Drinking, Intimacy, and Turbulence in Dating and Early Romantic Relationships during Young Adulthood

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Declaration

I declare this thesis is the product of my own work carried out under the supervision of Dr Bernd Heubeck, Professor Don Byrne, and Dr Ross Wilkinson. I affirm it is in accordance with The Australian National University thesis guidelines for higher degree research.

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19 March 2013
Abstract

The culture of alcohol usage in western societies infiltrates almost every aspect of life, including romantic relationships. Popular media and the literature suggest that the prevalent use of alcohol between romantically-linked couples has the potential to affect their relationship quality and experiences. However, there is minimal research on the impact of drinking in the very early phase of dating relationships. Early romantic courtship is marked by intense emotional volatility and high vulnerability to dissolution, and can affect the course of relationship development. As such, the impacts of alcohol, whether positive or negative, on relationship quality and experience during this early phase of relationship development warrant further investigation.

The main objectives of this thesis were to develop greater understanding of the pattern of alcohol usage in the early phase of dating relationships and to explore the consequences of drinking on young adults’ relationship quality and subjective experiences. Three studies were performed to address these aims. Study One aimed to shed light on the prevalence of alcohol use on dates, the factors that drive individuals’ alcohol usage, and the relational impact of such practice. Results from the online questionnaire (n = 282) showed the majority of participants drank on dates. This behaviour was primarily driven by their general drinking tendency and their partners’ alcohol usage. The findings also suggest that drinking on dates may affect the level of intimacy experienced by women, but not men. Specifically, women’s drinking positively predicted their own feelings of intimacy, but their partners’ drinking was negatively associated with women’s sense of intimacy.
Study Two aimed to extend the findings of the previous study by exploring in depth young adults’ experiences on dates using a semi-structured interview approach. A subset of participants from Study One (n = 44) returned for this study. Data were coded and thematically analysed through the lens of the Relational Turbulence Model. Participants expressed an expectation that alcohol usage would have beneficial effects on dating experiences and relationship quality. A range of descriptors of the sense of uncertainty and issues of partner inference that resulted from alcohol usage also emerged from participants’ discourse. Together, the results suggested that drinking between dating partners may evoke or reflect turbulence in the relationship.

Dating is an interpersonal experience, and the cornerstone of dating research is dyadic investigations. Study Three employed a dyadic design to explore the effects of couples’ drinking on both dyad members’ feelings of intimacy and experiences of turbulence (n = 66 couples). Results from the paper questionnaire revealed only women’s drinking had significant associations with relational outcomes. To the extent that women drank in the absence of their partners, they also reported higher levels of uncertainty. Women’s alcohol usage also showed significant relationships with male partners’ intimacy. Specifically, men’s intimacy was negatively associated with women’s alcohol usage outside of the relationship, but was positively associated with women’s drinking in their presence.

The consistency and discrepancy in the findings across the three studies are discussed. Overall, results demonstrated diverse and complex associations between drinking, intimacy, and turbulence in the early phase of dating relationships. Implications for
theories, relationship advisors and dating couples, and future research are provided.

An additional study that extends the exploration of dating and relationship experiences to a group of individuals who consumed alcohol at heavy and pathological levels is presented in the Clinical Practicum Appendix.
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Table of Contents

Declaration .................................................................................................................. ii
Abstract ..................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgement .................................................................................................... vi
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................... vii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................. x
List of Figures ........................................................................................................... xii
Introduction ............................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Romantic Relationship in Young Adulthood .............................................. 3
  Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood .............................................................. 3
  The Empirical Understanding of “Dating” ................................................................. 6
  Conceptualization of Romantic Relationships ......................................................... 9
  The Psychosocial Impact of Dating ......................................................................... 10
  Summary .................................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 2: Alcohol Use in the Context of Romantic Relationships ............................ 14
  Alcohol Use in Young Adulthood .............................................................................. 14
  Drinking and Dating ............................................................................................... 15
  Impact of Alcohol Use ............................................................................................ 18
  Theoretical Integration of Alcohol Use and Romantic Involvement in Young
  Adulthood ............................................................................................................... 21
  Summary and Thesis Direction .............................................................................. 23
Chapter 3: Study One

Method ...............................................................34
Results .....................................................................40
Discussion .............................................................50

Chapter 4: Study Two .............................................58

Method ...............................................................64
Results .....................................................................68
Discussion .............................................................86

Chapter 5: Study Three ..........................................95

Method ...............................................................103
Results .....................................................................111
Discussion .............................................................124

Chapter 6: General Discussion...............................136

Current Findings ....................................................136
Implications ..........................................................141
Future Research .....................................................144
Concluding Remarks ..............................................146

References ............................................................148

Appendix

A: Participant Information Sheet and Participation Consent (Study One) .................193
B: Online Questionnaire (Study One) ...............................................................195
List of Tables

Table 3.1. Description of the sample in Study One .............................................36
Table 3.2. Means, standard deviation, and Spearman’s correlation of core variables ..................................................................................................................45
Table 3.3. Regression models of alcohol consumption on dates .........................46
Table 3.4. Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting males’
post-date intimacy ..................................................................................................48
Table 3.5. Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting females’
post-date intimacy ..................................................................................................49
Table 4.1. Characteristics of low and high drinkers who participated in Study Two.70
Table 4.2. Frequency of responses for date-alcohol expectancies .........................73
Table 4.3. Frequency of responses for the positive impact of alcohol use on dates
among participants who went to a dating activity involving alcohol ......75
Table 4.4. Frequency of responses for the negative impact of alcohol use on dates
among participants who went to a dating activity involving alcohol ......76
Table 4.5. Frequency of uncertainty themes raised by participants .....................81
Table 4.6. Frequency of responses for the themes of interdependence .................85
Table 5.1. Sample characteristics .............................................................................105
Table 5.2. Summary of the characteristics of couples across casual dating, steady
dating, and engaged relationships .........................................................................113
Table 5.3. Mean scores from female and male partners, as well as average couple
scores, on alcohol usage .......................................................................................114
Table 5.4. Mean scores from female and male partners, as well as average couple
scores, on measures of relational turbulence and intimacy .................................115
Table 5.5. Pearson’s correlations among study variables for female partners above diagonal and male partners below diagonal, and intraclass correlations between members of a dyad along the diagonal ................................. 116
List of Figures

Figure 5.1. SEM of actor effects of alcohol usage and relationship duration on relational turbulence and intimacy ................................................................. 119

Figure 5.2. SEM of partner effects of alcohol usage and relationship duration on relational turbulence and intimacy ................................................................. 121

Figure 5.3. APIM with alcohol usage and relationship duration as the predictors for relational intimacy and turbulence ................................................................. 123
Introduction

Consider the infamous beginnings of Carrie Bradshaw and Mr Big in the classic television show *Sex and the City*. There was instant chemistry between them the moment they laid eyes on each other. They subsequently had dates in bars, nightclubs, parties, restaurants, and all sorts of venues across New York City. They talked, flirted, and put the moves on each other; all the while clutching alcoholic beverages in their hands.

Although this popular television show debuted more than a decade ago, its portrayal of dating scenes remains highly relevant to today’s culture. Dating is a critical component of young adults’ lives. People spend a significant proportion of their single lives searching for Mr or Miss Right. When they find the man or woman of their dreams, they then spend considerable effort into sustaining and flourishing the relationships. The budding romantic relationship is often disseminated to determine the progress and prognosis of the partnership. It is not only on television that Carrie Bradshaw spent substantial amount of time dissecting every detail of her love life to her three best friends, but in reality, people also discuss with friends, turn to advice columns, and read self-help books in search of answers to find dating success. It is evident that dating success is an enigma to which the answer is sought by many.

The concept of two romantically attracted people meeting and getting to know each other over an alcoholic drink is widely practiced. A national culture of alcohol consumption means that it is difficult to socialize and date without drinking. Common dating venues such as bars, pubs, restaurants, parties, concerts, and
functions are all inundated by alcohol. Friends and advice columns often have their opinions and beliefs about the conduciveness of drinking on the budding romance. Some may say a few drinks is the best way to kick start a romantic relationship. On the other hand, others may argue that the sight of an intoxicated partner is a turn-off. There are even some preconceptions that the type of beverage you consume on a date is an indicator of the kind of person you are (Atik, 2011). In contrast to the many and diverse opinions about drinking on dates, there is surprisingly little research on the impact of alcohol usage on the early phase of dating relationships in the scientific literature. As such, there appears to be a growing discrepancy between the dating-drinking information as demanded by the lay public, and what is available in the empirical current literature.

This thesis will begin by reviewing the limited research on dating and drinking, and present in depth what is currently known in the available literature. After careful consideration of the gaps in the literature, three studies were performed to shed light into this field. In learning about the dates that took place in the lives of real people, this thesis aimed to gain insight into the real-life occurrences and relational consequences of dating and drinking.
Chapter 1: Romantic Relationship in Young Adulthood

Romantic relationships are undeniably among the most important and significant relationships in adulthood. This form of relationship is characterized by its dyadic nature and mutual acknowledgement of affection and attraction (Brown, 1999; Collins, 2003). The interest in romantic relationships often begins in adolescence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009), but it is in young adulthood that this interest is really brought to the fore (Clark & Beck, 2010). Romantic relationship development is often mapped along a progression in emotional and psychological intensity and investment (Meier & Allen, 2009; Rusbult, 1980), as well as the manifestation of other relational markers such as growing intimacy, passion, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). Romantic involvement is a critical life domain, not only because it is the normative pathway to marriages and formation of new families (Cui, Lorenz, Conger, Melby, & Bryant, 2005), but also because of its implication for the individual’s psychological and emotional functioning.

Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood

Being romantically involved is a normative and central life experience in young adulthood. The majority of young adults have had some experiences of a romantic relationship. By the age of 18, 69% of males and 76% of females report having been romantically involved, either currently or in the preceding 18 months (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). In the subsequent college years, about 57% of undergraduate students disclosed that they were in exclusive romantic relationships, of which the median duration was 1-2 years (Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2010). Compared to the transient and capricious nature of romantic relationships in adolescence (Connolly,
Furman, & Konarski, 2000), these relationships in adulthood often become more serious and committed, with greater emotional depth and complexity, as well as of longer duration (Arnett, 2000; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). In young adulthood, romantic relationships constitute a significant aspect of everyday life (Knox & Wilson, 1981; Lokitz & Sprandel, 1976), and having an intimate relationship is regarded as one of the most important life goals (Hammersla & Frease-McMahan, 1990). Most college students perceived their romantic partners as the closest relationships they had (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Although parents and peers continue to constitute important elements of the support network, romantic relationship become increasing central to the lives of young adults (Laursen & Williams, 1997; Young, Furman, & Laursen, 2010).

Most people consider romantic involvement as a desirable event. In a nation-wide survey of Australian adults, 45% of the respondents who were not romantically involved reported that they were looking for either a short-term or long-term relationship (Relationship Australia & Credit Union Australia, 2008). Another telling sign is the proliferation of relationship self-help books, dating advice columns, and match-making/dating services that proclaim to hold the solutions to people's dating challenges. Such industry capitalizes on people's needs and desires for romantic relationships and its popularity is indicative of people's views of the importance of romantic relationships in their lives.

Dating marks the initial phase of romantic courtship, and is a prominent event in young adulthood. This is evidenced by the changing social landscape in Western countries which paints a gradual increase in the age of marriage (Australian Bureau of
Statistics, 2012). In 2010, the median age at which people entered marriage was 27.9 for women and 29.6 for men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), meaning that dating and the search for romantic partners encompass half, if not more, of young adulthood. With the delay in the timing of marital unions and hence a prolonged process in mate searching, some scholars (e.g. Carroll et al., 2007) regard marriage as a task of later adulthood and thus recommend that future studies on young adulthood should direct attention beyond the context of marriage to dating and other forms of intimate relationships.

The scientific literature adds weight to lay people’s beliefs of the significance of romantic relationships in young adulthood. From an evolutionary perspective, young adulthood marks the peak period of reproductive fertility for both men (Eskenazi et al., 2003) and women (Dunson, Colombo, & Baird, 2002), and thus the formation and sustenance of romantic relationships at this stage is critical for reproductive success. From a psychosocial viewpoint, such as Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development, the search for intimacy is a central developmental task that is confronted in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This notion is echoed by others (e.g. Neemann, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995; Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004) who argued that the navigation of the challenges presented in the establishment and maintenance of relationships with romantic partners are normative developmental tasks that are confronted in early and middle adulthood. The importance of such tasks can be explained by attachment theories, which proposed there is a gradual transfer of primary attachment from parents to romantic partners in early adulthood whereby romantic partners begin to serve attachment-related functions such as being a proximity-maintenance figure, safe haven and secure base
(Fraley & Shaver, 2000; C. Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Collectively these theoretical perspectives clearly recognize the importance of romantic relationships during young adulthood.

The Empirical Understanding of “Dating”

Dating is one of the critical means for establishing romantic relationships as, for most couples, it marks the transition from platonic to romantic relationship (Morr & Mongeau, 2004). Although everyone has some intuitive sense of what a “date” is, early research has been either vague in their definition of the term (e.g. Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987) or failed to define it at all (e.g. Roscoe, Diana, & Brooks, 1987). In other research, dating has been loosely defined as spending time with another person who shares a mutual romantic interest (e.g. Glickman & La Greca, 2004). It was not until recently that research began to synthesize the lay definitions of dating. Drawing from the ways in which university students and community adults defined a date, Mongeau, Jacobsen and Donnerstein (2007) found five overarching themes that characterized dating – dyadic, date goals, date elements, communication expectations, and feelings. Whereas dyadic and date goals point to the involvement of two people in a goal-oriented activity, date element suggests the operation of a culturally scripted date structure. In addition, communication expectations reflect a set of communication processes on a date. Lastly, feelings refer to the range of emotions that are experienced on a date, such as affection, attraction, and romance.

Some scholars (e.g. Skrobot, 2010) have pointed out that the liberal use of the term “dating” by both lay persons and researchers has resulted in varied definitions and meaning. A study on college women and dating identified four different types of
dating (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). The first type are “joined at the hip” relationships, which have a fast course of relationship progression from initiation to exclusivity, emotional intenseness and sexual involvement. In contrast, “boyfriend-girlfriend relationships” are characterized by a slower relational progression, with less sexual spontaneity and emotional intensity. The third form of dating taps into the more formal notion of going out on a date with romantic interest. This form of dating, though traditional, appeared to have declining popularity as only 37% of the participants reported being on this type of date six or more times (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Replacing the formal dating is “hanging out”, which was found to be the most common type of dating. The term “hanging out” is laden with meaning, but it is most typically recognized as spending time with members of the opposite sex alone or in a group. It is believed that this blurred definition of dating facilitates the exploration of romantic interest as it implies little commitment is involved (Skrobot, 2010). To date, Glenn and Marquardt’s (2001) typology remains the only empirical effort to formulate a model of the different forms of dating. Although it is valuable in outlining the different approaches to early relationship development, its sole focus on women’s perspective restricts the ability to generalize this typology as a universal model of early courtship. In fact, most research in this field, as reviewed in subsequent paragraphs, does not distinguish between different types of dating. Rather, dating is perceived as a unitary phenomenon that is loosely defined as the activities between romantically-attracted partners that characterizes the early phase of romantic relationship development.

An extensive topic of research in this field is dating scripts, which refers to the cognitive schemas that are used to organize dating experiences (Laner & Ventrone,
2000). Investigations into dating scripts shed light into the stereotypical sequence of events that occurs on dates (Alksnis, Desmarais, & Wood, 1996). These scripts guide individuals’ behaviours on dates, as well as their expectation and interpretation of events (Laner & Vetrone, 2000). Studies into first-date scripts have consistently associated men with active roles such as initiating the date, planning the date activity, paying for the date and initiating sexual contact (Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008; Rose & Irene Hanson, 1989). On the other hand, women have often been assigned the passive and reactive roles such as accepting the date, being appealing and developing conversations (Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Rose & Irene Hanson, 1989). Furthermore, studies of the “typical” dating scenario often observed considerable overlap in participants’ expectation in initiation activities, dating activities and dating outcomes (Bartoli & Clark, 2006; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). This research, in addition to the high agreement between males’ and females’ dating expectations (Bartoli & Clark, 2006), suggests that dating is a highly-scripted event in the western culture.

Although there is a culturally shared dating script, the motivation behind dating varies across individuals, as well as within individuals at different points in time. Upon enquiries regarding the reasons for going on a first date, university students and adults in the community commonly endorsed social/relational goals such as uncertainty reduction, relational escalation, having fun, companionship, intimacy and mate selection (Mongeau et al., 2007; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004). These findings echoed earlier research into the functions of dating (Roscoe et al., 1987) and goals in relationship initiation (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999). While dating and going out with friends may share similarities in behaviour, these goals have been
proposed to be the defining factors that distinguish dating from hanging out with friends (Mongeau et al., 2007).

**Conceptualization of Romantic Relationships**

There have been ongoing efforts to conceptualize the romantic courtships. In contrast to the theories of discrete transformations in the nature of romantic involvement that permeate relationship research on adolescence (Brown, 1999; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011; Furman & Wehener, 1994), conceptualizations of adult premarital relationships tend to utilize a dimensional approach that captures the varying levels in which the underlying mechanisms and processes operate across relationship development. For instance, romantic attachment theory claims that romantic partners serve as principle attachment figures as they function to provide adults with a safe haven and secure base (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The transfer of attachment functions from primary caretaker to romantic partner is a gradual process, and it is believed that a fully-bloomed romantic attachment takes approximately two years of romantic partnership to develop (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This theory further explains that the type of attachment one forms and experiences with romantic partners is shaped by the attachment one had with his/her parents or significant carers at a young age, as well as experiences with friends and peers during the developmental years (Furman & Simon, 1999). While attachment theory focuses on the effects of personal characteristics on the relationship, interdependence models conceptualize romantic courtships as a phenomenon whereby two individuals influence each other in an enduring and reciprocal manner (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). Social exchange theories, such as Rusbult’s (1980) Investment Model, also acknowledge the bidirectional influences between dating partners and advance the conceptualization by taking into account
both the nature of the current relationship and relational alternatives. The central premise of these theories posits that a person’s commitment to the continual development of the relationship increases as a function of one’s experience of relational reward and the perceived cost of terminating the relationship (Floyd & Wasner, 1994). Another approach in the conceptualization of romantic relationships is to consider the psychological constructs that define the courtship. Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory postulates that the feelings of love in intimate relationships are a result of varying levels of intimacy, passion, and commitment. It proposed that the development of intimate relationships is mapped by progressive escalations in intimacy, followed by passion, and subsequently commitment. Empirical research found support for this conceptualization and its validity is strengthened by successful replications across different cultures (Gao, 2001; Lemieux & Hale, 2002).

The Psychosocial Impact of Dating
The normative tasks of establishing and maintaining romantic relationships in young adulthood warrants scholarly attention as the choices made in this developmental stage can have both transient and enduring consequences on the individual’s psychosocial functioning. There is abundant research on the benefits of romantic relationships. For instance, involvement in romantic relationships has been linked to a reduction in the likelihood of health and mental health hazards among college students (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). Additionally, the development of relationship commitment, as well as the quality of romantic relationship, predicted unique variance in happiness and other markers of subjective wellbeing such as life satisfaction (Demir, 2008; Dush, 2005). The shift from transient to more intimate and serious romantic relationships that marks young adulthood may also have the
potential to lead to the formation of life-long companionship (Meier & Allen, 2008). Moreover, research into the experiences of romantic involvement revealed subjective reports of benefits such as feeling of intimacy, self-growth, positive self-esteem, and sexual gratification (Sedikides, Oliver, & Campbell, 1994).

While successful relationship development is desirable, the journey can often be interspersed with the potential for psychological pain. The search for love may involve rejection, heartache, and disappointment, which can lead to feelings of “hurt” (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Additional costs of romantic involvement reported by college students included stress and worry about the relationship, making sacrifices, conflicts, increased dependence on partner, and the investment of time and effort (Sedikides et al., 1994). Romantic relationships can be fragile and vulnerable, most particularly in the early stages of the development (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). Not only can the dissolution of a relationship be a distressing experience (Simpson, 1987), but romantic involvement itself may also evoke unpleasant emotions. Longitudinal studies found that adolescents and college students who were in romantic relationships in the preceding year were at greater risk of having depressive symptoms compared to their non-dating peers (Chen et al., 2009; Davila, 2008; Joyner & Udry, 2000). There is also some evidence to suggest that merely thinking about relationship difficulties can elicit depressed mood, especially among females (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). These findings stand in stark contrast to the aforementioned research that showed a buffering effect of romantic involvement on mental disorders. This discrepancy in findings may be explained by the use of mental disorder diagnoses versus symptom identification as the outcome variable of research interest. Despite the inconsistent
findings, researchers have contended that the increase in risk of having depressive symptoms may be accounted for by the stress and coping model (Davila, 2008, 2010). This model suggests that the inherent difficulties of romantic relationships, as well as the associated intensity of emotions, challenge the coping skills and resources of young adults and thereby increase their psychological vulnerability. Research on adolescents found that involvement in romantic relationships, especially those of poor quality, was associated with poorer academic achievement and lower future goals, as well as increasing isolation from social peer groups (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Romantic relationships have implications beyond adolescence and young adulthood. Early theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968) suggested that the inability to resolve the intimacy stage in early adulthood may lead to the formation of maladaptive interpersonal relationships in subsequent stages of life. In addition, some scholars (e.g. Arnett, 2000) viewed the period between the ages of 18-25 as a time of self-focused exploration when individuals are neither adolescents nor have they fully committed to adult roles and responsibilities. This exploration of relationship opportunities is critical for development of skills that are needed for relationship stability and satisfaction (Fincham & Cui, 2010; Reifman, 2010). Given that some of the precursors to marital dissatisfaction and instability can be traced back to premarital courtship (C. Kelly, Huston, & Cate, 1985; J. H. Larson & Holman, 1994), the development of such skills in the dating phase has implications for later long-term committed relationships. It is akin to the unfolding of a deterministic process of developmental change whereby one’s romantic experiences in young adulthood may shape one’s perception, behaviours, and consequently experiences in future relationships (Young et al., 2010). Thus, romantic relationships in young adulthood
are important and formative, with potential positive and negative repercussions that may alter or define the course of relationships with current and future romantic partners.

