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Background



- In 2021, 49.3% of full-time college students (ages 18–22) reported past-month alcohol use¹
- College alcohol consumption is influenced by peer networks, social environments, relationship dynamics, and perceived norms^{2,3}
- Alcohol is often used as a tool to form or strengthen peer connections, but the relationship between drinking and social connectedness is complex and bidirectional²⁻⁶
- Lower levels of social connectedness among college students have been linked to poor mental health outcomes and greater feelings of social isolation⁴
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in social interaction patterns may have altered students' perception of social connectedness and the relationship between alcohol use and connection⁸

Objective

- To examine the relationship between alcohol use and perceived social connectedness among UCSD undergraduate and graduate students

Methods

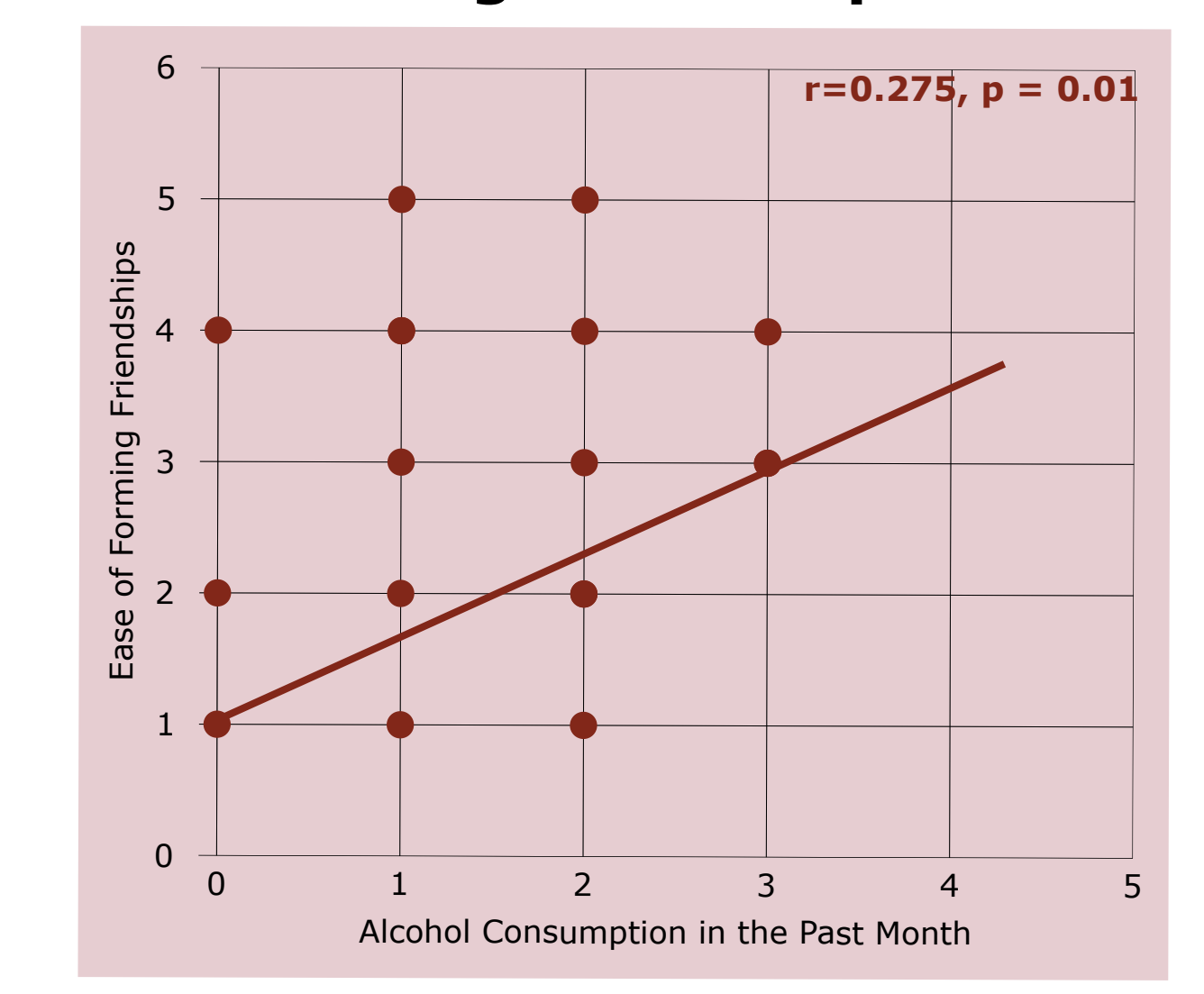
- 1 Total sample size was comprised of 77 UCSD undergraduate and graduate students aged 21+
- 2 Cross-sectional study using an anonymous, online 15-item Qualtrics survey
- 3 Exposure (**alcohol consumption behaviors**) measured using 3-items and categorized as low (0–1 drinks), moderate (2–3 drinks), or high (4+ drinks) risk groups
- 4 Outcome (**perceived social connectedness**) measured using the validated 20-item Social Connectedness Scale (SCS)⁹ (1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree)
- 5 Data analysis via SPSS v31. Statistical tests included Chi-Squared and Pearson Correlation

