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Are Alcohol Brand Names Driving Binge Drinking?

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Actors, musicians, and celebrities in the public eye tend to have a significant impact on America's youth, either for good or bad.

Researchers from the University of Pittsburgh and Norris Cotton Cancer Center have concluded a study that suggests binge drinking in teenagers and young adults could be heavily influenced by alcohol-brand recognition in popular music.

"Every year, the average adolescent is exposed to about 3,000 references to alcohol brands while listening to music," associate professor of medicine and pediatrics and director of the Program for Research on Media and Health in Pitt's School of Medicine, Dr. Brian A. Primack said in a statement. "It is important that we understand the impact of these references in an age group that can be negatively affected by alcohol consumption."

Primack and his colleagues issued randomized surveys to over 2,500 Americans between the ages 15 and 23. Each participant was given a list of popular songs that mention a specific brand of alcohol and were asked to identify ones they liked or owned. The respondent was also asked to recall which type of alcohol was mentioned in the song's lyrics.

After adjusting for age, socioeconomic status, and alcohol use by friends and family, it was determined 59 percent of the respondents admitted having at least one alcoholic drink of either 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor at least one time in their life.

Out of the teens and young adults who reported drinking, 18 percent binge drank at least once a month and 37 percent recounted an injury they sustained due to alcohol. Participants who were able to correctly identify the brand of alcohol mentioned in a given song were twice as likely to have had a complete drink. These individuals were also more likely to binge drink compared to teens that did not identify the brand of alcohol.

"A surprising result of our analysis was that the association between recalling alcohol brands in popular music and alcohol drinking in adolescents was as strong as the influence of parental and

peer drinking and an adolescent's tendency toward sensation-seeking," Primack explained. "This may illustrate the value that this age group places on the perceived opinions and actions of music stars."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, upward of 88,000 deaths each year are caused by excessive alcohol consumption, making alcohol use the third leading causes of life-style related death. Over 4,300 of these deaths are attributed to Americans under the age of 21. In the future, researchers hope young adults and teens will use critical thinking skills before they are influenced by public interest.

"Media literacy is a growing educational methodology that may be successful in helping young people make healthier decisions," Primack added. "In the case of alcohol, it may be valuable to help them understand how alcohol-brand references in music may manipulate their thoughts and emotions to sell them a product."

Source: Nuzzo E, Rice K, Sargent J, Primack B. Alcohol brand appearances in US popular music. Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research.2014 and Medical Daily.