Summary

Dating, an early yet critical phase of romantic courtship, is a normative developmental task that confronts young adults. Its saliency at this life stage is emphasized in the wealth of relationship-related demographical data, as well as theoretical conceptualizations of the developmental trajectories of intimate relationships. A body of research has demonstrated that romantic experiences in this life stage can have short-term and long-term implications, for better or worse, that range from the individual’s wellbeing to one’s current and future romantic relationships. Thus, in view of the saliency and impact of romantic relationships in young adulthood, understanding the dating experiences in this population is a compelling research objective.
Chapter 2: Alcohol Use in the Context of Romantic Relationships

There are numerous factors that can affect the course of romantic relationships; one of which is alcohol usage. The intricate link between alcohol use and romantic relationship is particularly pertinent in young adulthood – a period characterized by heightened opportunities for risk-taking behaviours and social network expansion (Arnett, 2000; Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). The available literature illustrates complex interactions between alcohol use and dating relationships, with diverse impact on the quality and experiences of romantic courtship.

Alcohol Use in Young Adulthood

Alcohol usage is strongly embedded in the Western society. In Australia, 7.2% of the population drinks daily and 39.5% drinks at least weekly (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). Although the age of legal drinking in Australia is 18, 40% of adolescents have had a full serve of alcohol by age 14 (Roche et al., 2007). The subsequent trajectory of alcohol use shows a marked escalation in alcohol consumption from young adulthood to mid- or late- twenties (Auerbach & Collins, 2006; Maggs & Schulenberg, 2005). Studies of young adults revealed approximately 66% of college students consumed alcohol in the past month (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2004; Windle, 2003). The proportion of drinkers peaks between ages 21 to 22, with 85% of men and 76% of women report drinking within the past 30 days (Bachman, Wadsworth, O'Malley, Johnston, & Schulenberg, 1997). These findings of high levels of alcohol usage in young adulthood are complemented by undergraduates' report that alcohol usage was an integral aspect of their university norm (Prentice & Miller, 1993). Although some studies have identified greater
alcohol usage among college students compared to their non-college peers (e.g. Kypri, Cronin, & Wright, 2005; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002), the differences appeared to be an artefact of pre-existing background characteristics (White & Jackson, 2005).

Young adults' drinking behaviour has strong health implications as heavy episodic drinkers are at greater risk of developing alcohol use disorders (Knight et al., 2002). Among college students, approximately 44% reported engaging in binge drinking in the two weeks preceding the research study, with binge drinking defined as five standard drinks for men and four standard drinks for women in one drinking occasion (Courtney & Polich, 2009). Closer examination revealed that, among adults between the ages of 18-29 years, 7.0% met the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV's (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) definition of alcohol abuse and 9.2% for alcohol dependence (Dawson, Grant, Stinson, & Chou, 2004). With such a critical level of alcohol use in the young adult population, the US Surgeon General and the US Department of Health and Human Services (2000) have expressed their concerns and identified young adults’ alcohol usage as one of the most serious public health problems in current times.

While research has consistently found high levels of alcohol use among young adults, the pattern of usage, both across groups and within individuals, is not uniform. Rather, it varies across drinking settings, contexts, and motivation (Clapp, Reed, Holmes, Lange, & Voas, 2006; Kairouz, Gliksman, Demers, & Adlaf, 2002; Windle, 2003). One of the key situational drinking conditions for young adults is dating.

**Drinking and Dating**
Alcohol usage is an integral aspect of the Western dating culture. Not only is alcohol widely available in common dating environments such as restaurants, bars and parties, popular culture has also long integrated alcohol use within dating practice (George & Stoner, 2000). Examples include sharing wine with a dating partner over candlelight dinner, enjoying beer and cocktails together at clubs and parties, or delving into tropical drinks on a date at the beach (George & Stoner, 2000). The inclusion of alcohol into dating routines is encouraged in some popular relationship self-help books (e.g. Kuriansky’s (2004) *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Dating*) and dating advice columns (e.g. *Alcohol – First date no-no or appropriate social mixer* on eHarmony Advice (2012)).

In addition, popular media and advertisements have often fused alcohol use with romantic or sexual themes (Primack, Dalton, Carroll, Agarwal, & Fine, 2008; Roche et al., 2007; Wilson & Till, 2012). For instance, while the linking of alcohol use with social success in marketing campaigns is strictly monitored in most western countries (Advertising Standard Agency, 2012), a recent study found that alcoholic beverage brands often linked their products with interpersonal or sexual enhancement effects via social media “Facebook” status updates (Page & Cole, 2012). Another illustration can be seen on reality dating shows on television, which frequently feature alcohol use between couples on dates (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007). These messages from the media, whether presented in an apparent or subtle manner, have implications for the drinking culture as research has documented the impact of media exposure on individuals’ expectations, beliefs and behaviours (Ferris e. al., 2007; Johnson & Holmes, 2009).
The integration of alcohol usage into dating practices is further demonstrated by studies of dating scripts. A study asked undergraduate students to describe hypothetical and actual dates, and found that alcohol consumption was an activity shared by both female and male's dating scripts (Rose & Frieze, 1993). There was also high agreement between the actions on hypothetical and actual dates across genders, suggesting that alcohol usage is a core component in the western dating routine. The strength of this conclusion is supported by subsequent studies (Amiraian & Sobal, 2009; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008) which have consistently replicated the finding that alcohol consumption is embedded in typical dating scripts and is an expected event on dates.

People often hold implicit theories about alcohol usage and romantic relationships. In a study of common beliefs about romantic relationships, the majority of men (59%) and a sizeable proportion of women (32%) endorsed the belief that bars are good places to meet potential mates (Abowitz, Knox, Zusman, & McNeely, 2009). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that alcohol usage may be employed as an impression management strategy. A series of diary studies found that both men and women drank more when they wished to enhance their level of attractiveness in mixed-sex interactions (O'Grady, Harman, Gleason, & Wilson, 2012). In addition, young adults also nominated alcohol use as one of the strategies they used in relationship initiation, and the use of this strategy had moderate association with the individuals' goals to achieve sexual intimacy (Clark, et al., 1999). In fact, some men perceived alcohol as a tool for "sexual seduction" on dates in their attempts to gain their dating partners' sexual consent (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003, p. 303). The foregoing pattern of results may be explained by findings that individuals do indeed have higher
expectations of sexual intimacy when alcohol is available (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Morr & Mongeau, 2004). These commonly held beliefs offer further evidence for the significance of alcohol usage within the context of romantic relationship.

Although few studies have documented the prevalence of alcohol use on dates, limited research suggested approximately 15%-25% of adolescents drank on their first date (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997). The prevalence of alcohol consumption on dates was higher in an older population. In studies of young adults, approximately 50% of these participants revealed they had drunk on their dates (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; O'Hare, 1990). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that females showed greater preference for drinking during a date compared to men (O'Hare, 1990). However, the quantity of alcohol that is typically involved on dates is unclear. There is little consistency in the findings, with one study reporting that a dating event was protective against heavy drinking (Clapp & Shillington, 2001), while another stated heavy alcohol usage was involved when couples drank on dates (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995). Nevertheless, the available research adds weight to the popular portrayal of alcohol use on dates and illustrates that these two phenomena – drinking and dating – are indeed conventionally co-occurring events.

**Impact of Alcohol Use**

Widespread alcohol use has substantial impact on the lives of young adults. There is a plethora of research on the multitude of negative consequences associated with drinking on a broad range of life domains, including physical and mental health (Hingson, Hereen, Zakoc, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002; Markman Geisner, Larimer, & Neighbors, 2004; Room, Babor, & Rehm, 2005), academic performance (McGee &
Kypri, 2004), and legal and financial costs (Makela & Mustonen, 2000; Richardson & Budd, 2003). However, these negative consequences often do not occur in isolation, but rather in conjunction with subjective experiences of positive consequences from drinking (Lee et al., 2010). Although there is less research into this area, people have reported encounters of positive alcohol effects including enhancement of mood and enjoyment, facilitation of emotional expression, and alleviation of stress (Nystrom, 1992; Park, 2004; Patrick & Maggs, 2008).

Humans are inherently social creatures embedded in extended networks of interpersonal connections. Hence it is not surprising that drinking also has substantial impact on the interpersonal domain. Across the literature, one of the most commonly reported positive interpersonal effects of drinking is "social lubrication" whereby alcohol serves as a tool to enhance the flow of interaction in a convivial environment (Monahan & Lannutti, 2000). Drinkers have also reported subjective experiences of feeling less shy and less inhibited in the presence of others, as well as feeling closer to members of the opposite sex (Nystrom, 1992). For men, alcohol increased their level of self-disclosure when they were interacting with females, a result that was likely to be contributed by alcohol's ability to reduce inhibition and alleviate interpersonal anxiety (Caudill, Wilson, & Abrams, 1987; W. H. George & Norris, 1991). Recent research has identified additional mechanisms underlying the social benefits of drinking, including the amplification of positive affective display, enhancement of the sense of social bonding, and promotion of social responsiveness (Sayette et al., 2012). These alcohol effects translate to benefits in romantic relationship development as drinkers tended to perceive their partners (regardless of drinking or not) to be more likeable and extraverted (Corcoran, 1997), qualities that are valued in romantic mates.
In fact, there is some support for the folklore phenomenon of the “beer goggle” effect, with one study showing that intoxicated participants evaluated members of the opposite sex with higher attractiveness ratings than their non-intoxicated counterparts (Lyvers, Cholakians, Puorro, & Sundram, 2011). Moreover, women who consumed alcohol under a laboratory condition reported a greater likelihood of behaving in ways that conveyed their intention to pursue relational escalation in dating vignettes (Testa, Van Zile-Tamsen, Livingston, & Buddie, 2006). In further support of the notion that drinking can be conducive to intimate relationship development, studies have found that drinking in social settings was associated with increased likelihood of both current and future romantic involvement (Engels & Knibbe, 2000; Engels, Knibbe, & Drop, 1999). Moreover, both observational studies and subjective reports supported the notion that alcohol use can facilitate romantic encounters and increase the likelihood of sexual intercourse (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997; Lindgren, Neighbors, Ostafin, Mullins, & George, 2009; Park, 2004; Patrick & Maggs, 2009). Overall, the foregoing provides an illustration of the relationship-facilitative effects of alcohol.

While consuming alcohol is widely regarded as a source of individual, social, and interpersonal pleasure in the western culture (Stimson, 2006), it also has the potential for negative relational consequences. There is a large volume of research that documents the link between alcohol use and increased risk of unwanted sexual outcome, including sexual assault, sex with regret, and unprotected sex (Abbey, 1991; Leigh, 2002; McGee & Kypri, 2004). This may be, in part, a result of the attenuation of sexual inhibition, fear, and anxiety driven by the pharmacological mechanisms of alcohol (Cooper, 2006; Steele & Josephs, 1990) or one’s pre-existing expectations.
about the effects of alcohol on one's behaviour (Cooper, 1994, 2006). Others have
reasoned that the occurrence of unwanted sexual consequences is contributed by the
misinterpretation of cues and impaired judgment that follow intoxication (Abbey,
1991; Flack et al., 2007). People have also reported interpersonal disputes, ranging
from verbal arguments to physical fights, as a result of alcohol use (Park, 2004; Wells,
Mihic, Tremblay, Graham, & Demers, 2008). Additionally, alcohol could lead to a
display of undesirable social behaviors such as being loud-voiced and boisterous, as
well as behaving in ways that the person later regarded as regrettable (Makela &
Mustonen, 2000). Furthermore, in intimate relationships, heavy alcohol use between
partners was associated with poorer relationship quality, including relationship
dissatisfaction, more negative interaction patterns, less positive communication tone,
and more general and alcohol-related disagreements (Fischer et al., 2005; Marshal,
2003). Thus, while people expect and report an array of positive drinking outcomes
(e.g. Park, 2004), it is clear that drinking can also lead to negative consequences that
are not conducive for romantic relationship development.

Theoretical Integration of Alcohol Use and Romantic Involvement in Young
Adulthood

Personal relationships have been an extensive topic of research in recent times, and
the field has witnessed the growth of promising theories of romantic relationship.
Similarly, the field of alcohol research encompasses voluminous theories of
normative and problematic alcohol use. However, these two fields of research have
thus far been conducted in parallel. As a result, there is yet to be a comprehensive
theory that conceptualizes alcohol usage within the context of romantic relationships.
Nevertheless, some of the current understanding of alcohol usage in romantic relationships can be drawn from the literature on emerging adulthood.

Some scholars, most notably Arnett (2000), argue that the period from the age of 18 to mid-twenties constitute a distinct period of development, which they termed "emerging adulthood". This life stage, at least in the western culture, is regarded as a transition phase where these individuals have progressed beyond the developmental tasks of adolescence, but have yet to fully assume the roles and responsibilities that are normative in adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Individuals in emerging adulthood do not view themselves as adults (Arnett, 2001), but are seen to be in the process of self-focused exploration of identity within the vast opportunities offered in this life stage in areas such as education, work, recreation, friendship, and worldview (Arnett, 2000; Tanner, 2006). Central to the current thesis is the exploration of opportunities in the areas of love and alcohol use (Arnett, 2000, 2005).

The emerging adulthood theory claims that identity exploration in romantic relationships and substance use are key features of this life stage (Arnett, 2000, 2005). Compared to younger participants, emerging adults place greater value on intimacy, thus alluding to the importance of closeness and mutual emotional exchange in this developmental stage (Montgomery, 2005). Indeed romantic relationships in emerging adulthood become more intimate and serious as individuals begin to take a more pragmatic perspective and seriously contemplate the kind of person and relationship quality they seek in establishing long-term partnership (Arnett, 2000). Coinciding with the critical developmental task of identity exploration in romantic relationships is the increase in alcohol usage at this life stage (Bachman et al., 1997; Maggs &
Schulenberg, 2005). Several hypotheses have been proposed to account for the heightened alcohol use in emerging adulthood. These include emerging adults’ tendencies to pursue self-focused, novel, intense and risk-taking experiences (Arnett, 2000, 2005). Additionally, alcohol use may be contributed by the increased independence and peer influences, as well as reduction in parental monitoring and social control that are characteristics of this life stage (Arnett, 2000, 2005). Furthermore, in Australia, people can legally purchase and consume alcohol at age 18, which increases emerging adults’ access to alcohol use. Thus, formulating coherent and meaningful identities with respect to love and explorations in drinking behaviour are two fundamental tasks in emerging adulthood.

However, the literature on the developmental tasks in emerging adulthood is not without critics. Specifically, while the theoretical perspectives on “emerging adulthood” recognize the significance of both drinking and dating at this life stage and illuminate the psychosocial backdrop against which both phenomena take place, it simply implies that the identified exploration in both domains co-occurs at this life stage. As such, no inferences or links are made between drinking and dating, and hence the emerging adulthood viewpoint does not fully capture the dynamic processes at work between the two areas of development.

**Summary and Thesis Direction**

The alcohol-supportive social milieu of Western societies is witnessing an expansive use of alcohol within romantic relationships. With the advent of such widespread alcohol use, efforts to understand the impact of drinking on early dating relationships have assumed greater urgency. This is especially the case given that romantic
partnership is one of the most intimate and closest forms of relationship in young adulthood, and that alcohol use may have significant implications on current and future romantic relationship functioning.

However, a review of the literature revealed there is minimal research on the relational impact of alcohol usage within dating courtships. The majority of available research limits their scope of investigation to stable and marital relationships (e.g. Homish & Leonard, 2007; Johns, Newcomb, Johnson, & Bradbury, 2007; Keams-Bodkin & Leonard, 2005). Within the scarce research on dating relationships, investigations into alcohol-effects tend to focus on negative and/or sexual outcomes (e.g. Cooper & Orcutt, 1997; Flack et al., 2007; Patrick & Maggs, 2009). In addition, greater scholarly attention is devoted to heavy and pathological drinking at the expense of investigation into the effects of normative levels of alcohol consumption (e.g. Leonard & Homish, 2008; Mushquash et al., 2011; Power, Rodgers, & Hope, 1999). The paucity of empirical exploration into the effects of normative drinking on non-sexual consequences, combined with the lack of research into the early phase of premarital relationships, have raised numerous questions about the impact of alcohol usage by dating couples on their relationship quality and experiences.

Both romantic involvement and management of alcohol usage are salient tasks of young adulthood. This thesis uses the term “young adulthood” broadly to encapsulate the period from the age of 18 through to mid- to late-twenties. Although some scholars (e.g. Arnett, 2004) drew distinctions between “young adulthood”, “early adulthood”, and “emerging adulthood”, this thesis views all of these theoretical conceptualizations under the umbrella term of “young adulthood”. This decision was
informed by arguments that there are few empirical differences that differentiate these groups. Rather, they are terms that describe overlapping periods, or even the same period, of development (Fincham & Cui, 2010). Furthermore, some have emphasized that the conceptualization of “emerging adulthood” simply identifies the effects of societal and cultural changes on young adults over recent decades, rather than capturing a unique stage of development (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Notwithstanding contentions in the use of terms in the literature, the period following adolescence is a critical period of life span development (Fincham & Cui, 2010). Thus, this thesis conceptualized young adulthood as a period of continuation of development and refinement of psychosocial functioning, as opposed to a distinct and unique life stage. Within this phase of development, recognized roughly as between the ages of 18 to mid-twenties, the complex interplay between romantic relationships and alcohol use will be explored.
Chapter 3: Study One

The review of the literature presented in Chapters 1 and 2 highlighted the developmental significance of romantic involvement and alcohol use in young adulthood. Although the literature has illustrated the concomitant occurrence of romantic involvement and alcohol usage, less is known regarding the factors that underlie alcohol usage in the context of romantic relationships. Furthermore, greater understanding of the perplexing links between drinking and its impact on dating relationships is needed as this early phase of romantic partnership is believed to be more fragile and vulnerable to relationship dissolution than any subsequent phases (Felmlee et al., 1990; Le et al., 2010). In addition, the dating phase deserves research attention as many routinized and dysfunctional patterns of interactions are set in place prior to marriage (Bryant & Conger, 2011). Thus, the present study sought to explore the nature and impact of alcohol use on relationship development in the dating phase of courtship.

Alcohol Usage on Dates

The decision to drink or not to drink on a date is an interesting dilemma. On the one hand, there are good reasons to believe that drinking on a date may not be conducive to relationship development. A frequently reported dating goal is to search for a potential mate (Mongeau et al., 2007). As alcohol affects one’s decision-making capacity (George, Rogers, & Duka, 2005), individuals may wish to stay sober to enhance the accuracy of their evaluation of their partner as a potential mate. Another fundamental purpose of dating is to form a favourable impression in the eyes of the dating partner as the likelihood of subsequent dates and potential relationship
development is contingent upon the extent to which one is perceived as mate-worthy.

Drinking, however, may convey an unfavourable impression to a potential partner (Colby, Colby, & Raymond, 2009). Furthermore, alcohol is known to reduce inhibition and thus alcohol consumption on dates may increase the likelihood of hostile verbal expressions and conflicts (Babor, Berglas, Mendelson, Ellingboe, & Miller, 1983). A female drinker may also be perceived as more sexually accessible (Beccaria & Guidoni, 2002) and increase the likelihood of unwanted sexual advances (Gross, Bennett, Sloan, Marx, & Juergens, 2001), as well as risky sexual behaviours such as having unprotected sex with multiple or casual sex partners (Cooper & Orcutt, 2000; LaBrie, Earleywine, Jason, Pedersen, & Marriot, 2005). Taken together, this research alludes to some possible reasons as to why it may not be wise to drink on a date.