Results

Table 1. Participant Demographics (N=77)

Characteristics	n (%)
Age (years)	
21-23	61 (78.2%)
24-26	11 (14.1%)
30+	4 (5.1%)
27-29	2 (2.6%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Mixed (2+ Identities)	24 (30.8%)
Hispanic/Latino/a/x	18 (23.1%)
Asian	17 (21.8%)
White	13 (16.7%)
Middle Eastern or North African	3 (3.8%)
Native American or Alaska Native	1 (1.3%)
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1 (1.3%)
Black or African American	1 (1.3%)
Gender Identity	
Female	52 (66.7%)
Male	22 (28.2%)
Non-Binary/Third Gender	1 (1.3%)
Other	1 (1.3%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (1.3%)
Year at UCSD	
4th or beyond	40 (51.3%)
3rd	21 (26.9%)
Graduate	14 (17.9%)
1st	3 (3.8%)
2nd	0 (0%)

Figure 1. Pearson Correlation Between Past-Month Alcohol Consumption and Ease of Forming Friendships



A significant positive correlation, $p=0.01$ $r=0.275$, was observed between past-month alcohol consumption and perceived ease of forming friendships

Figure 2. Students' Past and Current On-Campus Involvement

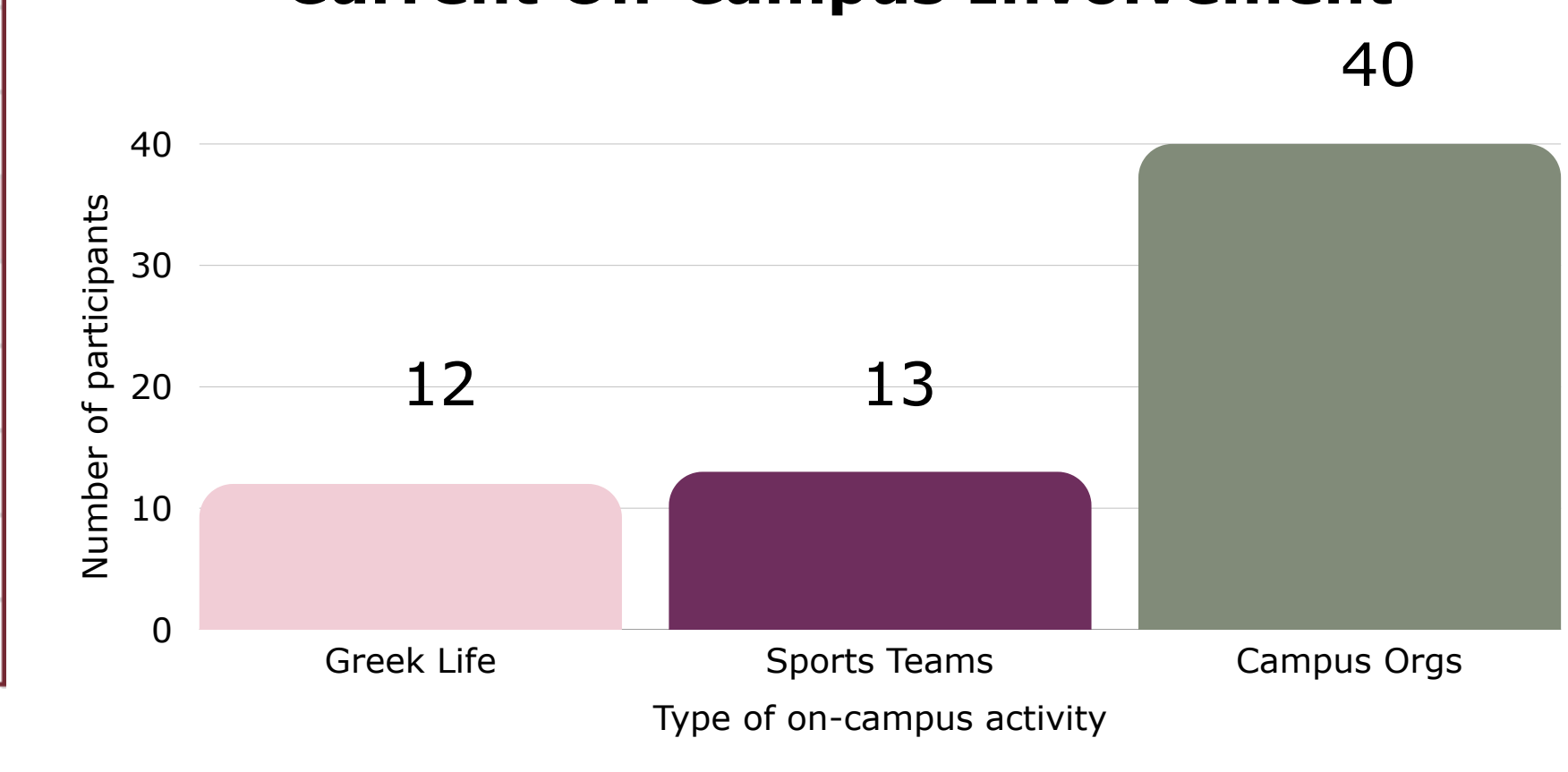
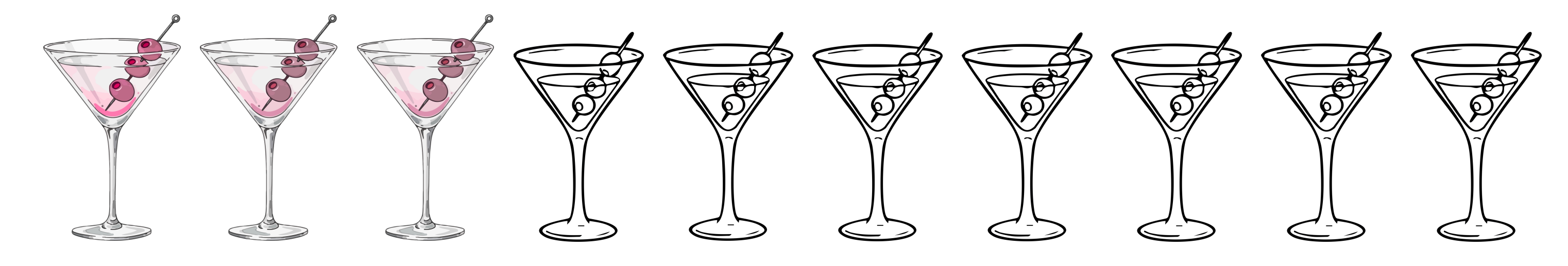


