please indicate which of the following scenarios you would prefer.
   a. There are some movies I enjoy seeing a second or even a third time
   b. I can’t stand watching a movie that I’ve seen before
3. Please indicate which of the following scenarios you would prefer.
   a. I often wish I could be a mountain climber
   b. I can’t understand people who sit flat peaks climbing mountains
4. Please indicate which of the following scenarios you would prefer.
   a. I dislike all body odors
   b. I like some of the earthy body smells

Results
A series of one-way ANOVAs indicated there were no statistically significant differences between athletes and non-athletes on sensation seeking and the five substance use attitude surveys (see Table 1).

Table 1. Differences in Athletes and Non-Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSSV</td>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>0.573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Non-athlete</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>1.285</td>
<td>0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>Non-athlete</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.186</td>
<td>0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.151</td>
<td>0.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>Non-athlete</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>0.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>Non-athlete</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>0.487</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the small size of the athlete and non-athlete groups, post-hoc correlational tests were examined. Several strong correlations (r > .6) were found between sensation seeking and attitudes towards several substances (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sensation Seeking and Substance Use Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Sensation Seeking</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Tobacco</th>
<th>Cocaine</th>
<th>Marijuana</th>
<th>Ecstasy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td>0.64**</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td>0.64**</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-athletes</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.70**</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
College athletes and non-athletes did not significantly differ on sensation seeking and attitudes towards substance use. Though conclusions are limited by the small sample size, correlational data suggests that sensation seeking was related to more favorable attitudes towards alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use. This suggests that sensation seeking college students may be at increased risk for substance use.