However, in spite of the above reasons for not drinking, alcohol use on dates is a common phenomenon. Several lines of research have investigated the factors underlying alcohol use on dates and this research can be organized into two conceptual groups – psychological and behavioural factors. Psychological factors include individual dispositions to act impulsive or feel anxious in dating situations. The evidence linking impulsivity and alcohol use is strong, with numerous studies (e.g. Arnett, 1996; Grau & Ortet, 1999), as well as literature reviews (Baer, 2002) and meta-analysis (Hittner & Swickert, 2006), consistently showing a small to moderate positive associations between impulsive tendencies and the amount of alcohol use in adolescent and college student samples. On the other hand, the evidence for the link between anxiety and drinking behaviours has been less consistent. Prevalence studies have revealed high rates of co-morbidity between social anxiety and alcohol use.
disorders in both clinical and general populations (e.g. Kushner, Abrams, & Borchardt, 2000; Liang & Chikritzhs, 2011). However, beyond the research on diagnosable anxiety disorders, the findings on the association between general anxiety disposition and alcohol use have been inconsistent. For instance, some studies have revealed a weak to moderate positive relationship (e.g. Stewart, 1995), whereas others have demonstrated a negative association (e.g. Ham, Bonin, & Hope, 2007) or no direct relationship (Grau & Ortet, 1999; Meade Eggleston, Woolaway-Bickel, & Schmidt, 2004) between anxiety and alcohol use. Drawing from these studies on trait disposition, it stands to reason that individuals who are high in state impulsivity, and possibly state anxiety, in relation to dating are also more likely to consume alcohol on dates.

In addition to individual dispositions, another frequently studied psychological factor in drinking behaviour is alcohol-expectancy. Early research on motivational pathways towards alcohol use predicts that people’s drinking is driven by their expectations of attaining valued outcomes (Cox & Klinger, 1988). These outcomes may be a direct (via neurochemical pathways) or indirect (instrumental in production of outcomes that have intrinsic values) product of alcohol consumption. The attainment of these outcomes evokes affective changes in the individual, and this model assumes that individuals are more motivated to drink when they expect the positive affective consequences to outweigh negative affective consequences (Cox & Klinger, 1988). This seminal model of drinking motives has sparked an extensive growth of research into alcohol expectancies. The most widely recognized conceptualization of drinking expectancies in the literature is Cooper’s (1994) four-factor model. It advocates for four primary drinking motives, which are (a)
enhancement motives – drink to increase mood or well-being, (b) social motives – drink to attain social rewards, (c) coping motives – drink to regulate negative emotions, and (d) conformity motives – drink to avoid social rejection. These expectancies, whether conscious or unconscious to the individual, are seen as proximal antecedents for alcohol use (Cooper, 1994). Later research has refined the concept by investigating context-specific expectancies, such as expectations of the effects of alcohol on one’s feeling of intimacy (Wolf & Cooper, 2008) and its impact on the marital relationship (Leonard & Mudar, 2004). A body of research has demonstrated a robust moderate positive association between the endorsement of specific expectancies and distinct sets of drinking behaviour (Cooper, 1994; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2005). In the romantic relationship domain, it was found that the expectation of sexual enhancement was positively associated with drinking prior to intercourse (Weinhardt, Otto-Salaj, Brondino, & Norberg, 2002), while beliefs regarding enhancement of intimacy predicted drinking in dating situations (Wolf & Cooper, 2008). Collectively, studies have attested to the incremental variance in the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption explained by alcohol expectancies, even after controlling for known contributing variables to alcohol use (e.g. age and gender) (Jones, Corbin, & Fomme, 2001).

In addition to the aforementioned psychological mechanisms, there is evidence to suggest that behavioural factors are also influential determinants of alcohol use. A recent study argued that unique variance in alcohol use, specifically binge drinking, can be explained by habitual processes (Norman, 2011). This indicates that alcohol use may partly be a habitual process that is driven by the pattern of past drinking behaviours. However, research is needed to attest to the application of habitual
drinking in the dating context. Another behavioural factor that may promote drinking in dating relationships is the partner’s alcohol use. A meta-analytic study revealed that people tend to consume greater amount of alcohol when they are with heavy-drinking peers compared to light-drinking or non-drinking peers (Quigley & Collins, 1999). Within the context of intimate relationships, one study found that young adults’ alcohol use was significantly predicted by their romantic partners’ drinking behaviour (Wiersma, Fischer, Harrington Cleveland, Reifman, & Harris, 2010). This reciprocal influence between partners’ alcohol use may be explained by social selection theory or assertive pairing theory, whereby individuals seek to be with others who share similar drinking behaviour and thus validate each other’s alcohol usage (Gonzaga, 2007; Kandel, 1978). Alternatively, socialization theory posits that one’s drinking may change as a result of imitating partner’s alcohol use, as well as the subsequent social reinforcement from partner (Kandel, 1980).

Research has consistently found that men consume alcohol at higher quantity and frequency than women (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wilsnack, Vogeltanz, Wilsnack, & Harris, 2000). This gender difference in drinking behaviour is also reflected in dating relationships (Engels & Knibbe, 2000). There are numerous gender theories in the literature in relation to alcohol use. However, few theories attempt to explain the differences in drinking behaviour within the context of early dating relationships. One of these theories is expectancy theory. It has been shown that while both men and women anticipate alcohol consumption will lead to enhanced sexual performance and pleasure (Dermen & Cooper, 1994; MacLatchy-Gaudet & Stewart, 2001), these expectancies are more strongly endorsed by men (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Wall, Hinson, & McKee, 1998). As a result, men are more likely to
drink alcohol in the romantic context in order to obtain their anticipated sexual outcomes (Wilsnack, Wilsnack, & Obot, 2005). On the other hand, because of their awareness of potential consequences of intoxication on their sexuality, women may restrict their drinking in dating situations to minimize the risk of sexual disinhibition or vulnerability to unwanted sexual advances (Testa, Van Zile-Tamsen, et al., 2006). Risk theory also posits greater alcohol usage among men in dating situations. Alcohol usage is considered a risk-taking behaviour (Hill & Chow, 2002). Men’s greater propensity for risk behaviours (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; Hill & Chow, 2002) may account for their higher alcohol consumption on dates compared to their female counterpart. Some have argued that men gain intrinsic rewards from taking risk behaviours, such as enhancement of one’s sense of masculinity (De Visser & Smith, 2007; Wilsnack et al., 2005). In the dating situation where one of the primary goals is to impress one’s partner, it is conceivable that men may consume alcohol to boost their sense of masculinity. In contrast, women’s risk-averse tendencies may be a possible reason behind their lower alcohol consumption compared to men in social situations (Wilsnack et al., 2005).

The extant literature on factors that encourage drinking stems from disparate studies. Although the factors underlying alcohol use have been studied from a range of perspectives, there has been little integration of data. This is especially the case in the research field of premarital relationships. Consequently the current state of the literature does not allow for the formulation of a coherent picture of the factors that contribute to drinking in dating situations. Thus, the following research question is posed:
Research question 1 (RQ1): To what extent do sex, date-anxiety, date-impulsivity, alcohol-date expectancy, general drinking tendency, and partner’s drinking predict the amount of alcohol use on dates?

The Impact of Drinking on Intimacy

Among those who choose to drink on a date, the impact of such action on the dating experience and relational outcome remain unclear. The preceding chapter has reviewed the literature on the impact of alcohol use on interpersonal relationships. As a general observation of the literature, the predominant focus on sexual outcomes is representative of the direction of this field. In addition to sexual behaviours, existing alcohol-related research on intimate relationships tended to focus attention on dyadic communication and attraction. While investigations into these outcomes are valuable for understanding the interpersonal effects of alcohol usage, these outcome variables may not attest to the impact of drinking on individuals’ subjective experiences of courtship. The available research on the effects of alcohol on perceptions of relationship quality is comparatively sparse, and these studies tend to focus on either martial relationship or examine heavy or pathological alcohol use only. As such, empirical understanding into the impact of everyday alcohol usage within the context of early romantic partnership is lacking.

Intimacy is a distinct component of relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) and is widely used in research on people’s subjective experience and evaluation of their romantic relationships. Intimacy is defined as a subjective feeling that is characterized by a sense of closeness, affection and connectedness between interacting partners (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999; Sternberg, 1986). According
to Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love, the development of intimacy is critical for the blossoming of romantic relationships in the early phase of courtship (Sternberg, 1986). Factor analytic studies revealed intimacy is related, but not synonymous with people’s subjective experiences of passion and commitment (Marston, Hecht, Manke, McDaniel, & Reeder, 1998). This points to intimacy being a distinct empirical construct that facilitates the establishment of a positive bond and sets the foundation for romantic love.

The critical role of intimacy in early romantic relationship is also illustrated by a study that showed that an increase in the subjective experience of intimacy further sparked feelings of passion (Baumeister & Bratslavsky, 1999), both of which are seen as necessary for continual relational escalation (Sternberg, 1986). In support of the importance of intimacy in dating relationship, a longitudinal study showed that men who held a greater focus on intimacy goals had a greater likelihood of entering a romantic relationship at follow-up (Sanderson, Keiter, Miles, & Yopyk, 2007). Thus, the feeling of intimacy is a pivotal dating factor the affects the progression from friendships to romantic relationships.

The importance of investigating intimacy-enhancement factors is reinforced by suggestions that people evaluate the state of their romantic relationships in terms of the level of intimacy (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). In considering the initiation of romantic relationships, people have indeed identified intimacy as a primary goal for dating (C. L. Clark et al., 1999; Mongeau et al., 2007; Reeder, 2008). Additionally, when drinking was involved on dates, individuals expected higher levels of intimacy (Morr & Mongeau, 2004). A recent study examined couples’ daily diary reports over
a 3 week-period and found that intimacy was in fact greatest when a small amount of alcohol was consumed and when couples drank together in similar amounts (Levitt & Cooper, 2010). The present study sought to add to this small body of research by exploring the relative impact of habitual drinking and alcohol use on dates on subsequent feelings of intimacy. Accordingly, the following research question was formulated:

Research question 2 (RQ2): To what extent does alcohol consumption on a date, compared to habitual drinking, affect subjective feelings of intimacy?

**Method**

This study was based on an online questionnaire completed by students at The Australian National University. Data was collected between March and June 2011. Approval was granted by the local Human Ethics Research Committee.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited via invitation by email and posters distributed throughout The Australian National University campus. These advertisements contained a web link that directed participants to the online questionnaire. The eligibility criteria, as listed on both the advertisements and participant information sheet, were drinkers between 18 to 25 years of age, self-defined as single, and interested in being in a romantic relationship. The rationale for these criteria was based upon the aim of generating greater understanding of the dating and drinking practices in young adulthood as theoretical observations emphasized that romantic interest and alcohol
consumptions are both prominent activities in the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Participants

The characteristics of the sample are described in Table 3.1. A total of 283 participants took part in the study (102 males, 181 females) and had a mean age of 19.48 years (SD=1.49 years; range=18-24 years). One male participant requested that his responses be withdrawn and was hence not included in the data analysis. The sample was composed primarily of Caucasians (61.3%), with the remaining sample identifying themselves as Asian (38.3%) or Aboriginal (0.4%). Participants were informed that all responses would be confidential and that they may be contacted for a follow-up study using the contact details they provided. The participants came from a variety of disciplines, with 113 (40.1%) participants receiving first-year psychology research credits for their participation in this study. Participants were informed at the start of the questionnaire that they would receive $25 after they complete study 2. They were also made aware that they can choose to receive $5 for the questionnaire study if they decline or were not chosen to participate in study 2. Ninety-six participants (34.0%) chose to receive $5 at the conclusion of study 2.
Table 3.1. Description of the sample in Study One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>19.48 ± 1.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University enrolment (N)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ years</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of past romantic relationships</td>
<td>2.0 ± 2.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Material

The online questionnaire was constructed via the Qualtrics program. Participants could access the questionnaire by going to the advertised URL and providing online consent. A copy of the questionnaire is displayed in Appendix B.

Measures

Dating experience. Participants were given the following definition of a date. "A date is any pre-arranged social activity with a person where there is some romantic interest. Sometimes, the activity is not explicitly communicated as a "date" between the interacting pair. However it is considered a date when two persons who are
romantically interested or attracted try to get to know each other better while doing an activity together."

A combination of 25 open-ended and forced-choice items was used to assess participants’ experiences on their last date where alcohol was available. This included questions on the perimeter of the date (i.e. location, time, activity). Additional items were used to examine participants’ perception of their own and partner’s feelings of intimacy, whereby intimacy was assessed by the evaluation of the level of understanding between both parties, impression of each other, and emotional closeness. Moreover, several items measured the development of relationship, as indicated by participants’ evaluation of certainty, desire for romantic escalation and commitment about the relationship. Participants were asked to recall and rate their perception of intimacy and relationship development at three points in time – before, during, and after the date on a slider bar anchored by “not at all” to “very much”, as opposed to a fixed likert-type scale.

**Drinking history / drinking tendency.** Participants reported their drinking history and general drinking tendency on the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) (Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, & Monteiro, 2001). Only the 3 questions on alcohol consumption from the AUDIT, also known as the AUDIT-C (Bush, Kivlahan, McDonell, Fihn, & Bradley, 1998), were included in this study. The 3 items assesses the quantity and frequency of alcohol use. A pictorial guide illustrating the equivalence of standard drinks among common alcoholic beverages was provided to participants to enhance the accuracy of responses. Scores were totalled and a higher score reflected a history of greater quantity and frequency of
alcohol consumption. This measure was also used as an indicator of general drinking
tendencies as AUDIT scores have demonstrated temporal stability in the short- and
medium-term (Reinert & Allen, 2002).

**Alcohol-date expectancies.** A new measure was developed to measure
individual’s expectation that alcohol consumption on dates will have positive effects
on the romantic relationship. A new measure was needed as there are no tools
available in the literature that specifically explores alcohol-expectancies within the
dating situation in early stages of romantic relationship development. To the author’s
best knowledge, alcohol-intimacy expectancy scale (Wolf & Cooper, 2008) is the only
published measure that taps into some of the alcohol-expectancies that may have
relevance to dating relationships. Thus, in addition to inclusion of new items that
have face validity, items from the alcohol-intimacy expectancy scale were drawn to
inform the development of the current alcohol-date expectancy measure. All items
were worded to specifically focus on the dating context. The scale consisted of 16
items on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate the frequency with
which they drink for the listed reasons (0 = almost never; 5 = almost always). Scores
were totalled and a high score on this scale reflects greater expectation that drinking
on dates will lead to positive outcomes for the progression of the dating relationship.
Principal Component Analysis yielded a one-factor model as demonstrated by visual
examination of the scree plot and eigenvalues (Initial eigenvalue = 7.12, accounting
for 44.87% of variance). The scale achieved satisfactory reliability (Cronbach α=.92).

**Personal characteristics.** Two individual disposition variables were
measured – anxiety (8 items) and impulsivity (8 items) – on a 5-point Likert scale
anchored by “not true of me at all” and “very much true of me”. Half of the items were positively-worded while the remaining items were reversed-worded to minimize acquiescence and to better capture the dimensional conceptualization of these variables. Items were drawn from available measures of anxiety and impulsivity, including the Dating Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (Glickman & La Greca, 2004) and the Impulsive Sensation Seeking scale (De Leo, Van Dam, Hobkirk, & Earleywine, 2011), and were worded to apply specifically to dating situations. Hence, these variables were termed “date-anxiety” and “date-impulsivity”. Factor analyses revealed two-factor models for date-anxiety (initial eigenvalue = 3.17, accounting for 39.67% of variance; second eigenvalue = 1.82, accounting for additional 22.73% of variance) and date-impulsivity (initial eigenvalue = 3.45, accounting for 43.07% of variance; second eigenvalue = 1.73, accounting for additional 21.63% of variance) scales respectively. For both date-anxiety and date impulsivity, the second factor contains items that were negatively worded to minimize acquiescence bias. Therefore, the two factors were combined for each scale and the internal reliability computed from the current sample was satisfactory (α_{date-anxiety} = .76; α_{date-impulsivity} = .81). Scores from each scale were totalled and higher total scores reflect greater levels of date-anxiety and date-impulsivity.

**Dating and relationship history.** Fourteen items were included to assess participants’ past experiences in dating and romantic relationships, including number and duration of past relationships, age of first romantic relationship, and typical dating behaviours.
Demographic factors. Lastly, a demographic questionnaire was developed to gather information on participants’ sex, age, ethnicity, academic degree and contact details.

Analysis

The statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results

Prevalence of Alcohol Use on Date

The majority of the participants \( n = 187, 66.3\% \) of sample) had been on at least one date where alcohol was available in the date setting. Seventy-five percent of this subgroup \( n = 141 \) reported either they or their partners had consumed alcohol while they were on the date. Among those who went on a date where alcohol was available, 63.9\% \( (n = 119) \) of these dates occurred in the past 60 days. There were no significant gender differences in the reports of being on dates where alcohol was involved or whether they chose to drink on such dates \((t_{(280)} = .35, p > .05)\).

Investigation into the most recent dating experiences where alcohol was involved revealed the most popular setting was a restaurant/cafè (49.7\%), followed by a bar /nightclub (29.4\%), movie or concert (7.5\%), home (7.5\%), parties (4.3\%) and others (1.6\%).

Upon enquiry into the frequency with which participants drank on dates, 38.4\% of males reported “rarely”, 38.4\% reported “sometimes”, and 23.3\% reported “often”. On the other hand, women reported their frequency of drinking on dates as 50.0\%
“rarely”, 41.2% “sometimes”, and 8.8% “often” ($X^2_{(2)} = 10.28, \ p = .006$). Gender had a small but significant effect on the tendency to drink on dates (Cramer’s $V = .21, \ p = .006$).

**General Drinking Behaviour vs. Drinking Behaviours on Dates**

Results indicated that participants varied in their general drinking tendencies. The average total score on AUDIT-C for the entire sample was 4.26 ($SD = 2.34$; range = 1-10), with males ($M = 4.77, \ SD = 2.55$) having significantly higher AUDIT-C scores than females ($M = 3.97, \ SD = 2.17, t(278) = 2.79, \ p = .006$). Participants who went on a date where alcohol was available ($M = 4.70, \ SD = 4.70$) had significantly higher AUDIT-C scores than those who did not ($M = 3.39, \ SD = 2.31; t(278) = 4.57, \ p < .001$). There was a significant correlation between general drinking tendency and alcohol consumption on date ($r = .31, \ p < .001$). Additionally, there was a significant relationship between AUDIT-C scores and tendency to drink on dates ($F(2, 241) = 26.00, \ p < .001$). Post-hoc Bonferroni analysis showed that those who had a tendency to drink “often” on dates had significantly higher AUDIT-C scores than those who “sometimes” drank on a date ($p = .001$), who in turn, reported significantly higher AUDIT-C scores than those who “rarely” drank on dates ($p < .001$).

**Drinking Behaviour on Most Recent Date**

On the most recent date where drinking was involved, participants noted they drank an average of 2.33 standard drinks ($SD = 2.78$; range = 0-12.0; median = 1.60) while they reported their partner drank an average of 2.83 standard drinks ($SD = 3.38$; range = 0-17.0; median = 1.60). There was no significant gender difference in the quantity consumed by males or females in both reports of self and partners’ drinking ($p > .05$).
When drinking took place, the average amount consumed by partners collectively was 6.82 standard drinks ($SD = 0.48; \text{range} = 1.0-25.0; \text{median} = 5.00$).

**Preliminary Analysis for Regression Model**

The relationships between the core variables and their means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.2. Spearman's correlation analysis revealed date-anxiety and date-impulsivity were not significantly related to each other, but were both significantly correlated with alcohol-date expectancy ($r_{\text{date-anxiety}} = .24, p < .001; r_{\text{date-impulsivity}} = .21, p = .001$). Date-impulsivity was significantly correlated with one’s general drinking behaviour and one’s level of alcohol consumption on dates, as well as partner’s alcohol consumption on dates. One’s general drinking behaviour, as reflected by AUDIT-C scores, showed significant relationship with one’s alcohol use and partner’s alcohol use on date. Similarly, alcohol-date expectancy was significantly associated with one’s drinking ($r_s = .18, p = .018$) and the partner’s drinking ($r_s = .17, p = .022$) on dates. Furthermore, one’s drinking was positively related to one’s partner’s drinking ($r_s = .75, p < .001$). Post-date intimacy showed no significant associations with other variables.

**Predictors of alcohol use on date (RQ1)**

The first series of regression analysis sought to examine the factors that may predict alcohol use on dates. Regression analysis assumes that variables are normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The distribution of the dependent variable, individual’s level of alcohol consumption on dates, showed slight positive skewness and kurtosis (skewness = 1.65, $SE = .17$, kurtosis = 2.37, $SE = .33$). Logarithmic transformation were conducted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) and results of normality
checks of the transformed variable were satisfactory in accordance with Tabachnick and Fidell’s (2001) recommendations (skewness = .047, SE = .220; kurtosis = -.702, SE = .437; Shapiro-Wilk W = .976, p = .029). However, subsequent analyses revealed variable transformation did not affect the substantive results. Therefore, the results of regression analyses based on the original untransformed variable are presented below.

