



Understanding the role of social norms in a web-based personalised feedback intervention for student alcohol use

Marley, S., Bewick, B.M. & Bekker, H.
ESSUS June 2012





unitcheck

What does Unitcheck do?

See how many units are in the alcohol you drink.

Check if the amount you're drinking is risky for your health.

See how many people drink a similar amount to you.

Enter your email address [register](#)

[Log In](#) [About](#) [FAQ](#) [Contact](#)

What if I don't drink?

We know that not all people drink alcohol. This site also provides information to those who don't drink so even if you don't consume alcohol please log on.

How safe is my information?

All information you provide is stored safely and securely. The questions do not take long to complete. The questionnaire is anonymous and confidentiality is assured.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Accessibility Policy](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Site Map](#)

Bewick, B.M., West, R.M., Gill, J., O'May, F., Mulhern, B., Barkham, M. and Hill, A.J. (2010).

Bewick, B.M. Trusler, K., Mulhern, B., Barkham, M. and Hill, A.J. (2008).



- Account
- Survey
- Results
- About
- FAQ
- Contact

Questions

Page 1 Page 2 Page 3 Page 4

Welcome to the Unitcheck website. Remember confidentiality is assured so please answer all questions honestly. We ask you to read all of the questions carefully and answer based on your own experiences or behaviour.

Personal Details

Age in years

21

Gender

Male Female

Your alcohol consumption

The following questions ask about your alcohol consumption. Remember that you do not have to consume alcohol to be able to answer these questions. Please answer all of the questions as directed, regardless of whether you drink alcohol or not and regardless of the frequency of drinking alcohol.

How often do you consume alcohol?

4-5 days per week

How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?

3 or 4

How often do you have SIX or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion?

Never Less than monthly Monthly Weekly Daily or almost daily

Questions

Page 1 Page 2 Page 3 Page 4

Your alcohol consumption

How often do you have a drink?
2-3 times a week

Your alcohol consumption

Did you consume any alcohol?
 Yes No

Please enter the details of your drinking

Friday 3 December

Using the 24 hour clock, please enter the times that you started and finished drinking:

Drinking from to .

Please click on the alcoholic drinks that you consumed on this day:

Lager »

- Pint(s) of standard lager (e.g. Carling Black Label, Foster's)
- Pint(s) of premium lager (e.g. Stella Artois, Kronenbourg 1664)
- 440ml (i.e. small can) of super strength lager (e.g. Special Brew, Tennent's Super)
- 330ml bottle(s) of premium lager (e.g. Beck's, Corona)

Beer/Bitter/Stout »

Cider »

Wine »

Spirits »

Alcopops »

Please enter the number of drinks:

Pint of standard lager

Non-alcoholic drinks with no alcohol added

Please indicate when you ate food whilst drinking alcohol:

	Just Before	During	Just After
Meal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snack	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Done

Sunday 5 December

No alcoholic drinks entered.

Enter/Edit

Monday 6 December

No alcoholic drinks entered.

Enter/Edit

Results

How much am I drinking?

Drinking on each occasion

Drinking behaviour

Consequences of drinking

Provide your feedback

Supporting information

How much am I drinking?

- Over the last week you had 24 units of alcohol.

Personalised feedback

- It is recommended that women do not consume more than 14 units of alcohol per week.
- The amount you drank last week is considered hazardous for your health.
- To minimise health risks you should cut down your alcohol intake.

Personalised information

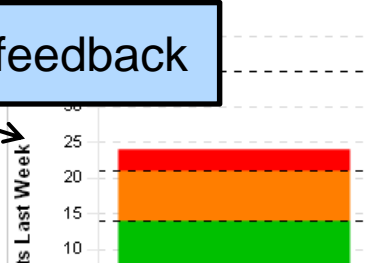
- At least 75% of University of Leeds students drink less than you.
- Only 20% of University of Leeds students drink a similar amount to you
- Of University of Leeds students who also drink at weekly hazardous levels:
- 90% feel that their drinking has a negative effect on their finances.
- 50% feel that it has a negative effect on their studies.
- 50% feel that it has a negative effect on their physical health.