Figure 3. Frequency of Alcohol Consumption Among Participants



~3 in 10 UCSD students reported high-frequency of alcohol consumption per one sitting (4+ drinks)

Table 2. Chi-Squared Analysis of Socially Drinking and Social Connectedness

Exposure	Outcome	P-Value
Alcohol in social settings	Social Connectedness Scale	0.600

No significant relationship between alcohol consumption in social settings (with or without peers) and social connectedness, $\chi^2(77) = 95.79$, $p = 0.600$; outcome measured as categorical, sorted into levels of connectedness (Low connectedness: ≤ 66 , Moderate connectedness: 67–72, High connectedness: ≥ 73)

Figure 4. Pearson Correlation Between Drink Quantity in One Sitting and Social Connectedness



No significant association between the number of drinks consumed in one sitting and social connectedness scores, $r = 0.37$, $p = 0.748$

Conclusions



- Students who reported greater alcohol consumption in the past month also reported greater ease in forming friendships, suggesting that alcohol may serve as a social facilitator in peer interactions
- Despite this significant positive association with perceived social ease, alcohol use was not significantly related to broader social connectedness, indicating drinking may only influence short-term social comfort, rather than deeper feelings of connection⁴
- The absence of a relationship between drinking quantity in a single sitting and social connectedness suggests that heavier drinking does not necessarily translate into stronger social connectedness¹⁰
- Overall, findings suggest that alcohol may be perceived as enhancing social approachability, but it does not appear to fully strengthen overall social connectedness
- Limitations include a small sample size, which reduced statistical power; a larger, more diverse sample could clarify whether the observed trends persist in broader populations. Potential social desirability bias and unmeasured confounding variables, such as personality traits, that influence social connectedness independent of alcohol use

Implications

- UCSD could create low-pressure, alcohol-free events with icebreaker activities that help students start conversations and maintain friendships without relying on alcohol
- Prioritizing funding for long-term campus organizations and "third spaces" that facilitate the meaningful, sustained social-connectedness that alcohol fails to provide

References

Scan here for resources