Multiple regression was conducted to predict the contribution of sex, date-anxiety, date-impulsivity, alcohol-date expectancies, general drinking tendency, and partner’s alcohol consumption on individual’s alcohol use on dates. Using Cohen’s (1988) power analysis for multiple regressions, it is anticipated that, with 6 predictors, the current sample size of 282 could detect medium effect sizes for the factors affecting alcohol usage on dates with a power of .80 and probability level of .05. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure variables did not violate the assumptions of multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity. All continuous dependent variables were centred at their means to circumvent the issue of multicollinearity when calculating the interaction effect (Aiken & West, 1991). To control for anticipated gender differences in alcohol use, sex was entered into the first step of the regression equation and accounted for 0.4% of variance in alcohol use on dates ($F_{(1, 197)} = 1.74, p = .188$). Date-anxiety, date-impulsivity, alcohol expectancies, general drinking tendency, and partner’s alcohol consumption were entered in the second step. The inclusion of these factors accounted for a total of 62.0% of the variance in drinking behaviour on a date ($F_{(6, 192)} = 54.75, p < .001$). Only sex ($\beta = -.12, p = .009$), general drinking tendencies ($\beta = .13, p = .012$) and partner’s alcohol use ($\beta = .75, p < .001$)
were significant predictors of alcohol consumption on dates. A summary of the regression analysis is displayed in Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Date-anxiety</td>
<td>28.44</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Date-impulsivity</td>
<td>25.23</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alcohol-date expectancy</td>
<td>26.65</td>
<td>12.81</td>
<td>0.237***</td>
<td>0.210**</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. AUDIT-C scores</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.444***</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Actor’s alcohol consumption</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.188*</td>
<td>0.172*</td>
<td>0.309***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner’s alcohol consumption</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.181*</td>
<td>0.167*</td>
<td>0.169*</td>
<td>0.749***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Post-date intimacy</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 3.3. Regression models of alcohol consumption on dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-.54</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.71</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date-anxiety</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date-impulsivity</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectancy</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General drinking</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s drinking</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.74***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ change for $R^2$</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.79***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All continuous predictor variables were centered at their means.

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

Subsequent analyses were conducted to test for potentially moderating effects of sex. This was achieved by crossing sex with each of the other predictor variables. The interaction terms were entered into the third step one at a time in separate analyses. Results revealed no significant interaction effects.

**Predictors of intimacy on dates (RQ2)**

The second set of multiple regression models was constructed to explore the effects of alcohol usage on feelings on intimacy by the end of the date. In accordance with the guidelines outlined in the literature (Howell, 2012; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), inspection of histogram, skewness and kurtosis suggests the dependent variable, post-date intimacy, is normally distributed (skewness = -.90, $SE = .18$; kurtosis = .81, $SE$
The data set were split by gender in order to elucidate on the possible differential effects of alcohol usage on males and females’ intimacy. Prior to the analysis, all the continuous variables were centered to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). The results of the regression analyses are presented in Tables 3.4 and 3.5.

Using Cohen’s (1988) power analysis for multiple regression, it is anticipated that, with 4 predictors in separate analyses by gender, the current sample sizes of 101 males and 181 females could detect medium effect sizes for the impact of drinking on intimacy with a power of .80 and probably of .05. In a two-step multiple regression analysis, general drinking tendencies, and actor and partner’s drinking on a date were entered into step one. Together, these variables explained 2.7% of variances in males’ intimacy and 6.6% of variance in females’ intimacy. The literature has suggested that the effect of drinking is affected by one’s alcohol expectancies (Patrick & Maggs, 2009). Accordingly, the interaction between expectancy and actor’s drinking was added into step two. This interaction effect explained an additional 2.6% of variances in males’ intimacy ($F_{change} (1, 60) = 1.74, p > .05$) and 5.9% of variances in females’ intimacy ($F_{change} (1, 106) = 7.39, p = .008$). In the final model, none of the predictors were significantly associated with males’ intimacy. On the other hand, actor’s alcohol consumption ($\beta = .46, p = .002$) and partner’s alcohol consumption ($\beta = -.39, p = .007$) were significant predictors of females’ level of intimacy. The interaction between alcohol-date expectancy and actor’s drinking also predicted females’ intimacy ($\beta = .25, p = .008$).
Table 3.4. Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting males’ post-date intimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE_B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General drinking tendencies</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s drinking on date</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s drinking on date</td>
<td>-.58</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectancy * Actor’s drinking on date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ change for $R^2$</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All continuous predictor variables were centered at their means. Results did not reach statistical significance at $\alpha = .05$. 

Table 3.5. Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting females’ post-date intimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$SE B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General drinking tendencies</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor’s drinking on date</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner’s drinking on date</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectancy * Actor’s drinking</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ change for $R^2$</td>
<td>3.60*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.40**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All continuous predictor variables were centered at their means. * $p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$
Discussion

Using an online questionnaire design, this study aimed to gain greater insight into the nature of alcohol use in young adults’ dating culture. Additionally, the present study sought to explore the factors that may affect drinking behaviour, as well as the relational consequences of alcohol use, on dates.

The current study addresses the relative dearth of empirical data on the prevalence of alcohol use on dates. The results confirmed the popular belief that alcohol is commonly used on dates as half of the sample had shared this experience. When alcohol is available in the date setting, the majority of participants (75%) chose to consume alcohol. The prevalence rate of drinking on dates obtained in this study is comparable to findings obtained from American college samples (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; O’Hare, 1990). Furthermore, the date settings also bare similarities with pervious research (Bartoli & Clark, 2006; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; O’Hare, 1990). Interestingly, there seems to be a notable difference in the level of alcohol consumption on dates between the current study and existing research, with the partners in this study collectively drinking only half the amount reported by an American sample (Mongeau & Johnson, 1995). Furthermore, the lack of gender differences in drinking behaviour on dates departs from previous research that claimed women showed greater preference to drink on dates than men (O’Hare, 1990). These differences between the current findings from Australia and those from other Western cultures are surprising given the abundance of evidence that suggest a cross-cultural generalizability of drinking behaviours across Western nations (Degenhardt et al., 2008; Monteiro, Rehm, Taylor, & Stockwell, 2008). However, given the scarcity
of research in this area at this stage, it cannot be said with conclusive confidence whether the current finding is a true reflection of differences in alcohol use between cultures, or whether it is simply a spurious finding or a result of sampling at a top university. It is also speculated that, given the rapid changes in the dating culture in recent times (Skrobot, 2010; Turner, 2003), the discrepant findings may represent a cohort effect as much of the existing research was conducted a decade or so ago. Thus further replication of this work is needed to verify the validity of current findings.

The current study further aimed to bring clarity to the divergent literature on the psychological and behavioural factors that contribute to alcohol use on dates. The results pertinent to RQ1 indicate that behavioural factors, such as one’s general drinking tendency and the partner’s alcohol use on a date, were significant predictors of one’s drinking behaviour on a date. That is, the more one tended to drink outside of dates and the more the dating partner drank, the likelihood of one’s drinking and the amount of alcohol consumed on dates increased. This finding corroborates the results of past studies that argued for the significance of drinking history (Borsari, Murphy, & Barnett, 2007; Ham & Hope, 2003; Quigley & Collins, 1999) and the importance of modelling effects on alcohol use between interacting pairs (Caudill & Marlatt, 1975; Larsen, Overbeek, Cranic, & Engels, 2012; Lied & Alan Marlatt, 1979; Quigley & Collins, 1999). It was also revealed that gender was an important predictor in alcohol use on dates. The current finding that males were significantly more likely to drink on dates agrees with and a body of research which depicts heavier alcohol consumption among men compared to women (e.g. O'Malley & Johnston, 2002).
By contrast, analyses also revealed that psychological factors, such as anxiety, impulsivity, and expectancies, had no uniquely significant influences on date-drinking behaviour. The dissociation between the effects of psychological and behavioural factors indicated that the dynamics of behavioural factors, specifically one’s drinking habits and partner’s alcohol use, outweighs psychological processes in exerting influences on date-drinking behaviour. This finding conflicts with the abundant literature (e.g. Cooper, 1994; Ham et al., 2007; Urbán, Kökönyei, & Demetrovics, 2008) that showed an association between the aforementioned psychological factors and drinking behaviour. One possible explanation for the inconsistency between existing and current findings is that previous research often examined psychological factors in isolation. In contrast, the current study investigated psychological and behavioural factors concomitantly and revealed that the behavioural factors are stronger than psychological factors in predicting drinking on dates. An alternative explanation may stem from the differences in research focus between the current and past studies. Whereas existing literature is dominated by investigation into general drinking behaviour, the present study was context-specific and questionnaire items were designed to maximise the assessment of date events and dating relationships. The possible disparity between context-specific and context-nonspecific research is illustrated by findings of substantial variability in within-subject alcohol use across different settings (Demers et al., 2002; Kairouz et al., 2002). These studies have also shown that the drinking-context accounted for unique variance in alcohol use.

Additional analyses were also performed to investigate RQ2 and explore the effects of drinking on the feelings of intimacy on dates. Multiple regression analyses revealed drinking on dates predicted women’s feeling of intimacy, but not men’s sense of
intimacy. Specifically, the findings suggest that women’s feeling of intimacy towards their partner increases as their own level of alcohol consumption rises. Extending the plethora of studies on drinking and sexual outcomes (e.g. Cooper & Orcutt, 1997; Patrick & Maggs, 2009), the current finding attests to the facilitative effect of alcohol use on intimacy on dates. Although not assessed in the current study, previous literature proposed that the promotion of intimacy following alcohol consumption may occur via several avenues – increased self-disclosure (Caudill et al., 1987), increased positive affectivity and decreased negative affectivity (Sayette et al., 2012), and reduced inhibition (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997). Furthermore, current results showed that expectancy had a moderating effect between women’s drinking and their own feeling of intimacy. That is, women who had greater alcohol-date expectancies were more likely to experience increased intimacy after drinking. This finding mirrors previous research on sexual behaviours which revealed an interaction between alcohol use and expectancy on sexual behaviour (Patrick & Maggs, 2009). Drawing from expectancy theories (e.g. Cooper, 1994), the current moderation effect may reflect an activation of pre-existing beliefs following alcohol use, which then together guide one’s reactions, perception, and interpretation along an expectancy-congruent path.

It was remarkable to notice that, while women’s drinking facilitated their own feelings of intimacy, their partners drinking appeared to have a direct negative effect on women’s intimacy. This means that as partners’ alcohol consumption increased, the women’s feeling of intimacy at the end of the date decreased. This finding stands in stark contrast with previous research that links drinking partners with positive attributes. For instance, across a range of vignette and laboratory studies, individuals
who drank were perceived by their drinking or non-drinking partners as more sexual, extraverted, friendly, admirable, and responsive (Connors & Sobell, 1986; Corcoran, 1997; W. H. George, Cue, Lopez, Crowe, & Norris, 1995). In addition, male drinkers were often perceived to be more romantic than their sober counterparts (Borjesson & Dunn, 2001). On the other hand, there is also evidence that alcohol consumption has no effect on the perception of dating partners (Corcoran & Michels, 1997). In light of the varied results from previous studies, the exact reason for the current unexpected finding is unclear. Additional analyses showed the negative relationship between partners' drinking and one's post-date intimacy was not moderated by expectancies or length of the dating relationship. One possible explanation is the methodological differences across studies. Whereas the present study used participants' self-reported feelings of intimacy following partner's alcohol usage as the outcome variable of interest, previous studies focused on respondents' evaluation of drinking partners on trait-like dimensions. Rating tasks on trait-like fixed measures in vignette studies are also more likely to be influenced by stereotypes (George, et al., 1995), and thus may not be a full reflection of actual relationship state.

Gender differences emerged from the findings. It appears that women's feelings of intimacy are more susceptible to the influence of their own and their partner's drinking. In contrast, men's intimacy showed no associations with alcohol usage. Differential effects of drinking between men and women have been shown in previous research (Levitt & Cooper, 2010; Wilsnack & Wilsnack, 2013). This finding alsoparallels an earlier study that showed women who drank with their partners had more resilience against decline in marital satisfaction than their male partners (Hornish & Leonard, 2005). As such, this study adds weight to the notion that women may derive
greater relational benefit from their own alcohol usage compared to men.

Alternatively, the current non-significant associations between alcohol usage and men’s intimacy may not necessarily mean such relationships do not exist in the real world, but rather the strength of associations may be too small to be detected in this study. Power analyses suggest a sample of 100 men can afford greater than 80% power to uncover medium to large relationships in regression, though it may not have adequate power to detect small relationships (Green, 1991). Future studies may wish to employ a larger sample of male participants to verify the possible associations between drinking on a date and men’s feelings of intimacy.

Implication

The current study has research and practical implications. The results point to the significance of behavioural factors in predicting alcohol use on dates. The notion of behaviourism is not a new one. The influence of environmental contingency on animal and human behaviours has dominated psychological research in the early and mid-20th Century. However, the field of alcohol usage has overturned this research direction with an explosive growth of scholarly interest into the psychological mechanisms driving drinking behaviours. Contrary to this research trend, the present findings showed that, in dating situations, habitual behaviours (i.e. drink tendencies) and social influences (i.e. partner’s drinking) have greater proximal effects on one’s drinking behaviour than latent psychological factors. There is a body of literature that advocates for alcohol intervention to focus on psychological factors such as anxiety and expectancy (F. J. Hunter & Mazurek, 2004; Lau-Barraco & Dunn, 2008; Terlecki, Buckner, Larimer, & Copeland, 2011). While the efficacy of such a therapeutic approach has been demonstrated across numerous studies (Lau-Barraco & Dunn, 2008;
Wiers & Kummeling, 2004), the current result suggests that such conceptualization may not be effective if the target area of change is in dating situations.

Furthermore, recognizing the impact of alcohol use on intimacy has practical value. Factors that influence perception of relationship quality are critical at this stage of courtship as dating relationships, especially those in the early stages of formation, are vulnerable to dissolution (Felmlee et al., 1990; Le et al., 2010; Simpson, 1987). The results showed that drinking on dates has predictive value for women’s experience of intimacy, whereas general drinking tendency bares no association with relationship experiences. The finding that women’s intimacy was promoted by their own drinking but hindered by their partner’s drinking poses intriguing questions into the most appropriate drinking behaviour on dates if one wishes to enhance intimacy. The result suggests that the best alcohol-related way for women to feel intimate with partner is to drink on the date while their partners refrain from alcohol usage. On the other hand, it seems that women’s drinking on dates does not affect men’s feelings of intimacy.

Limitation

There are some caveats and limitations regarding this study that deserve attention. Firstly, this research was based on the experiences of university students, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other age groups. There are suggestions that the drinking patterns of university students differ from the remaining adult population (Karam, Kypri, & Salamoun, 2007; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002). Furthermore, the sample consisted mostly of low and moderate drinkers. The low representation of heavy drinkers in this sample limits the generalizability of results across all levels of alcohol consumption on dates. Moreover, participants were only
asked to recall their most recent dating experience. It is assumed that their responses represent a typical dating experience, though this assumption is not without flaws. In addition, this study was limited by its retrospective and cross-sectional design. As such, it is possible that individuals’ report of their dating experiences may suffer from retrospective bias in which their memory of the dates may be influenced by the outcome of the date or subsequent relationship events. The potential inaccuracy of retrospective data could be addressed in future studies using prospective diary and self-monitoring designs. Lastly, this study was limited by the sole use of self-report data. Dating is an interpersonal experience, but this study was unable to generate understanding of partners’ experiences in the dating situations. A subsequent study (Study Three) was designed to address this limitation by recruiting both partners in dating relationships in order to gain a dyadic perspective of relationship processes.

In conclusion, this study provided some insights into the pattern of drinking and dating, the factors that contributed to such pattern of alcohol use, as well as the relational consequences of alcohol use on dates. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, the results demonstrated the importance of one’s drinking history and partners’ drinking in predicting one’s alcohol use on dates. Furthermore, the current finding of the opposite effects between one’s drinking and partners’ drinking on women’s, but not men’s, intimacy underscored the complexity of the impact of alcohol use in perceived relationship quality. Romantic involvement in young adulthood is an important rite of passage and alcohol use within this context has implications for the course.
Chapter 4: Study Two

The literature review and the preceding study highlighted several key points – (1) alcohol use is a prevalent practice on dates among young adults, (2) drinking behaviors on dates can be predicted by the person’s drinking history and the partner’s alcohol usage, and (3) alcohol usage on dates by oneself and by partner have differential impact on one’s feeling of intimacy. The dating phase is a critical period of romantic relationship as it not only set the course for subsequent relational growth (Young et al., 2010), but this period is also subjected to greater vulnerability towards relational dissolution (Felmlee et al., 1990). Thus, the link between alcohol use and relational outcome is highly relevant to individuals at this early stage of courtship, and is therefore worthy of further investigation.

Using a qualitative interview design, the present study (Study Two) aimed to extend the findings of Study One by exploring the mechanisms that may affect the dating experience. One of the most widely studied psychological mechanisms in the field of alcohol research is expectancy. Alcohol-expectancies refer to anticipated effects of drinking (Cooper, 1994). The extant literature has identified a range of expectancies, including the expectation that alcohol consumption will enhance positive emotions, alleviate negative emotions, facilitate social interactions, and minimize social rejection (Cooper, 1994). Stemming from the research on general expectancies, recent studies have directed attention towards the operation of alcohol expectancies specific to romantic relationship development. To date, researchers have identified alcohol-relationship expectancy (Leonard & Mudar, 2004) and alcohol-intimacy expectancy (Wolf & Cooper, 2008). These pertain to expectations that alcohol
consumption will enhance the relationship quality and couple’s intimacy. The importance of alcohol-expectancy in dating relationships is illustrated in Study One, which revealed that individuals’ alcohol usage affects one’s feelings of intimacy in an expectancy-congruent manner. However, compared to the impressive body of literature on general drinking expectancies, there is limited research on dating couple’s expectation of the effects of alcohol consumption. Furthermore, the sparse research is limited by the sole use of questionnaire methodology derived from theory-driven conceptualization. As a result, it is unclear the extent to which the fixed and pre-structured questionnaire responses truly reflect dating couples’ expectations of the effects of drinking on their relationships. In addition, it will be fruitful for research to gain a greater understanding on whether these alcohol-date expectations translate to actual alcohol outcome on dates. Thus, this study began with two open-ended exploratory research questions:

Research question 1 (RQ1): Among young adults, what are the expected effects of alcohol consumption during a date?

Research question 2 (RQ2): What are the perceived consequences of alcohol usage on dates?

This study also aimed to identify ways through which alcohol usage can affect the experience and quality of the dating phase of romantic relationships. The Relational Turbulence Model (RTM) is a promising theory to draw from for this purpose as RTM accounts for the dyadic patterns of cognitions, emotions and behaviours when couples negotiate increasing commitment within the relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001, 2004). This theory is pertinent to the early stages of courtship as the initiation of a dating relationship, as well as the transition from casual to steady dating,
are marked by an escalation in partners’ level of commitment (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). RTM claims that the negotiation of commitment is tumultuous as the increased intensity and disruptions during this period of turbulence heighten individuals’ sensitivity to the signals in their environment (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010). The turbulence has been argued to be a necessary by-product of relational escalation, a process characterized by relational uncertainty and negotiation of interdependence between partners (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).

Relational uncertainty is an intrapersonal experience of the extent to which one have confidence about the interpersonal encounter (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). There are three source of relational uncertainty, including (1) self uncertainty, which refers to one’s doubts about one’s participation in the relationship, (2) partner uncertainty, which entails one’s doubts about their partner’s involvement in the relationship, and (3) relationship uncertainty, that is one’s doubts about the relationship itself.

Whereas self and partner uncertainties can be conceptualized as individual-level constructs, relationship uncertainty is a higher-level abstract construct about the ambiguity of two individuals as a social dyadic unit (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). On the other hand, the negotiation of interdependence is an interpersonal process which involves increasing mutual influence between partners on each other’s routines and behaviours (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). The negotiation of interdependence consist of two components: (1) partner’s interference, which refers to the degree to which a partner impedes one’s actions and goals, and (2) partner’s facilitation, which is defined as the extent to which one’s partner promote one’s performance in an activity and obtainment of goals (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).
The central premise of RTM highlights the heightened relational uncertainty and partner interference at relational transition periods (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). The first generation of this model predicted a curvilinear association which depicted an increasing sense of uncertainty at early stages of courtship as couples adjust to the new relationship status, whereas the sense of uncertainty subsides at later stages of courtship (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). RTM further hypothesized that partner’s interference peak initially prior to the establishment of more facilitative patterns of interdependence at later stages of the relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). These predictions are partially supported by empirical findings (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). However the results have not been consistently replicated (e.g. Solomon & Theiss, 2008).

In sum, drawing from a sizable body of literature and theories, RTM proposes two core processes – relational uncertainty and partner interference - that operate at varying degrees as a function of the romantic relationship trajectory. While the theoretical basis of this model is logically derived from the literature, close examination of the RTM literature revealed these two underlying constructs may not have rigorous empirical foundation. Firstly, it is questionable the extent to which the sources of relational uncertainty explicated in RTM is a true representation of real-world experiences as it was derived from interviews on only 10 college students (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999), and the methodology and analyses of the interviews were not elaborated. In the subsequent development of the multidimensional uncertainty scale, although self-uncertainty and partner-uncertainty achieved adequate psychometric properties, the study did not attest to the reliability of the measurement of relationship uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Secondly, in relation to
interdependence, while the associated scales have strong psychometrics (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999), the authors failed to explain how they determined in the first place the ways in which partners influence each other. Thus, although RTM has been employed in various studies (e.g. Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007; Theiss & Solomon, 2006), doubt is cast upon the theory in terms of its methodological operationalization. As such, the literature has applied a theory where the basis of the constructs has not been empirically substantiated. Moreover, the extant research on this theoretical framework relies on quantitative methods, which may be constrained by their numerical representation of fixed responses, and hence limited in their ability to gain in-depth insights into the real-world experiences. Thus, the following research questions were formulated to generate greater understanding into young adults’ experiences in early romantic relationships development within the RTM model:

RQ3: What domains of relational uncertainty characterize the experiences of young adults on dates?