Personalised feedback
(based on social norms)

Personalised information
(based on social norms)

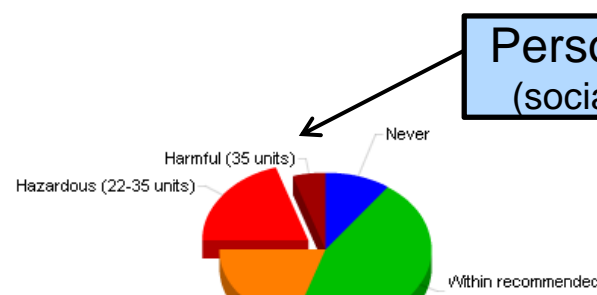
- If you feel you need help changing your drinking behaviour, or have any concerns about the negative effects of alcohol, please contact one of the help services by clicking on the supporting information tab.

Your drinking last week



Personalised feedback

How much do other students drink?

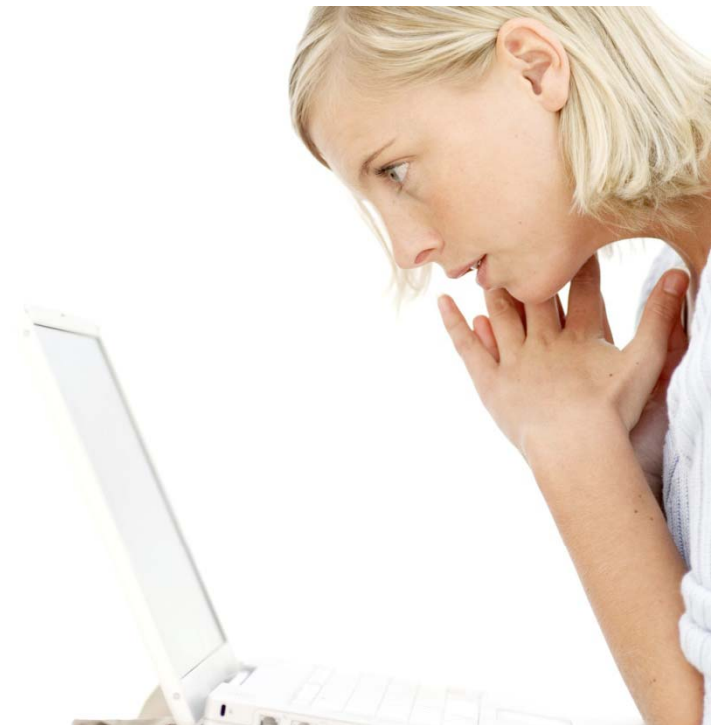


Personalised feedback
(social norms – by gender)



How do students interact with web based alcohol interventions, specifically Unitcheck?

How do students react to the personalised normative feedback component?





Design: Qualitative study with an experimental design

2 conditions:

- A. same sex specific feedback
- B. non sex specific normative feedback

Procedure: Think-aloud method

Semi structured interview

Analysis: Framework analysis



Recruitment: Student participants from the University of Leeds drinking over recommended weekly limits

Participants: 21 students
Female: 14; Male 7
mean age 19 years (range 18-21)

Year of study: First year - 10; Second year - 11

Reported units consumed in previous week:

Group A: Median 36.5 units

Group B: Median 28 units



Results: 5 meta-themes were identified

Today I will talk about 2...

- **Active thinking**
- **Comparison with others**



Active thinking

Refers to themes which involved the participant actively engaging with Unitcheck and relating it to their own experience, often resulting in an evaluation of their own drinking behaviour.



*...that's your life that's like life recommendations to you and it's saying that I'm it's putting it that I weekly, yeh have arguments with my girlfriend, I break the law, but you know that's and they are because of drinking yeh, arguments with the Mrs are definitely because of drinking she said on our one year anniversary she said that I had a drinking problem, I was like well and I think that's literally that's just hit me now.. which is s***, yeh, its literally just hit me. (P7, MA)*



This evaluative process started early on in the Unitcheck programme.