RQ4: What domains of interdependence characterize the experiences of young adults on dates?

As noted in previous paragraphs, some studies have failed to replicate the curvilinear association of uncertainty and interference as a function of intimacy (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Solomon & Theiss, 2008). The inconsistent finding led to a redirection of empirical focus away from the transition from casual to serious romantic involvement, and instead to other relational transitions. That is, the second generation of RTM claimed that relational turbulence peaks at times of transition, rather than varying as a function of the level of intimacy. Thus far, the impact of relational uncertainty and partner interference has been illustrated in couples coping
with fertility issues (Steuber & Solomon, 2008), breast cancer diagnoses (Weber & Solomon, 2008), depression (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012), and those who returned from military deployment (Theiss & Knobloch, 2011).

Within the RTM framework, alcohol use can be considered in relation to turbulence in romantic relationships. This model states that turbulence is manifested during relational transitions. As argued by Knobloch (2007), “transition” accounts for more than shifts in the status of the relationship, but also encompasses changes in individual’s pattern of behaviour. By extension, RTM implies that partners confronted with alcohol use may be faced with relationship uncertainty and partner interference. In support of this argument, research has alluded to a link between drinking and the experience of relational turbulence. Individuals who were ready to reflect and change their drinking behaviours often experienced worry and anxiety (DiClemente & Hughes, 1990). Some of these worries and anxiety may be related to their concerns over the affective and relational consequences of their alcohol use (Wanberg, 1983). In addition to the uncertainty related to one’s drinking, it has also been suggested that partners’ drinking can also evoke feelings of doubts and uncertainty (Emmers & Canary, 1996). Furthermore, alcohol use within romantic partnership can interfere with relationship and personal functioning. It is widely cited that heavy drinking between romantically-linked partners disrupt daily tasks and relationship functioning (Kearns-Bodkin & Leonard, 2005; Leadley, Clark, & Caetano, 2000; Torvik, Roysamb, Gustavson, Idfast, & Tambs, 2013). Furthermore, alcohol use between partners, especially when consumed on a disconcordant or heavy manner, has been linked with increased likelihood of disagreements (Fischer et al., 2005), lower level of happiness (Meiklejohn, Connor, & Kypri, 2012), and poor
relationship quality (Kearns-Bodkin & Leonard, 2005). Similar findings have been
demonstrated across the literature, with one research review concluding that alcohol
use is maladaptive for relationships as it is associated with greater relational
dissatisfaction, negative interaction patterns, and violent behaviours towards partners
(Marshal, 2003). Although these findings reiterated the existence of a link between
alcohol usage and the experience of relational turbulence, the current understanding is
drawn from a body of literature that is largely confined to research on heavy and
problematic alcohol use. As such, there remains scope for further investigation into
the proposal that alcohol use contributes a factor in the experience of relationship
turbulence among dating couples with non-problematic drinking patterns.

Accordingly, the following research questions were pursued:

RQ5: What, if any, is the relationship between alcohol involvement
on dates and the experiences of relational turbulence?

Method

Research approach

Study Two employed an ethnographic perspective to explore individuals’ perceptions
and interpretations of the world (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This qualitative semi-
structured interview study used a hybrid inductive and deductive thematic analysis
approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to describe the dating
experiences of young adults and the role of alcohol at this stage of relationship
development. The purpose of this method was to integrate data-driven and theory-
based codes to uncover patterns and differences in participants’ responses and thereby
elucidate the social phenomenon of dating and alcohol. The interviews were
conducted between September and November 2011, i.e. 3 to 8 months after the participants completed the Study One questionnaire. Approval for this study was granted by the local human research ethics committee.

**Participants**

Participants for this study were purposefully sampled (Marshall, 1996) from the pool of individuals who completed Study 1 between March to June 2011. In Study One, participants were informed that they may be invited for a follow-up study in 3-6 months’ time. The criterion for inclusion in this study was participants’ self-reported level of alcohol consumption in Study One. The AUDIT data were divided by gender and classified into low (30.2% of female sample in study 1; 33.7% of male sample), medium (31.3% of female sample; 34.7% of male sample) and high (38.5% of female sample; 31.7% of male sample) drinkers. To maximize effective collection of data on a spectrum of experience, only the low and high drinkers were invited to return for the interview via the email contacts they provided in the questionnaire.

**Data collection**

At the beginning of the session, participants completed a brief 11-items questionnaire. These items assessed participants’ dating and drinking behaviours in the preceding 3 months. This questionnaire is displayed in Appendix E.

This study utilized a semi-structured interviewing approach (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994) whereby participants were encouraged to discuss their dating and drinking experiences while being guided by a set of predetermined open-ended questions (see Appendix F). These questions centered on four areas, which were (1)
participants’ experiences in the most recent successful and/or unsuccessful dates, (2) their evaluation of themselves, their date-partners and the relationship at the time of the date, (3) the role of alcohol on the dates, and (4) their beliefs and attitudes regarding drinking on dates. The interview also included unplanned questions that emerged from the dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. The purposes of the unplanned questions were to clarify participants’ responses, elicit greater details, or encourage further elaboration. The extent to which the researcher encouraged participants or asked probing questions depended on the participant ability to elaborate on their dating experiences and provide sufficient information surrounding the aforementioned areas. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer does not play a passive role, but rather is actively involved in the co-construction of data (Seidman, 2013). The interviewer recognized her potential influences in participants’ responses and hence strived to impose minimal influence on participants’ discourse by avoiding interruptions and following the participants’ lead as much as possible. Participants were informed that they may decline to answer questions without providing reasons. At the end of the interview, participants were also given the opportunity to discuss freely experiences and beliefs related to dating and alcohol that had not been asked for. The benefit of this semi-structured approach was that it provided participants with the opportunity to elaborate on their responses while maximizing the gathering of comparable qualitative data across participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The interviews took place in a quiet room at The Australian National University and participants were interviewed independently. All participants consented to the audio recording of the interviews. The interviews were preceded by some “small talk” and an explanation of the interview process to enhance rapport and reduce participants’
apprehension. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to discuss any concerns elicited by the interview process, in addition to completing a related questionnaire. The average time taken to complete the entire interview procedure was 52.4 mins ($SD = 8.0$).

**Data analysis**

All audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and entered into the QSR NVivo 9 data management program. The coding and theme-identification of the interview responses were conducted using a mixed inductive and deductive analytic approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach enables the identification of themes that are both pertinent to the participants’ experiences and informed by the literature (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Prior to reviewing the transcripts, a coding manual was created using Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) approach to code development. The development of coding categories was guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework (see Appendix G). Examples of thematic coding of the transcripts are displayed in Appendix H. To assess the reliability of the codes, two randomly selected sections of transcripts were independently coded by the researcher and a student volunteer using the predefined codes. Any differences in coding resulted in further refinement of the coding manual. When the researcher and the volunteer coder achieved agreement on the coding of the selected transcripts, the researcher continued to code all remaining transcripts using the coding manual. The coded texts were reduced and organized into their respective categories. Subsequently, the similarities and differences within the text in each category were identified and the emerging patterns were defined into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).
Once the themes were identified, they were entered into SPSS Statistics 20 in accordance to the participants who voiced those themes. Due to the nominal nature of the data, Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to determine differences between participant subgroups and chi-square tests for independence were used to determine if relationships exist between the themes.

Results

Participant Characteristics at Wave Two

Of the 191 participants who were invited, 44 (20 males, 24 females; $M_{age} = 19.82$, $SD = 1.57$; 75.0% Caucasian, 25.0% Asian) agreed to participate in this follow-up study. On average, these participants went on 4.43 dates in the past 3 months ($median = 3.00$; range = 1-21). There were no statistically significant differences in sex, age, ethnicity, and the number of prior romantic relationships between participants who returned to this follow-up study and those who did not. Another 16 participants also agreed to be interviewed, but they were not included in the analyses as they reported they did not go on any dates within the 3 months of the interview. This final sample size of 44 was considered to be sufficient after the participants’ responses had reached a saturation point where no new information emerged during analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The participants were grouped into low and high drinkers in accordance to their self-reported pattern of alcohol usage in Study One. Eighteen low drinkers and 26 high drinkers participated in the current study, and their characteristics are displayed in
Table 4.1. There were no significant differences between low and high drinkers in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, and the number of prior romantic relationships. Furthermore, they did not differ significantly on the number of dates they had attended in the past 3 months ($p > .05$). However, an examination of the proportion of dates where drinking was involved showed that high drinkers ($M = 41.4\%$ of the dates; $SD = 8.1$) were more likely to consume alcohol on dates compared to low drinkers ($M = 16.2\%$ of the dates; $SD = 5.1$; $t_{(39.54)} = -3.13$, $p = .003$). Moreover, on dates where drinking was involved, high drinkers consumed greater quantities of alcohol than low drinkers ($M_{\text{high drinkers}} = 2.27$ standard drinks, $SD = 1.79$; $M_{\text{low drinkers}} = .67$ standard drinks, $SD = .89$; $t_{(38.79)} = -3.91$, $p < .001$).
Table 4.1. Characteristics of low and high drinkers who participated in Study Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low drinkers $(n = 18)$</th>
<th>High drinkers $(n = 26)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex (n)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
<td>19.67 ± 0.41</td>
<td>19.92 ± 0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity (n)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of prior romantic</strong></td>
<td>1.7 ± 0.3</td>
<td>2.5 ± 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of dates attended</strong></td>
<td>3.5 ± 0.9</td>
<td>5.1 ± 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>in past 3 months</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of dates</strong></td>
<td>16.2 ± 5.1*</td>
<td>46.2 ± 8.1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>where drinking was involved</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity of alcohol consumed</strong></td>
<td>0.67 ± 0.21*</td>
<td>2.27 ± 0.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>on dates in past 3 months</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(standard drinks)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates significant differences between low and high drinkers $(p < .05)$

**Alcohol Use on Dates**

Among the 44 participants, 29 (65.9%) had been on a date within the 3 months prior to the interview in which alcohol was involved. Of these 29 dates, 23 (79.3%) involved both partners drinking, 2 (6.9%) involved interviewee drinking only and 4 (13.8%) involved the partner drinking only. The interview questions related to the impact of alcohol use on dating experiences were given only to the participants who went on dates where drinking was involved.
Alcohol Expectancies (RQ1)

Participants were not asked explicitly about their expectations of the effects of drinking. Rather, the following five themes emerged naturally from their discourse on their drinking experiences on dates. The frequency with which participants expressed these themes is displayed in Table 4.2.

The most frequently anticipated effect of alcohol mentioned by participants was *coping* expectancy. This encompasses expectations that alcohol would alleviate unpleasant emotions that may be elicited in dating situations, including feelings of anxiety, awkwardness, formality, inhibition, and uncertainty. As one participant stated, “Personally, I am quite shy and I don’t like to open up to new people. If I have a drink, it makes me feel more relaxed and gives me the confidence to be myself” (participant number 119, female). Another participant added that “[alcohol] breaks down barriers when you would normally be self-conscious on the date... Also those barriers of awkwardness or shy normally are thrown away when I have a drink [be]cause I loosen up a bit more. I think that’s more appealing for someone who is shy” (325, m).

Another anticipated effect of alcohol consumption was *social* expectancy. Participants recounted the expected benefits of alcohol use in facilitating interactions on both the individual and dyadic levels. Within the individual level, alcohol was seen as an aid to promote one’s interpersonal skills: “When I start drinking, I can be more talkative, more outspoken” (10, f). Additionally, the anticipated effects of alcohol did not stem solely from its consumption, but rather it was seen as a tool that enhances the dyadic interaction: “It’s a bridge of communication. We can discuss
what we are drinking, leading to more intimate conversation” (241, m). This expectation of social facilitation was neatly summarized by a participant: “Alcohol is one of the greatest social lubricants in the world, which is probably why we love it so much” (413, m).

Drinking to conform to cultural expectation was another recurring theme. In some instances, drinking was seen as an activity that is expected in certain date settings: “it’s a bar and it’s weird to not drink alcohol” (10, f). At other times, participants explained that drinking is “more a social, not protocol, but standard thing to do” (346, m). Hence some participants expressed the expectation that drinking would reduce the likelihood of social rejection or judgement: “I guess just having a drink because it’s socially unacceptable to not have a drink in your hand” (33, f). Extending beyond the desire to conform to the societal norm, the need to match partner’s drinking to avoid negative emotive or relational outcome was also raised as a reason for drinking: “If the other person is drinking, then you join them, otherwise it’s a bit awkward” (346, m).

The expectation of enhancement effects also arose from participants’ discourse. Participants revelled in the likelihood that alcohol will enhance the positive emotions in dates such as fun and sense of enjoyment. This expectancy is summarized by one participant who stated “[alcohol] added a sort of entertaining funny element to dating” (305, f). For some participants, alcohol plays a central role in their dating lives. This is illustrated by one participant’s comment that “I need alcohol to have fun” (148, m) and another who stated “without alcohol, it would’ve been more tiresome and “I want to get out of here”. Maybe not like that, but a bit more boring”
Lastly, analysis of participants’ discourse on their dating experiences also revealed the endorsement of *relational* expectancy. At times, alcohol was seen as an impression management tool to enhance the interpersonal attraction: “When we had dinner, I decided to have a drink instead of a soft drink because I want to be seen more mature” (4, f). Some participants raised the notion that alcohol consumption enhances the sense of connection between partners: “When we were both drinking, we felt we were on the same page” (97, f). As a result, a participant raised the expectation that alcohol assists in relationship formation: “Drinking can hasten the time from strangers to friends and then from friends to couples” (10, f). Furthermore, there were several participants who expressed uncertainty regarding relational escalation and anticipated that alcohol could be used as a tool to explore relational options: “When I like this girl and I am not quite certain whether she likes me, I will try to kiss her and, if it doesn’t work out, I can afterwards go “sorry I was drunk”” (413, m).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectancy themes</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some participants voiced multiple themes within the categories. Hence the percentage of responses exceeds 100.*
Mann-Whitney U test revealed males and females did not differ in the frequency with which they voiced expectancy themes ($p > .05$). There was also no difference between low and high drinkers in expectancy themes ($p > .05$).

**Impact of Alcohol Use on Dates (RQ2)**

Analysis of participants' responses revealed 15 themes in relation to the impact of alcohol use on their dates. Given the volume of themes, in addition to the low endorsement rate for some of these themes, a summary of the positive and negative alcohol experiences will be shown in table illustrations (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4). (See Appendix H for a detailed explanation and examples of each theme). There were no significant differences between men and women in the frequency with which positive ($U=92.50, N_1=14, N_2=15, p>.05$) and negative ($U=93.00, N_1=14, N_2=26, p>.05$) impact was reported. Similarly, low and high drinkers did not differ significantly in the frequency with which they reported positive ($U=190.00, N_1=18, N_2=26, p>.05$) and negative ($U=173.00, N_1=18, N_2=26, p>.05$) alcohol-impact.
Table 4.3. Frequency of responses for the positive impact of alcohol use on dates among participants who went to a dating activity involving alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of the positive impact</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate conversation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get to know each other better</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become more extraverted</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase flirting and expression of romantic interest</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational escalation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve date atmosphere</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Some participants voiced multiple themes within the categories. Hence the percentage of responses exceeds 100.
Table 4.4. Frequency of responses for the negative impact of alcohol use on dates among participants who went to a dating activity involving alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of the negative impact</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displayed negative behaviour</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destructive verbal communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicitation or exacerbation of negative emotions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of alcoholic beverage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to drive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got drunk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty regarding one’s evaluation of partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive self-focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Some participants voiced multiple themes within the categories. Hence the percentage of responses exceeds 100.

Themes of uncertainty (RQ3)

There were three content areas of relational uncertainty that emerged in participants’ discourse. These were self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and alcohol uncertainty. The frequency with which these subthemes were voiced is illustrated in Table 4.5. Mann-Whitney U analyses showed no significant differences between males and females in the frequency with which they reported uncertainty subthemes ($U = 93.00, N_1 = 14, N_2 = 26, p > .05$). Low drinkers and high drinkers also did not differ in the frequency in which they reported these themes ($p > .05$).

Self & partner uncertainty. There were four subthemes of self-uncertainty embedded in participants’ description of their recent dating experiences. The same 4
subthemes also emerged for uncertainties related to the partner. One of these themes was the evaluation of oneself and partner. This refers to concerns that participants had about their appearances, decisions and actions within the date situations: “I was worried whether I would be able to keep the conversation going on the date...would I have a pimple at the time, those kind of ridiculous things.” (317, m). Furthermore, participants also speculated on how they were being perceived by their partners. For instance, one participant noted “it was hard to decipher what her interpretation of me was” (361, m), while another participant was “uncertain what he thought of me to start off with, whether he thought I was just going along with it, it really confused me” (348, f).

Another subtheme centered on uncertainty regarding the level of romantic interest. Participants questioned the nature of the attraction: “I knew he liked me, that was really obvious. But I was wondering how much and whether I liked him” (28, f). On the other hand, doubts were also raised regarding the extent to which one’s partner is romantically interested in oneself: “Like I wonder what she is thinking, does she like me, does she not like me” (40, m) Participants also queried whether the interest is beyond that of friendship, that is, the extent to which one is interested in the other person as a steady dating-partner or spouse: “I have doubts that whether this guy is the kind of person I want... I feel really good when I hang around with him. But his attitude and the things he talk about make me kind of doubt whether he would be a good partner for me in the future” (23, f).

Another subtheme represented the readiness for relational escalation. More specifically, some participants discussed their ambivalence regarding their readiness
to increase the commitment within the relationship. For example, one participant stated "I guess I wasn’t sure whether I want to go down that track with relationship" (118, m), while another participant noted "I knew that I wanted to stay single, but also that maybe I was making a mistake because she was a great girl" (346, m).

Participants were also concerned about the extent to which their partners wished for escalation of the relationship status: "I got the vibe that what we were doing, like going out on a couple of dates and hooking up, that was good for the time being, but I wasn’t picking up where she wanted to take the next step" (393, m).

The subtheme of uncertainty related to the negotiation of commitment within the relationship also emerged. After the participants made a decision regarding their wish to increase their commitment within the relationship, they expressed uncertainty in the way they would communicate their decisions and achieve the desired relational escalation. As illustrated by a participant who wanted to enter into a steady dating relationship, "I was nervous and worried, a bit uncomfortable saying it, I don’t really know how to ask him to be my boyfriend" (305, f). In contrast, some participants did not wish to pursue the romantic relationship. They also experienced a sense of uncertainty: "At the end of it, I know we were just friends. I guess I was uncertain how I would leave it" (33, f). Furthermore, participants raised doubts regarding how they should respond should their partner raise the issue of commitment: "I just want to be friends with her. I am worried that if she says something, like asking to become boyfriend and girlfriend, I don’t know what to say" (311, m).

**Relationship uncertainty.** Participants also identified uncertainties about their dating relationships. There were four subthemes that emerged from the
transcribed material. One subtheme relates to the uncertainty regarding the *compatibility* between the partners. Participants expressed doubts about the extent to which they and their partners were a good match for long-term intimate relationships. For instance, one participant noted “I am not really sure whether we are really suitable for each other” (10, f).

Another subtheme that arose was the uncertainty regarding the *boundaries* of the relationship. This refers to their self-reported ambiguous understanding of the actions that are appropriate within the relationship: “I guess I want to know... What’s going to happen? Are you going to call each other? Or is it a really relaxed sort of thing? And I did worry that it was too relaxed and it was too superficial without anyone ever saying I am upset about it? (51, m)”

In the early phases of courtship, participants emphasized the uncertainty they experienced regarding the *status* of their relationships. This includes their confusion about the definition of their relationship: “I still not sure whether that is a relationship” (23, f). Furthermore, participants also conveyed their ambivalence about the level of commitment within the relationship: “We were both obviously more than friends but didn’t know whether it is a committed relationship, so we both just avoided giving a straight answer” (112, m).

The theme of uncertainty regarding the *future* of the relationship also arose from the transcribed material. This theme refers to the worries disclosed by the participants about the direction and the nature of their relationships in the future. A participant, for example, noted, “I guess after [the date], I was still uncertain about where we are
Similarity, another participant remarked, “I was still a little bit unsure on where it was going, what was happening, if it was going to stay in this limbo zone” (305, f).

**Alcohol uncertainty.** One content area of uncertainty related to alcohol use captured the questions participants had about their decisions and actions. Some participants were unsure what the appropriate actions were when their partners were drinking. For instance, one participant noted “I don’t know what to do when he gets drunk. Should I leave him there or bring him home?” (128, f). Additionally, participants expressed doubts about their decisions or actions made while intoxicated: “We were not the same, we just act stupid and the next day we felt terrible and like “why did I do that” and I am like “why did you do that?” and it didn’t seem like we were having fun” (197, f).

Another source of alcohol uncertainty centred on individuals’ evaluation of their drinking partners. The doubts arose when participants inferred negative qualities on the basis of their partners’ drinking behaviour: “What if he’s an alcoholic? I wouldn’t want to be with a guy who drinks on a constant basis or drink too much, that’s not good, not healthy” (68, f).
Table 4.5. Frequency of uncertainty themes raised by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of uncertainty</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Proportion of sample¹ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self &amp; partner uncertainty</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic interest</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness for relational escalation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation of commitment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship uncertainty</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol uncertainty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions and action</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Some participants voiced multiple themes within the categories. Hence the responses within each category may exceed 100%.

**Themes of Interdependence (RQ4)**

There were two content areas of partner interdependence that emerged from the discourse – facilitation and interference. The frequency in which these themes were reported is shown in Table 4.6. Mann-Whitney U analyses showed no significant differences between males and females in the frequency with which they reported global independence themes (facilitation and interference) \( (p > .05) \). Low drinkers
and high drinkers also did not differ in the frequency in which they reported these themes \( p > .05 \).

**Facilitation.** Participants identified 2 ways in which their partners facilitate their daily lives. One of the subthemes centred on the extension of social network. Participants identified the friendships offered by their partners as one of the ways in which their partners facilitate their everyday lives: “I consider him one of my close friends at that time” (97, f).

Another subtheme referenced the notion of emotional wellbeing. Participants discussed their romantic partners’ ability to promote positive emotions in everyday life: “You know the saying see the world through rose-tinted glasses, that’s what it feels like when we started going out” (111, f). Similarly, some participants recognized their partners’ assistance in the alleviation of negative emotions when they were distressed: “He can be a bit of distraction. If I am having a rough time or busy with work and just get away from it all, he can take my mind off it” (119, f).

**Interference.** In contrast to the few subthemes of facilitation, participants identified a host of ways in which their partners interfere with their everyday lives. One subtheme pertained to the interference in social relationships as a result of the budding romantic relationship. As one participant explained, “I was a bit more secretive [be]cause I didn’t want my friends to know cause I didn’t know if I wanted to take it further. I knew if I told them it will be a big deal” (21, f). This quote is also an illustration of the link between the participant’s sense of uncertainty and her perceived interference from her partner.
Another subtheme involved the disturbance to one’s routine. A participant, for example, commented that “around that time, she was affecting me a lot. My schedule was arranged based on her. So if she’s free in the afternoon, then we would meet in the afternoon and move my other things later” (419, m). Some participants described the consequences of the changes in routine on their academic and vocational performance: “He played a dominant role in when we see each other or not, or what we do. That can be like a big distraction from school” (119, f). Other participants noted changes in their usual behaviours in order to accommodate partners’ lifestyle: “I don’t really drink a lot and he does drink quite a lot... I think he finds it quite strange that I don’t drink a lot. So if he is drinking, then I will say I have a little glass of wine too” (305, f).

While some described behavioural interference from their partners, other explained that the hindrance was more covert. Some participants elaborated on the intrusiveness of their thoughts about their partners: “My daily activities were the same... But when I was doing these kinds of things, I always think about him, I cannot get him out of my mind” (23, f). Some of the rumination content appeared to be related to the sense of uncertainty that the participants felt: “I started to spend more time thinking about him, or thinking about whether we will be in a relationship” (10, f).

Although some participants identified the facilitative effects of having a romantic partner on their emotional wellbeing, others reported the elicitation of negative or distressing emotions. A participant, for example, remarked: “He played quite big of a role in my life. Probably more than I like. I was quite stressed about it, but I was like
I don’t want to be stressed” (21, f). Others described the emotional interference from their partners as arising from the uncertainty that was elicited in this early stage of the relationship. “Just before things started to get serious, when I wasn’t sure if she was really interested in me, she was affecting me a fair bit because I was anxious all the time” (123, m). This, once again, highlights the intersection between participants’ sense of uncertainty and their perception of partner interference.

Furthermore, participants articulated that partner’s alcohol usage, especially heavy alcohol consumption, undermined the date and the development of their relationships. One participant, for instance, explained: “It was annoying when he got too drunk and that kind of ruined the night” (141, f). At times, partners’ drinking was viewed as undesirable and repelling, which impeded relationship escalation. “He was drinking copious amount of alcohol. I think that’s pretty unattractive” (68, f). One participant summed up how drinking on dates can defeat the pursuit of dating goals: “Usually at the beginning of the date, we have some purpose. For example, we want to know each other better or we want to carry our relationship further. When he drank too much during the date, in the end, I had no idea what he was saying or what he was doing. The date has totally changed” (23, f).

Additionally, the discourse revealed the notion that alcohol-interference was strongest when there was discrepancy in dating partners’ alcohol consumption. For example, one participant reported: “I feel uncomfortable being with him, who always get drunk, because I will always be sober and have to take care of him” (20, f). Some participants noted that there may be negative evaluations of partner and relationship when they and their partner’s drinking were discordant. When describing his
perception of a non-drinking dating partner, this participant stated: "Her image just deteriorated because if you want to hang out with me, I am a drinker, she must at least know how to drink. Also it's a preview about future. If I go out with friends, where we can go will be limited by her" (241, m). Similarly, another drinking participant painted an unfavourable evaluation of their non-drinking partner: "Unless she had some sort of reason for not drinking, it was a negative feeling and I felt pressured not to drink as well. If she wasn't drinking because she didn't feel like it and it was a setting that I am used to, I would say she is not a fun person or not into the same kind of fun I am" (246, m). Overall, participants noted the dissimilarities in alcohol usage between dating partners can interfere with relationship development.

Table 4.6. Frequency of responses for the themes of interdependence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes of interdependence</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Proportion of sample (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercourse</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional wellbeing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol-interference</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Facilitation                     | 9   | 20.5                     |
| Emotional wellbeing              | 5   | 11.4                     |
| Social                           | 4   | 9.1                      |

1Some participants voiced multiple themes within the categories. Hence the responses within each category may exceed 100%. 


Discussion

This study drew on the RTM to illuminate the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes within dating relationships that may be affected by couple’s alcohol usage. As such, the primary focus of this study was to explore individuals’ experiences of turbulence in dating relationships, i.e. their sense of uncertainty and partner interdependence, through their discourse. In drawing links between relational turmoil and alcohol usage, this study aimed to illustrate possible ways in which drinking can affect individuals’ experiences in the early phase of their romantic relationships.

The Anticipated Effects of Alcohol Consumption (RQ1)

Scholars (e.g. Cooper, 1994; Jones et al., 2001; Kuntsche et al., 2005) have largely agreed that the endorsement of alcohol-expectancy is a critical factor that drives drinking behaviour. Five themes of date-alcohol expectancies were revealed in participants’ discussion of their alcohol use on dates. These include enhancement, social, coping, conformity, and relational expectancies. The former four themes support the proposed drinking motives in Cooper’s (1994) four-factor model. On the other hand, the emergence of relational expectancy in this study alludes to a distinct factor that operates in intimate relationships. Previous studies have shown people have different expectations and behaviours in specific situations (Arriaga, Agnew, Capezza, & Lehmiller, 2008; Kairouz et al., 2002). Thus far, the literature has proposed some theory-driven alcohol expectancies related to relationship functioning, such as feelings of intimacy, openness, and sexual enhancement (Leonard & Mudar, 2004), as well as self-disclosure and feelings of closeness (Wolf & Cooper, 2008). The theme of relational expectancy in this study is an overarching category that
encapsulates the conceptualizations from the above discrete research. However, it is the spontaneous emergence of this theme within participants' natural discourse that accentuates the validity and real-life operation of these constructs.

**The Consequences of Alcohol Usage on Date (RQ2)**

Participants reported diverse consequences that resulted from drinking on dates. Consistent with previous research into the subjective effects of alcohol usage (e.g. Nystrom, 1992; Park, 2004), most participants simultaneously identified both positive and negative drinking. It has been contended that the experiences of positive and negative impact have direct and indirect (via strengthening or weakening expectancies) effects on alcohol consumption (Cox & Klinger, 1988; Nystrom, 1992). The reported alcohol-outcome in this study does not appear to include extreme positive or negative encounters. Thus, it was encouraging to note that the participants did not experience dire negative drinking consequences noted in other research, such as violence and unwanted sexual activities (e.g. Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, & Turner, 1999). A reason for the lack of report of extreme alcohol-events may be the methodological differences between current study and available research. While previous studies utilized anonymous questionnaires, the nature of face-to-face interview in this study can be confronting. As such, participants may not wish to report extreme consequences for fear of embarrassment or a desire to conform to perceived socially-acceptable behaviours. Despite this limitation, the reported alcohol-consequences illustrated that drinking on dates is akin to a double-edged sword and has the potential to both enhance and impede relationship development.
Experiences of Uncertainty and Interdependence in Dating Relationships (RQ3 & RQ4)

Previous research suggested that uncertainty is an intrinsic element of budding relationships (Knobloch & Miller, 2008; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Consistent with prior literature, three content areas of uncertainty emerged from the participants' descriptions of their dating experiences — self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and alcohol uncertainty. (Alcohol uncertainty will be discussed in later sections.) The subthemes of self and partner uncertainty raised by participants include doubts about one's evaluation, romantic interest, readiness for relational escalation, and the negotiation of commitment. While the former three subthemes resemble Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) content of self and partner uncertainty, the subtheme of uncertainty in the negotiation of commitment is one that has not been identified in previous RTM literature. Nevertheless, previous studies have suggested that at times of uncertainty, individuals tend to avoid discussion of delicate matters, especially those that are important or threatening to the self or the relationship (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). This tendency to suppress communication contradicts one's desire for commitment change, and may further exacerbate the sense of uncertainty. In relation to relationship uncertainty, the emerged subthemes encompass questions about partners' compatibility, relationship boundaries, relationship status, and the future of the partnership. These themes echo the subscales identified in the original measure of relationship uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). These qualitative findings add weight to the validity of the conceptualization of relational uncertainty proposed in the RTM (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).
Two content areas of partner interdependence arose from the interviews, namely \textit{facilitation} and \textit{interference}. The emerging themes showed that partners both facilitated and hindered participants' social relationships and emotional wellbeing. In addition, participants identified additional ways of partner interference including disruption to daily routines and cognitive activity. The emergence of multiple themes under the interdependence construct contradicts Knobloch and Solomon's (1999) unidimensional measure of partner facilitation and interference. Indeed recent research lends support for a multidimensional perspective as several domains of partner interference have been found among couples grappling with depression (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012) and infertility issues (Steuber & Solomon, 2008). The findings of emotional and cognitive interdependence in relationships replicates results from previous studies (Clark & Reis, 1988) and extends the original RTM conceptualization which focuses solely on the dyadic behavioural influences (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Interestingly, the frequency with which partner interference was reported was at least two times greater than partner facilitation. This may be explained by the RTM assertion that partner interference is more pronounced in early stages of courtship before partners gradually establish a more coordinated and mutually beneficial interaction system (Solomon & Theiss, 2008). Nevertheless, while the literature has primarily focused on partner interference (e.g. Knobloch & Delaney, 2012), the emergence of facilitation themes in dating experiences is a reminder of the positive impact of early relationship development.

\textbf{The Role of Alcohol in the Experience of Relational Turbulence (RQ5)}

RTM proposes that relational turbulence is a result of two processes – experiences of uncertainty and perception of partner interference (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).
Consistent with the deduction in the introduction, the finding of this study illustrates that alcohol use can contribute to the experiences of uncertainty and partner interference. As articulated by the participants, alcohol has an effect on individuals’ sense of uncertainty. The subthemes of *alcohol uncertainty* raised by the participants captured the doubts they had about their actions, decisions and evaluations when they and/or their partners were drinking on dates. Although one of the primary dating goals is to achieve a reduction of uncertainty (Mongeau et al., 2007), the involvement of alcohol on dates can have a counter-productive effect on this dating goal.

Alcohol involvement also has an impact on the interdependence system. The RTM conceptualization of interdependence (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001), as well as the subsequent research that used this model (e.g. Steuber & Solomon, 2008), centres on partners’ mutual influence in the attainment of everyday goals. Broadening this perspective, the crux of the interviews in this study grounded participants to their most recent dating experiences and thereby generated greater specificity in the understanding of the facilitating and interfering effects of alcohol on dating goals. Although participants did not make explicit remarks about how drinking assisted with their goals, the facilitative effects of alcohol can be observed through the reported positive consequences of drinking. As the positive impact voiced by participants overlaps largely with the prominent goals of dating such as relational escalation, getting to know each other and having fun (Mongeau et al., 2007; Mongeau et al., 2004), it can be deduced that drinking on dates can have positive effect on couple’s interdependence system. At the same time, alcohol use also impeded the attainment of dating goals. This is not only demonstrated by the negative consequences reported by participants, but also in the emergence of alcohol-interference themes.
Participants' noted that drinking on dates can affect the progression of the date, as well as negative evaluation of the partner and viability of the budding romantic relationship. This finding corroborates with research that asserts alcohol usage is a critical component of young adulthood (e.g. Arnett, 2000; Prentice & Miller, 1993) and illustrates that the prioritization of drinking in young adults' lives have the potential to affect romantic relationship development.

The finding that alcohol use contributes to dating couples' experiences of relational turbulence has clinical implications. The RTM model argues that the feeling of turmoil at times of relational transition is a part of the normative trajectory of romantic partnership, and the successful navigation of these challenges is critical for the development and maintenance of a relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001; Theiss & Solomon, 2008). In fact, there is evidence to suggest that uncertainty is a strong predictor of premarital relationship dissolution (Parkes & Adelman, 1983). This study detailed a range of doubts and partner influences that resulted from dating couple's alcohol usage. A greater awareness among drinking couples and relationship advisors of the effects of alcohol use on relational turbulence may normalize the experiences of turmoil and set a realistic expectation of the uncertainty and interference that may arise as they negotiate increasing commitment. It may also equip drinking couples with knowledge and skills to manage the various domains of uncertainty and partner interference, as well as the distress that may arise as a result of the tumultuous experience.
Strengths and limitations

In Study One, participants were informed that they may be invited to return for Study Two. As participants were primed to the variables of research interest in study one, they may pay greater notice to these variables in their dating lives and therefore be better able to recall these experiences in the follow-up interviews. This is especially important for qualitative research as the quality of data lies in the participants' ability to describe their experiences in detail. To further enhance participants' recollection, they were asked to limit their recall to the three months that preceded the interview and the discussion focused primarily on the most recent dating experience.

Some scholars may argue that the sole use of university students as research participants may limit the generalizability of findings. However, in line with the value of qualitative research, the purpose of this study was not to generalize results to the population, but rather to generate in-depth insight into the dating experiences of these individuals through their natural language. The interview approach permitted for follow-up questions and response clarifications, which would not have been possible in survey methods. Furthermore, as opposed to the fixed and pre-structured responses in traditional survey methods, the rich data that emerged from the natural responses in the interviews permitted for the revelation of complex processes that are occurring in the real dating world.

There are several limitations in this study. Firstly, the interviewer was not blinded to the participants' drinking status (i.e. high vs. low drinkers). However, the interviewer was aware of her potential influences on participants' discourse and strived to minimize interviewer effect by providing minimal encouragements to give
participants the opportunity to elaborate on their narratives. The interviewer also refrained from imposing assumptions by asking open-ended questions. Secondly, as with all retrospective studies, the report of past dating experiences in this study is not immune from recall bias (Coughlin, 1990). Furthermore, it is widely recognized that alcohol can impair memory functions (Perry et al., 2006). As 86.2% of the participants had consumed alcohol on their dates, it is unclear the extent to which alcohol had interfered with their recall of the details of the events. Lastly, the nature of this exploratory qualitative study is limited in its ability to quantify the experience of relational turbulence, nor could this study reliability compare between difference groups of dating individuals (e.g. experience of turmoil between high and low drinkers).

**Conclusion**

This study offers qualitative insights into individuals’ experiences of alcohol use on their recent dates, and elucidates the role of drinking on early romantic partnership. The results revealed an alcohol-relationship expectancy that is activated in dating situations, a factor that may drive drinking behaviours on dates. Furthermore, the finding supported the viability of RTM as a framework to investigate dating relationship processes in the context of alcohol use. Through the lens of the RTM framework, the findings highlight the effects of alcohol usage on the experience of turmoil by impacting on the individuals’ sense of uncertainty and perception of interference from partners’ drinking. The current study extends the findings from Study One and suggests that alcohol affects both relationship experiences (feelings of turmoil) and quality (intimacy). Collectively, these findings lay the foundation for
informing dating couples and relationship advisors on interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences that may emerge from the couple's drinking lifestyle.
Chapter 5: Study Three

Dating is a critical phase of romantic courtship that has long captured public and scholarly interest. The breadth of both individual and relational consequences resulting from dating relationships (as discussed in the literature review chapters) underscores the need for further research into the factors that can impact on romantic partnerships. Alcohol usage is strongly linked to the Western dating culture. The prevalent co-occurrence of alcohol usage and dating in young adulthood is supported by the preceding two studies and the wider literature. Questionnaire responses demonstrated that the involvement of alcohol on dates is linked to the feelings of intimacy (Study One), a widely used marker of relationship quality. To further understand the impact of alcohol usage within the context of romantic relationships, participants were asked to freely articulate their past dating experiences (study 2). Analyses of their discourse revealed that individuals who consumed alcohol within the context of their dating relationships encountered turbulence, a subjective experience characterized by uncertainty and partner interference. While the preceding studies were date-specific (i.e. examined experiences on specific dates), this third study was designed to widened the exploration to a longer interval of early relationship formation and to include both dating partners in romantic courtship.

Dating relationships are inherently dyadic in nature. The way in which an individual reacts in the relationship is a product of influences from both the individual and the interacting partner (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Despite development of new analytic techniques in recent years, individualistic conceptualization and methodology continue to dominate research in this field (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Although
understanding of intra-individual processes is valuable, such research is limited to the individuals' perceptions and therefore cannot reflect the full relational picture. Partners may have different experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of the courtship. Furthermore, they may be affected differently by the same relationship event. In support of this view, a study conducted analyses with data from one partner in the relationship and compared it to results derived from cross-informant data from both dating partners (van Dulmen & Goney, 2010). It was found that individual and dyadic analyses produced vastly different results, and claims derived from individual data may potentially be misleading. As such, scholars (e.g. Kenny & Cook, 1999; Thompson & Walker, 1982) have called for a move beyond individualistic orientation to research that takes a dyadic perspective to generate knowledge of the contribution from both actor and partner on the overall relationship. The current research answered this call by directing attention to both members of the dyad to examine processes in their early relationships.

The objective of this study was to examine the associations between drinking and intimacy, and drinking and turbulence, from a dyadic perspective. Intimacy and relational turmoil are theoretically linked. The first generation of RTM proposed that turbulence is highest when couples are at moderate levels of intimacy during the transition from casual to serious romantic involvement (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). However, the definition of "moderate intimacy" was arbitrary and subsequent investigation of the RTM failed to substantiate this claim (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Solomon & Theiss, 2008). Thus, the second generation of the RTM moved away from conceptualizing turbulence as a function of intimacy, and now sees it rather as a product of adjustment and transition in the relationship. The current study
was interested in investigating the notion that alcohol usage can disrupt the functioning of relationships in facilitative and/or inhibitory manner. From this perspective, this study explored the extent to which women and men’s drinking affect their own and partner’s subjective experiences of turbulence and feelings of intimacy in their dating and early romantic relationships.

**Alcohol Usage between Dating Couples**

Young adults tend to consume alcohol at higher rate than other age groups (Auerbach & Collins, 2006; Maggs & Schulenberg, 2005) and this tendency to drink is echoed in the relationship domain. Men who are in dating relationships, on average, consume more alcohol than women (Study 1; Engels & Knibbe, 2000). Theorists have suggested that this gender differences in drinking pattern within dating relationships may be driven by men’s risk-taking tendencies and their greater alcohol-expectancy of positive sexual outcomes (Hill & Chow, 2002; Wilsnack et al., 2005). However, while between-subject analysis (males vs. females) revealed gender difference, research that used within-couple comparisons have found that romantically-linked partners tend to consume alcohol in similar patterns and proportion. A high concordance of alcohol usage has been illustrated among both married couples and dating pairs (Leadley et al., 2000; McLeod, 1993; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Wiersma et al., 2010). Several theories have been offered to explain this concordance. The assortative mating or selection hypothesis suggests that people are more likely to form romantic partnerships with those who share similar characteristics and values as themselves (Lillard & Panis, 1996). On the other hand, the shared resource hypothesis puts forward that dating and married couples share the same environment in many life domains, such as living condition and social network. As such, the
exposure to the same stressors and contextual factors between partners leads to a convergence of drinking pattern (Smith & Zick, 1994). Another hypothesis, the social control theory, proposes that concordant alcohol use in romantic relationships is a result of one partner exerting control over another partner’s lifestyle and behaviour (Umberson, 1992). One review noted that selection processes are seen as more influential in couples’ drinking (Fischer & Wiersma, 2012), however the current state of evidence is insufficient to draw firm conclusions as to the theory that best explains the high similarity in health-behaviours between romantically-linked partners (Meyler, Stimpson, & Peek, 2007). Nevertheless, it was expected that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There will be a high concordance between actor’s and partner’s report of their own level of alcohol consumption.