17 out of 21 participants negatively evaluated some aspect of their drinking behaviour before receiving any feedback.

Um, so that would be 100ml um, 200ml er, lets call it . . . 15 – actually and then I had a couple of shots when I got to the club as well. God <pauses> that's really bad! (P16, MB)



Comparison with others

Encapsulates the cognitive and emotional reaction of participants when comparing their own drinking behaviour with that of a specific reference group.

This process begins with participant estimates of where their drinking rates in comparison to other student groups (people on their course, at the University of Leeds, at University in the UK). Continues with their initial cognitive and emotional appraisal of the normative feedback they receive and concludes with their evaluation of the feedback and the specific normative reference group used.



19 of the 21 participants estimated that they were average in terms of student drinking

13 of the 21 participants described being shocked or surprised by the actual normative feedback

“Yeh, I just think like ...I am just shocked...I guess I thought I drank pretty much the same as the majority of people and according to the results they've got on there I don't at all, I drink more than the majority.” (P5,FA)

7 out of 21 participants stated that they did not believe the normative feedback specifically comparing their own drinking with that of other students

“At least 75% . . . they drink less than me – are you sure?! Only 20% of female university students drink... Really? I don't know if I believe it. Um, a female – I really don't believe it actually” (P3, FA)



8 participants specifically commented on the use of normative comparative data as interesting and worthy of further consideration

“um, I guess it's more useful to be told in comparison to other students because I know what I'm drinking [...] and I already know what I do when I get drunk like so it's just knowing what other people do. 'Cause I guess this is an assumption that everyone else just does the same things” (P10,FB)

5 participants from the sex specific feedback group commented on the use of sex specific feedback as a positive distinction.

“there is quite a big difference between males and females. It's good to get that comparison rather than with people overall” (P20, FA)

13 of the 21 participants identified year of study as a more personally relevant normative comparison group



Conclusions

- ▶ Students drinking over recommended weekly limits can engage with web based interventions, actively processing information and applying it to their own lives
- ▶ The evaluative process starts before any feedback has been given
- ▶ Students are surprised by normative feedback on other student drinking and consider this an interesting and relevant addition
- ▶ The appraisal of normative feedback varies and is fluid
- ▶ Students studying at the same University are considered to be an appropriate comparison group
- ▶ Same sex specific feedback is generally considered to be more relevant, but only commented upon by female participants
- ▶ Year of study was suggested as a more salient referent group

Leeds Institute of Health Sciences

Academic Unit of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Thanks for listening



umslm@leeds.ac.uk



References

Moreira, M.T., Smith, L.A., Foxcroft, D. (2009). Social norms interventions to reduce alcohol misuse in University or College students. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 3 (CD006748).

Unitcheck

Bewick, B.M., Trusler, K., Barkham, M., Hill, A.J., Cahill, J. and Mulhern, B. (2008). The effectiveness of web-based interventions designed to decrease alcohol consumption – a systematic review. *Preventive Medicine*, Doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2008.01.005.

Bewick, B.M, Mulhern, B., Barkham, M., Trusler, K., Hill, A.J. and Stiles, W.B. (2008). Changes in undergraduate student alcohol consumption as they progress through university. *BMC Public Health*, 8, 163, Doi:10.1186/1471-2458-8-163.

Bewick, B.M., West, R.M., Gill, J., O'May, F., Mulhern, B., Barkham, M. and Hill, A.J. (2010). Providing web-based feedback and social norms information to reduce student alcohol intake: a multi-site investigation. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

Bewick, B.M. Trusler, K., Mulhern, B., Barkham, M. and Hill, A.J. (2008). Feasibility and effectiveness of a web-based personalized feedback and social norms alcohol intervention in UK university students: a randomized control trial. *Addictive Behaviors*, Doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2008.05.002.