Perception of Relationship Characteristics

The value of employing a dyadic perspective in this research design is to paint a more comprehensive picture of partners’ experiences in romantic relationships. Although both individuals in a romantic partnership experience the same relationship events, their subjective perception, experience, and evaluation of the relationships are not necessarily the same. This is illustrated in previous research that recruited dyads to examine a host of relationship-related constructs. In studies of relational turbulence, the correlations between partners’ feelings of uncertainty were moderate to high with \( r = .3-.5; p < .05 \) (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; Theiss, 2011; Theiss & Nagy, 2010). The association between partners’ experiences of interference is lower, with correlations in the moderate range \( r = .2-.3, p < .05 \) (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; Theiss, 2011). Across studies, partners’ reports on indicators of relationship
functioning tend to be varied. The correlations between partners’ scores of their own level of marital and sexual intimacy ranged from .2 (Levitt & Cooper, 2010) to .5 and .6 (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Theiss, 2011). On measures of overall relationship quality, there was strong agreement between one’s evaluation of the relationship in relation to partner’s evaluation with $r = .6, p < .001$ (Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007). Collectively, these results show that although partners’ perceptions and evaluations of relationship characteristics are strongly related, they show far from perfect agreement with each other. On the basis of the results in previous dyad research, the following predictions were made:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There will be significant moderate positive correlations between actors’ and partners’ experiences of relational turbulence (i.e. uncertainty and interference).

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There will be significant moderate to strong positive correlations between actors’ and partners’ scores on intimacy.

**Alcohol Usage and Intimacy**

Both popular beliefs and the literature hint that there is an association between drinking and intimacy. Intimacy is defined as the subjective experience of closeness and connectedness with one’s romantic partner (Sternberg, 1986). It captures both the quality of the courtship and quality of interaction between romantically-linked couples (Heller & Wood, 1998). While the media almost always portray alcohol usage as a means to promote relational intimacy (Page & Cole, 2012; Primack et al., 2008; Roche et al., 2007), the empirical literature has uncovered a more complex link between drinking and intimacy. There is recurring evidence that alcohol has a
facilitative effect on intimacy. Moderate drinkers tended to report greater feelings of intimacy in their relationships compared to abstainers (Nezlek, Pilkington, & Bilbro, 1994). Couples who drank together in small or similar amounts were more likely to have increased feeling of intimacy (Levitt & Cooper, 2010; B. W. Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). On dates, greater intimacy is expected if alcohol is available (Morr & Mongeau, 2004). However, findings reported earlier in this thesis also showed that one’s drinking on dates was positively associated with one’s own feeling of intimacy, whereas partner’s drinking was negatively associated with one’s intimacy (Study One). This alludes to differential relational outcomes between drinkers and his/her dating partners. Deriving from previous findings in the literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): An actor’s alcohol usage will be positively and moderately associated with his/her own feeling of intimacy. (Prediction of relationship strength was based on results of Study One.)

Hypothesis 5 (H5): An actor’s alcohol usage will be negatively and moderately associated with his/her partner’s feeling of intimacy. (Prediction of relationship strength was based on results of Study One.)

Alcohol Usage and Relational Turbulence

Relational turbulence refers to the subjective experience of uncertainty and partner interference (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Although the available literature has not directly examined the impact of drinking on relational turbulence, growing evidence supports the proposed association between couple’s alcohol usage and uncertainty.
The qualitative accounts of dating experiences by young adults in Study Two have generated some insight into the ways in which drinking can evoke turbulence in dating relationships. When recalling their recent dating experiences, participants drew associations between alcohol usage and the doubts they had about their own behaviours and perceptions on dates (Study Two). Relational uncertainty can also be affected by changes in communication style following alcohol consumption. On the one hand, the disinhibition effects of alcohol can lead to greater self-disclosure and affective expression among drinkers and their sober interacting partner (Caudill et al., 1987; Jacob & Krahn, 1988; Sayette et al., 2012). This interpersonal openness and information transaction may reduce the experience of uncertainty for both the drinker and his/her partner. On the other hand, alcohol can also lead to increased interpersonal disputes, arguments, and aggression (Marshal, 2003). These negative interactions may prompt the drinker and his/her partner to consider the suitability of the partner and the viability of the relationship. The heterogeneity of previous findings on the alcohol-effects challenges the development of sound hypotheses. However, RTM proposes that the people in the early phase of romantic courtship experience heightened sensitivity to relationship-related information and respond to environmental cues with greater emotional and cognitive reactivity (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). As such, drawing from this theoretical framework, this study predicted alcohol usage will evoke new doubts or magnify pre-existing ambivalence that actors and partners have about themselves, their partner and the relationship in the early phase of courtship. On the basis of the ease with which participants in Study Two voiced their alcohol-related uncertainties, it was hypothesized that drinking and uncertainty would have at least moderate associations. These predictions were formalized as follows:
Hypothesis 6 (H6): An actor's alcohol usage will have positive and moderate association with his/her own sense of uncertainty.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): An actor's alcohol usage will have positive and moderate association with his/her partner's sense of uncertainty.

Previous research and contemporary theories imply that interference may account for the link between alcohol usage and relationship outcome. Interference from partner refers to the extent to which individuals perceive their partner as hindering their personal pursuits (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). The disinhibiting effects of alcohol may lead to undesirable behaviours, such as being boisterous and rude (Makela & Mustonen, 2000; Park, 2004). In addition, alcohol usage has been associated with greater likelihood of conflict and aggression (Leonard, 2005; Rothman, McNaughton Reyes, Johnson, & La Valley, 2012). These behaviours from drinking partner may undermine dating goals such as investigating romantic potential, having fun, and seeking companionship (Mongeau et al., 2007; Mongeau et al., 2004). These intoxicated behaviours, as well as the time spent drinking with partner, may also impede personal goal attainment such as academic and vocational ambition. In Study Two, the frequency with which participants voiced themes of partner interference was more than twice the frequency with which partner facilitation themes emerged. This supports RTM's proposal that hindrance from partner is pronounced at early stages of romantic relationship when partners try to negotiate a mutually beneficial and coordinated behavioural system. The results of Study Two also point to partners' alcohol usage as an additional interruption to this negotiation process. Perceptions of interference from partner may also lead to increased alcohol usage. Research has shown that some individuals drink to cope with distressing emotions and negative
events in romantic relationships (Cooper, 1994; Levitt & Cooper, 2010). Hence, drinking may constitute one of the coping strategies to alleviate the distress that stems from partner interference. As such, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 8 (H8): There will be positive and moderate associations between actor’s alcohol usage and his/her own perception of partner interference.

Hypothesis 9 (H9): A partner’s alcohol usage will be positively and moderately associated with an actor’s perception of interference.

Method

Participants

This cross-sectional study recruited couples through fliers posted across the Australian National University campus and advertisements placed on social media websites. To participate, the couples had to be dating for less than 2 years. While Study One examined individuals who were single but interested in being romantically involved, Study Two followed a subset of these individuals and thus focused on dating relationships of 0 to 7 months duration. This third study focused on dating relationships younger than 2 years. This phase represents the early stage of romantic partnership as the individual’s attachment needs remain in the process of transferring to their partner, a process that usually takes 2 years to develop (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Cindy Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Additional eligibility criteria included having no children and the female partner was not pregnant at the time of study. Interested couples responded to the researcher by email.
A summary of the characteristics of the sample is displayed in Table 5.1. Sixty-six couples (66 males and 66 females; 66 heterosexual couples) agreed to participate. The duration of the dating relationship reported by both partners was significantly correlated ($R_I = .931, F_{(65, 65)} = 14.45, p < .001$) and the average length of the dating relationships reported by individuals was 12.52 months ($SD = .54$; range = 1.0-23.0). The average age of the sample was 21.23 years ($SD = .18$), with 61.4% identifying themselves as Caucasian, 36.4% were Asian, and 2.3% were Indian. Both partners were of the same ethnicity in 90.9% of the relationships. On average, participants reported having a history of 2.6 ($SD = .2$; range = 1-9) romantic relationships. The majority of the participants were university students (90.9% of sample) while the remainder was in the workforce. The university students ($M = 21.11, SD = 2.00$) were significantly younger than the non-university students ($M = 22.40, SD = 2.36, t_{(130)} = -2.166, p = .032$), but did not differ significantly in the duration of their current relationship ($t_{(130)} = -.884, p > .05$). There were no significant gender differences in age ($t_{(130)} = -1.862, p > .05$) and number of past relationships ($t_{(130)} = -1.731, p > .05$). Participants were reimbursed at the completion of the questionnaire, with 81.8% of the sample receiving $10 while the remainder of the sample received course credit. Participants were informed in advance that there would be a lottery draw and one couple was randomly selected to receive a $150 restaurant voucher at the conclusion of the data collection phase.
Table 5.1. Sample characteristics (n = 132 individuals or 66 couples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>21.23 ± .18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>66 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of current relationship (months)</td>
<td>12.52 ± .54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>81 (61.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>48 (36.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>3 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University student</td>
<td>120 (30.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>12 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of past romantic relationships</td>
<td>2.6 ± .2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

The data collection phase took place from March to October 2012 following approval from the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. The couples came to the researcher’s lab together. Upon arrival to the lab, participants were informed of the study procedure and the reimbursement value. It was also emphasized to the participants that their responses in the questionnaire would remain confidential and access was limited to the researcher and her supervisors. After signing the consent form, each dyad member was seated at opposite ends of the lab. They each received the same questionnaire and were instructed to complete it independently. To maximize the efficiency of data collection, up to 3 couples completed the
questionnaire during the same session. The sessions were monitored by the researcher to ensure there were no discussions between and within couples while they were completing the questionnaire. At the end of the session, participants were given the opportunity to debrief with the researcher about any concerns they may have as a result of their participation. Furthermore, as mandated by the ethics committee, participants were debriefed and provided with resources about the risks of heavy drinking following completion of the questionnaire.

**Measures**

While this study invited both partners in a dating relationship, all of the items in this questionnaire assessed only the actor’s perception and experience. Participants were not asked about their beliefs regarding their partners’ experiences in the relationship in order to enhance time-efficiency and to limit intrusions into early relationships. A copy of the questionnaire is shown in Appendix K.

**Background questionnaire.** In a measure designed for the current study, participants provided information on their age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, current occupation, and history of past romantic relationships.

**Relationship quality.** Participants completed 2 measures of relationship quality. The first was based on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). Some of the item wordings were revised to better reflect issues pertinent to dating couples. This revised measure had 31-items. The original measure has a one-factor structure (Sharpley & Cross, 1982). Similarly, principal component analysis of this revised measure revealed a one-factor structure (initial Eigenvalue = 8.42, accounting
for 27.16% of the total variance. The internal reliability of this scale was adequate (Cronbach $\alpha = .89$). Scores from all items were totalled. The maximum score on this scale is 155 and a high score reflects poor dyadic adjustment.

The other measure was the intimacy subscale from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000). The psychometric properties of PRQC and its subscales have been shown to have strong internal reliability (Fletcher et al., 2000) and predictive validity (Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005). Participants responded to this 3-item measure on a 7-point Likert scale. The intimacy subscale achieved good internal reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = .74$). Scores were totalled and a high score reflects greater levels of intimacy.

**Alcohol use.** The AUDIT-C (Bush et al., 1998), a 3-item screening tool for heavy drinking, was utilized to measure alcohol use. The wording of the items was revised to examine the quantity and frequency alcohol use in the past four weeks. A pictorial guide was given to participants to assist their conversion of common alcoholic beverages to standard drinks. The AUDIT-C was repeated three times to enquire about alcohol use in three contexts – (a) drinking in the absence of partner, (b) drinking in the presence of partner but partner was not drinking, and (c) drinking with partner together. The latter two drinking contexts were collapsed to reflect the conceptualization of drinking outside of the relationship without partner versus drinking in the relationship with partner who may or may not be consuming alcohol. The average scores from items in the *drank-apart* and *drank-together* contexts were used in the analyses. Drawing distinctions between the two drinking contexts can
lead to more detailed understanding of the way in which drinking behaviours may influence relationship outcomes.

**Relational turbulence.** This study employed Knobloch and Solomon’s (1999) measure of relational uncertainty. This 20-item measure began with a stem that read “How certain are you about...?” followed by a series of statements. Participants indicated their level of agreement with these statements on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from “completely or almost completely uncertain” to “completely or almost completely certain”. Items were reverse-coded, and a higher score represented greater levels of uncertainty. Following Knobloch and Solomon’s (1999) operationalization of uncertainty, the measure consisted of 3 subscales – self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty. The literature advocates for the use of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs), as opposed to exploratory factor analysis, when there is an a priori conceptualization of the measurement model (J. E. Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Thus, CFAs were conducted to assess the validity of the measurement scales. Three fit indexes – Chi-square test ($p > .05$), Comparative Fit Index (CFI > .95), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < .08) – were used to examine the goodness of fit of the CFA model (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). Results from CFA suggested that Knobloch and Solomon’s conceptualization of a 3-factor model was a poor fit for the current data ($\chi^2 = 782.41$, $p < .001$; $CFI = .737$; RMSEA = .165). Subsequently, principal component analysis with direct oblimin rotation was performed to clarify the factor structure. Inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear one-factor model ($1^{st}$ Eigenvalue = 10.03, accounting for 50.17% of variance in uncertainty). This one-factor scale showed high internal
reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = .95$). Thus, the scores from the 20 items were totalled and subsequently averaged to provide an indicator of overall uncertainty.

To study partner interdependence, the current study used Solomon and Knobloch's (2001) 10-item measure. Participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale, with anchors "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", on the extent to which a partner affects their attainment of everyday goals and activities. CFA could not be performed as the model was under-identified. Principal component analysis with direct oblimin rotation was conducted instead. Consistent with Solomon and Knobloch’s (2001) proposal of three subscales, three factors emerged from PCA. They were partner interference, partner influence, and partner facilitation. The initial eigenvalues were 3.96, 2.21, and 1.16 respectively, with each factor accounting for 39.58%, 22.12%, and 11.55% of the total variance respectively. The subscales achieved satisfactory reliability (Cronbach $\alpha_{\text{interference}} = .90; \alpha_{\text{influence}} = .82; \alpha_{\text{facilitation}} = .78$). Thus, the average score for each subscale was computed, with higher scores reflecting greater interdependence.

Although Study Two revealed additional subthemes within the domains of uncertainty and interdependence, they were mostly conceptually similar to those proposed in Solomon and Knobloch's (2001) measure. Thus, it appeared that these measures have face validity for this population and the dating phase of relationship development. Furthermore, using the same measure creates comparability with previous relationship literature (e.g. Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), allowing the results of this study to be interpreted within existing research on relational turbulence.
Analysis

Data were entered into IBM SPSS Statistic 20 and structured into an individual data set (whereby each case represents one partner) and a dyadic data set (in which each case represents one couple). The data were analysed in several steps. The first series of analyses was conducted to examine the associations between within-subject scores and within-dyad scores. The analysis then focused on modelling the data from a dyadic perspective. A central concern that permeates research into dyads is the issue of interdependence (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Conceptually, partners in a romantic relationship are not independent from each other, but rather they exert bidirectional influences on each other’s’ emotions, behaviours, and cognitions (H. H. Kelly et al., 2003). Translating this nonindependence into the realm of statistical analysis means there is an intrinsic link between partners’ scores on dependent variables (Cook & Snyder, 2005). A failure to account for the non-independence between partners, as is the case with most of the commonly used statistical procedures such as multiple regression and analysis of variance, can lead to biases in analysis (Cook & Snyder, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006). More specifically, the risks of Type I and Type II errors are raised when assumptions of interdependence are statistically violated, thus adversely affecting significance testing (Cook & Snyder, 2005).

To address the interdependence between dating partners, this study will employ the Actor-Partner Independence Model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000) as the analytic approach. This approach allows for an estimation of the influence of an individual’s independent variable on both his/her own outcome variable, known as the actor effect, and his/her partner’s outcome variable, known as the partner effect (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). The APIM is increasingly utilized in couple research as investigation into the
mutual connections between partners can tap into the core of relationship dynamics (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). This model treats the dyad as the unit of analysis while allowing for the nonindependence in the responses between partners (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). As such, it models the interdependence that naturally occurs within dyadic relationships.

Results

Data Screening

Outliers in the dataset were identified using the techniques described by a number of authors (e.g. Howell, 2008; Osborne & Overbay, 2004; Zhang, Meratnia, & Havinga, 2007). The screening of outliers was first conducted via visual inspection of the dispersion of data points in histograms and boxplots. Any data points that appeared to substantially deviate from the remaining data set were subsequently examined to determine whether they were greater than 3 standard deviations from the mean. Using this approach, one female was identified as a univariate outlier with respect to self-uncertainty (z = -4.27), partner-uncertainty (z = -4.20), relationship-uncertainty (z = -4.33), and overall uncertainty (z = -4.78). Accordingly, the raw scores for these variables were deleted and were instead treated as missing values. No other outliers were detected.

The distributions of variables in the hypothesized model were examined. Inspection of histograms, Q-Q graphs, and skewness (range = .84 to 1.35) and kurtosis (range = -.18 to 2.02) statistics indicated that alcohol usage, relational turbulence, and intimacy variables were relatively normally distributed, in accordance with guidelines outlined
DRINKING, INTIMACY & TURBULENCE

in literature (Howell, 2012; Kendall & Stuart, 1958). Test of multivariate normality was conducted. Results revealed alcohol usage, relational turbulence and intimacy variables were multivariately normal (multivariate kurtosis = 10.67, critical ratio = 2.56), in accordance with the guideline recommended by Byrne (2010). This meant that basic assumptions of data normality were regarded as satisfied and therefore substantive analyses were proceeded with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Kaplan, 2000).

Descriptive Statistics

Relationship characteristics. Across the sample, two couples (3.0%) reported that they were in a casual dating relationship, which was defined as the phase prior to formal acknowledgment of romantic involvement. Sixty-three couples (95.5%) disclosed they were in a steady dating relationship, and one couple (1.5%) reported that they were engaged to be married. The mean ages of participants across casual dating, steady dating, and engaged relationship were 21.05 (SD = 1.24), 21.19 (SD = 2.05), and 24.45 (SD = .64) years respectively. Although there was 100% concordance between partners' report of their current dating phase, there were some discrepancies in their responses on the duration of their relationships. On average, casual daters reported being together for 8.8 months (SD = 8.1), with a concordance rate of 47.1% within couples. Among those who were in steady dating relationships, the mean duration of the relationship was 12.5 months (SD = 6.1) with a 92.4% agreement rate between dating partners. Partners who were engaged to be married responded, with absolute agreement, that they have been romantically involved for 23.0 months. A summary of the foregoing statistics is displayed in Table 5.2.
Table 5.2. Summary of the characteristics of couples across casual dating, steady dating, and engaged relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Casual dating</th>
<th>Steady dating</th>
<th>Engaged to be married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of couples</td>
<td>2 (3.0%)</td>
<td>63 (95.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>21.05 ± 1.24</td>
<td>21.19 ± 2.05</td>
<td>24.45 ± .64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the relationship</td>
<td>8.8 ± 8.1</td>
<td>12.5 ± 6.1</td>
<td>23.0 ± 0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alcohol usage and alcohol-related scores.** Descriptive statistics on the alcohol variables were calculated for male and female partners, as well as the couple. A summary of the results is presented in Table 5.3. The overwhelming majority of the participants (93.2%; n = 123) were drinkers, with only 6.8% of the sample (n = 9) reporting having abstained from alcohol consumption in the four weeks prior to participation in this study. For those who reported alcohol consumption in the past four weeks, 70.7% of the participants (n = 87) had drunk in the absence of their partners and 60.2% (n = 74) had drunk when their partners were present but were not drinking. Additionally, 74.8% of the couples (n = 46 couples) reported drinking together with their partners. Males (M = 1.81, SD = .70) and females (M = 1.69, SD = .58) did not show significant differences in frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption when they were drinking together (t(130) = 1.08, p > .05). However, males (M = 1.97, SD = .96) tended to consume alcohol with greater frequency and quantity outside of the relationship compared to women (M = 1.66, SD = .70; t(118.9) = 2.10, p = .038).
Table 5.3. Mean scores from female and male partners, as well as average couple scores, on alcohol usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol usage</th>
<th>Male partner</th>
<th>Female partner</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking without partner</td>
<td>1.97 ± .96*</td>
<td>1.66 ± .70*</td>
<td>1.82 ± .85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking with partner</td>
<td>1.81 ± .70</td>
<td>1.69 ± .58</td>
<td>1.75 ± .64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates significant gender difference in scores

**Relational turbulence and intimacy.** Several measures were designed to assess the participants’ experiences in the relationship. A summary of these scores is illustrated in Table 5.4. Males \(M = 58.48, SD = 6.50\) and females \(M = 58.42, SD = 6.34\) did not differ in their perception of dyadic adjustment \(t(65) = .05, p > .05\).

Paired-sample t-tests revealed there was no significant difference between male partner \(M = 1.89, SD = .66\) and female partner’s \(M = 2.03, SD = .87\) experiences of uncertainty in relation to the relationship \(t(65) = 1.17; p > .05\). There were no significant gender differences in the experience of partner facilitation \(M_{\text{male}} = 4.23, SD = .96; M_{\text{female}} = 4.44, SD = .90; t(65) = 1.42, p > .05\) and interference \(M_{\text{male}} = 3.00, SD = 1.26; M_{\text{female}} = 2.82, SD = 1.26; t(65) = -.96, p > .05\). Within-subject t-tests indicated both males and females reported significantly greater partner facilitation compared to partner interference \(t_{\text{male}(65)} = 5.05, p < .001; t_{\text{female}(65)} = 7.19, p < .001\).

On average, couples felt high levels of intimacy \(M = 18.27, SD = 2.21\), and there was no gender difference in the report of intimacy \(M_{\text{male}} = 18.27, SD = 2.21; M_{\text{female}} = 18.27, SD = 2.21; t(65) = .00, p > .05\). Inspection of the scatter plot between intimacy and turbulence variables revealed linear relationships. Subsequent analyses showed intimacy was negatively correlated with uncertainty \(r = -.34, p < .001\) and interference \(r = -.26, p = .003\).
Table 5.4. Mean scores from female and male partners, as well as average couple scores, on measures of relational turbulence and intimacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male partner</th>
<th>Female partner</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic adjustment</td>
<td>58.48 ± 6.50</td>
<td>58.42 ± 6.34</td>
<td>58.45 ± 6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational turbulence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>1.89 ± .66</td>
<td>2.03 ± .87</td>
<td>1.96 ± .77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>4.23 ± .96</td>
<td>4.44 ± .90</td>
<td>4.34 ± .95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference</td>
<td>3.00 ± 1.26</td>
<td>2.82 ± 1.26</td>
<td>2.91 ± 1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>18.27 ± 2.21</td>
<td>18.27 ± 2.52</td>
<td>18.27 ± 2.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Analyses

The extent of interdependence in the partners’ responses was assessed. This was achieved through examination of interclass correlations between actors and partners’ scores on drinking behaviours, relational turbulence, and intimacy (as illustrated in the highlighted diagonal section in Table 5.5). There was high agreement between dating partners on the duration of their relationship \( r = .93, p < .001 \). There was also a significant concordance between the two individuals in a dating relationship on their alcohol consumption. The strength of association in the frequency and quantity of alcohol usage between partners was stronger for the times when they drank together \( r = .70, p < .001 \) compared to when they drank apart \( r = .36, p = .036 \). Dating pair’s sense of uncertainty \( r = .37, p = .031 \), perception of partner interference \( r = .35, p = .044 \), and feeling of intimacy \( r = .63, p < .001 \) were also significantly correlated. Overall, actors and partners’ scores on the same variable were positively and significantly correlated and thus provided evidence for statistical interdependence
within couples. This interdependence between partners suggested that APIM was an appropriate model for subsequent analyses of dyadic data (Kashy & Kenny, 2000).

Table 5.5. Pearson’s correlations among study variables for female partners above diagonal and male partners below diagonal, and intraclass correlations between members of a dyad along the diagonal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Drinking outside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Drinking with</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uncertainty</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>-.38***</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interference</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intimacy</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.41***</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.63***</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Duration of</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 66 couples; *p < .05; **p < .01, ***p < .001 (two-tail)

APIM can be used for distinguishable and indistinguishable dyads. The dyads in this study were theoretically distinguishable based on the gender of the individual in the heterosexual relationship (Kenny et al., 2006). To test for empirical distinguishability, the omnibus test of distinguishability (I-SAT) was performed (Kenny et al., 2006; Olsen & Kenny, 2006). This involved imposing equality constrains on the means, variances, and covariances of the manifested variables for the two individuals in the dyad. The manifested variables that were included in this test were total alcohol usage, uncertainty, interference, and intimacy for both members of the dyad. The
results shows that gender was a distinguishing variable ($\chi^2(8) = 22.76, p = .004$). Thus, all of the structural equation models in this study employed the distinguishable approach to APIM.

**Structural Equation Modelling (Substantive Analyses)**

SEM is the recommended approach for analysis of distinguishable dyads (Cook, 1994; Newsom, 2002). As opposed to conventional structural equation modelling, the APIM utilizes observed variables directly in the hypothesized model (Gonzalez & Griffin, 2012). Doing so allows for analysis of the intercorrelations between partners across the variables of interest.

The APIM version of SEM was used in which dating couple’s alcohol usage and relationship duration were modelled as the predictors of relational turbulence (uncertainty and interference) and intimacy. Two drinking situations were included in the model – (1) consuming alcohol without partner and (2) consuming alcohol with partner who may or may not be drinking. The predictors were allowed to correlate to each other. The error terms of the outcome variables were also permitted to correlate with each other in light of the preliminary analysis indicating that they were strongly related. SEM was conducted in three separate phases. Phase one involved analysis of actor effects whereby associations were drawn between actors’ own predictors and outcome variables, while partner effects were constrained to zero (model one). Phase two involved examination of the partner effects whereby actor’s predictor scores were linked with partner’s outcome variables (model two). In phase two, all actor effects were constrained to zero. Phase three incorporated both actor and partner effects into a single model (model three). Conducting independent analyses of actor and partner
effects enabled identification of regression paths that were not statistically significant. Constraining these non-significant regression paths in model three increased the degrees of freedom and therefore allowed for model identification. Maximum likelihood estimations was used to calculate the standardized parameter estimates.

The fit of the models were examined on three fit indices. The relative chi-square \( (X^2/df) \) adjusts for the impact of sample size on chi-square tests and values less than 2.0 suggests an acceptable fit of the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is an incremental fit index and has the advantage of minimizing underestimation of fit in smaller samples (Bentler, 1990). Attainment of CFI greater than .95 has been recommended for a good fit (Hooper et al., 2008). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is an absolute fit index and values below 0.08 represent a model that is a good fit (Hooper et al., 2008).

**Model one (actor effects).** The fit indices demonstrated that model one was a good fit to the sample data \( (X^2_{(12)} = 17.22, X^2/df = 1.44; p = .14; CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08) \). Path estimation revealed women’s drinking with their partners was negatively associated with their own feelings of intimacy \((\beta = -.25, p = .044)\). Furthermore, women’s alcohol usage in the absence of their partners was positively associated with their own sense of uncertainty \((\beta = .28, p = .027)\). Men’s alcohol usage and the duration of courtship were not significantly associated with uncertainty, interference, or intimacy. A pictorial representation of SEM analyses for model one is shown in Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.1. SEM of actor effects of alcohol usage and relationship duration on relational turbulence and intimacy. Observed variables were used in the model. Single arrows indicate predictive paths. Weighted line represents significant path (*p < .05). Dotted lines denote paths that did not reach statistical significance. Although not depicted in this diagram, female and male’s alcohol usage and relationship duration were allowed to covary in AMOS. There were error terms associated with the turbulence and intimacy variables and these error variables were allowed to covary with each other.
Model two (partner effects). The fit indices indicated that model two was a poor fit to the sample data ($X^2_{12} = 23.42, X^2/df = 1.95, p = .02; CFI = .92, RMSEA = .12$). Inspection of the modification indices revealed no values exceeded the default threshold value of 4. As such, although the model was not a good fit to the sample data, further changes to the model were not justified from an empirical perspective. Women’s alcohol usage in the presence of their partners was positively associated with males’ feeling of intimacy ($\beta = .36, p = .003$). The remaining paths did not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$). The results of model two are displayed in Figure 5.2.
Figure 5.2. SEM of partner effects of alcohol usage and relationship duration on relational turbulence and intimacy. Observed variables were used in the model. Single arrows indicate predictive paths. Weighted lines represent significant paths (*p = .003). Dotted lines denote paths that did not reach statistical significance. Although not depicted in this diagram, female and male's alcohol usage and relationship duration were allowed to covary in AMOS. There were error terms associated with the turbulence and intimacy variables and these error variables were allowed to covary with each other.
Model three (APIM). Model three combines both actor and partner effects of alcohol usage on intimacy and turbulence. The regression weights of the effects of male’s drinking and relationship duration were constrained to zero as models one and two illustrated that these variables were not significant predictors of relational outcomes. Constraining these variables increased the degrees of freedom and thereby allowed for the testing of model fit. The fit indices indicated that model three was a good fit to the sample data ($\chi^2_{(18)} = 17.53, \chi^2/df = .97, p = .02; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00$). Results showed female’s drinking in the presence of their partner was positively associated with their male partner’s feeling of intimacy ($\beta = .32, p = .003$). On the other hand, female’s drinking without their partner was positively associated with their own sense of uncertainty ($\beta = .37, p = .006$) and negatively associated with their male partner’s feelings of intimacy ($\beta = .30, p = .033$). The result of model three is presented in Figure 5.3.
Figure 5.3. APIM with alcohol usage and relationship duration as the predictors for relational intimacy and turbulence. Observed variables were used in the model. Single arrows indicate predictive paths. Dotted lines (— — — ) indicate paths in which regression weights were constrained to zero. Weighted lines (——) represent significant paths (*p < .05; **p < .01). Semi-broken lines (— - - ) denote paths that did not reach statistical significance. Although not depicted in this diagram, female and male’s alcohol usage and relationship duration were allowed to covary in AMOS. There were error terms associated with the turbulence and intimacy variables and these error variables were allowed to covary with each other.
Discussion

There is general consensus in the literature and popular beliefs that alcohol usage between dating partners can lead to an array of relational consequences. The objective of this study was to elucidate the associations between couple’s drinking, experience of turbulence, and feelings of intimacy. The model conceptualization in this study was not only derived from a theoretical framework and empirical findings in the literature, but was also informed by the results in Studies One and Two. In using a dyadic approach, this study aimed to create a more accurate understanding of the impact of alcohol usage on couple’s relationship experience and quality in the early phase of romantic courtship.

Concordance of Couple’s Drinking and Relationship Evaluation

In support of H1 and a body of literature (e.g. McLeod, 1993; Wiersma et al., 2010), there was a moderate to high concordance in dating partners’ scores on alcohol usage. The stronger concordance in alcohol consumption in the presence of partner is consistent with results from Study One, as well as previous research (e.g. Quigley & Collins, 1999), which revealed individuals’ drinking behaviour within the dating context is partly driven by their partners’ alcohol consumption. This may reflect a socialization process or modelling process (Fischer & Wiersma, 2012), however firm conclusions could not be drawn due to the cross-sectional nature of the current study. Similarly, H2 was supported by current findings of moderate agreement in partners’ experience of relational turbulence, both in terms of the extent to which they had doubts in relation to the relationship and the perceived interference from partner. H3 was also supported with strong agreement between partners’ feelings of intimacy.
Similarities in drinking behaviour and relationship perception are encouraging signs for relationship development. Compatibility theory notes that partners in harmonious relationships tend to share similar characteristics (Levinger & Rands, 1985), and vice versa, interpersonal similarities predict relationship stability and quality (J. H. Larson & Holman, 1994). The Shared Reality Theory proposes that mutual beliefs about the shared world are necessary for the establishment and maintenance of romantic relationships (Hardin & Conley, 2000). Supporting this claim, research has shown that similarities in behaviours and beliefs between romantically-linked individuals are associated with greater feelings of being understood (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002), higher levels of love, positivity, and commitment (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996), higher satisfaction and lower negative affect (Gaunt, 2006), and lower occurrence of conflicts (Houts et al., 1996). Thus, partner compatibility in drinking behaviour and relationship perception may set a strong foundation for relationship stability and longevity (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001).

**Alcohol Usage and Intimacy**

There was no support for H4. Actor's drinking, whether alone or with partner, had no association with his/her own sense of intimacy. This finding stands in contrast to the results from Study One, which revealed a positive association between women's alcohol usage on a date and her own level of intimacy. There is also a recurring finding in the literature that moderate levels of alcohol usage is beneficial for romantic courtships (Levitt & Cooper, 2010; Nezlek et al., 1994). The conflicting results between the current study and existing literature reflect the importance of
ongoing research effort to elucidate the conditions under which drinking is conducive or detrimental to the drinker’s experience of intimacy in the relationship.

Although there was no support for actor effects, partner effects between alcohol usage and intimacy emerged from the actor-partner interdependence model. Thus there was partial support for H5. Specifically, women’s drinking in the presence of their partner was positively associated with male’s feelings of intimacy, whereas their drinking outside of the relationship shared a negative association with their male partner’s intimacy. This corroborates previous research that found couples who drank together in moderate levels experience greater levels of intimacy compared to those who drank apart (Levitt & Cooper, 2010). Earlier research has also illustrated the buffering effect of drinking together on relationship quality as women who drank with their husband more often than when they drank apart experienced smaller decline in marital satisfaction (Homish & Leonard, 2005). There are a number of ways in which men’s feelings of intimacy can be enhanced when their female partners drink in their presence. Alcohol is widely described as a social lubricant (Monahan & Lannutti, 2000). The pharmacological and psychological effects of drinking can facilitate women’s interpersonal interactions by reducing inhibitions (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997), increasing the display of positive affect and enhancing the sense of bonding (Sayette et al., 2012). Women’s drinking also amplifies their relationship-enhancing behaviours and lowers their intentions to resist sexual advances (Testa, Fillmore, et al., 2006). There is also evidence that shows the mere act of sharing alcohol beverages increases feelings of intimacy and perceived closeness in the relationship (Miller, Rozin, & Fiske, 1998). Together, these effects may be conducive to the level of intimacy felt by men when they accompany their drinking female partner.
On the other hand, males' intimacy was negatively associated with women's alcohol usage outside of the relationship. Consistent with the literature (e.g. L. J. Roberts & Leonard, 1998), couples who drink apart are at risk of relational instability. The reduction in men's intimacy may potentially be explained by increases in interpersonal disputes as couples have rated alcohol consumption without partner's company as one of the most common reasons for disagreements (Holmila, 1991). Additionally, men may also experience jealousy and feelings of being left out when their female partner did not involve them in drinking activities. Men are more likely to be affected by separation in alcohol usage as they place greater relationship value on sharing social activities with their romantic partner (Riesman, 1981). Alternatively, the effects may be bidirectional, in that women may drink outside of the relationship to cope with their male partners' low levels of intimacy. Previous research has attested that women are more attuned to their male partners' feelings of intimacy (Heller & Wood, 1998). Furthermore, women show a greater tendency to consume alcohol as a way to regulate intimacy, cope with negative affect, and resolve the impact of negative relational events compared to their male partners (Frank, Jacobson, & Tuer, 1990; Levitt & Cooper, 2010). Overall, the finding of differential effects of couple's drinking together and apart highlights the value of discriminating various drinking behaviours and contexts in examining the relational impact of alcohol usage.

**Alcohol Usage and Relational Turbulence**

Interestingly, while women's alcohol consumption was not associated with their own feelings if intimacy, their alcohol usage outside of the relationship was associated with their own sense of uncertainty. That is, consistent with H6, to the extent that the
female partners reported higher alcohol consumption outside of the relationship, they were also more likely to report higher levels of doubts about the relationship. There are several plausible explanations. Firstly, young adults perceive alcohol-venues as conducive to initial formation of romantic relationships (Abowitz et al., 2009). Hence, drinking outside of the relationship may increase exposure to other potential romantic mates, which can prompt the actor to question the suitability of the current partner and the relationship. Secondly, although not assessed in the questionnaire, one of the situations in which individuals consumed alcohol outside of the relationship may be drinking with friends. Research has shown that friends tend to have less favourable evaluation of the actor’s relationship outlook (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotias, 2001), and disapproval from friends is inversely related to relationship stability (Felmlee, 2001). As such, friends may directly or indirectly evoke women’s doubts about the relationship. Another drinking context outside of the relationship is drinking alone. The SEM models cannot attest to the directions of the effects. As such, the results could be interpreted as women consuming alcohol as a way to cope with the pre-existing uncertainty in their relationships. This argument is supported by findings that individuals who drink alone tend to endorse coping expectancies (Cooper, 1994). There is also abundant research demonstrating that the use of alcohol as a tool to alleviate psychological and emotional distress is not uncommon (Cooper, Frone, Russell, & Mudar, 1995; Park & Levenson, 2002).

There was no significant relationship between actor’s alcohol usage and partners’ experiences of relational uncertainty. As such, there was no support for H7. This finding was surprising given couples in previous research have expressed that alcohol usage was one of the most uncertainty-arousing events in their romantic relationships...
(Emmers & Canary, 1996). This thesis also found initial support for the notion that partner’s alcohol usage evokes one’s doubt and uncertainty about the partner and relationship (Study Two). With a small sample size, the inability to detect this partner effect in the current study maybe a result of inadequate statistical power. Across the literature, partner effects tend to be smaller than the corresponding actor effects (Ackerman, Donnellan, & Kashy, 2011), and thus the current study may not afford sufficient power to reliably find partner effects. Further discussion of power analysis can be found in subsequent paragraphs.

Contrary to predictions, there were no actor or partner effects between alcohol usage and interference (H8 and H9). This was unexpected given that young adults in dating relationships voiced that alcohol consumption negatively affected their pursuit of personal and dating goals (Study Two). The current finding is also inconsistent with previous research that noted that couples’ alcohol usage often hinders daily functioning and relationship quality (e.g. Marshal, 2003). It is possible that although the hindrance effects of alcohol was revealed by objective measures used in previous studies (e.g. frequency of argument), it may not necessarily equate to subjective perception of interference from partner. That is, although researchers may deduce from responses on measures that alcohol undermines relationship functioning, young adults may not perceive it as interference.

The inability to establish associations between drinking and interference may also be a result of over-representation of harmonious and well-adjusted couples in this sample. This sample bias is suggested in the mean score on dyadic adjustment, which was below the scale’s midpoint. RTM contends that partner interference is high at the
early stages of courtship because it is a by-product of partners’ attempt to negotiate a
coordinated interaction system (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). However participants
in the current study did not experience a high degree of partner interference in their
relationships. In fact, they identified significantly greater levels of facilitation than
interference from their partners. These results challenge the RTM claim of
heightened interference from partners in the early phases of relationship development
(Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Alternatively, it may suggest that the current
interference measure may not fully reflect the turmoil experienced by dating partners.
Although this measure was used in previous research (e.g. Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), the items are vague and tap only into
hindrance in friendship, time-management, and daily tasks. As shown in Study Two,
additional domains of interference from partners’ drinking emerged from young
adults’ discourse on their dating experiences. Future research may benefit from
further measurement development to enhance the assessment of interference that
dating partners inadvertently exert on each other. Doing so will add clarity to the
reliability and validity of future findings.

Alcohol Use, Relational Turbulence, and Intimacy

Gender differences emerged from the path analyses. Only women’s alcohol usage
showed effects on relational outcome, while men’s drinking did not appear to have
significant consequences for turbulence or intimacy. A differential effect of alcohol
usage between women and men has been shown in previous research (Homish &
Leonard, 2005; Levitt & Cooper, 2010; B. W. Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000; Wilsnack
& Wilsnack, 2013). These variations in the relational impact of drinking across
gender may be a result of differences in the ways in which women and men evaluate
their romantic relationships. It has been found that females tend to evaluate their relationships in terms of communication and emotional investment (Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Shulman & Scharf, 2000), whereas males show greater concern for sharing activities with their romantic partners (Riesman, 1981). Accordingly, since alcohol usage is a widely practiced shared activity between romantically-linked couples, it is conceivable that men may be more sensitive to the relational effects of their partners' alcohol usage compared to women.

The current finding of a direct linear relationship between relational turbulence (uncertainty and interference) and intimacy challenges the first generation of RTM, which predicts curvilinear relationships between turbulence and intimacy that peak during the transition from casual to serious relationships (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the mean intimacy scores in this study were above the midpoint of the scale for all but one participant. As such it is possible that the current linear relationship may be a result of sample bias and reflect only the tail end of the proposed curvilinear relationship. Nonetheless, the current findings on the contribution of alcohol usage on relational uncertainty add weight to the second generation of RTM which proposes heightened turbulence during times of adjustment, including but not limited to transition in relationship status. The results of this study illustrate that alcohol use constitutes a relational-adjustment factor that can evoke subjective experience of uncertainty in the early phase of dating relationship.
Implications
Given that martial stability and satisfaction can be predicted by the quality of premarital relationships (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996), it is important to identify factors that influence relationship experience and quality in early stages of courtship. The results alluded to the notion that women may not benefit from their own alcohol usage in the early phase of romantic relationship. Their drinking seemed to have no impact on their own feelings of intimacy but showed positive association with their own sense of uncertainty (when drinking without partner). On the other hand, it appears that men are more susceptible to the effects of their female partners’ drinking behaviour. Specifically, results suggest that men’s intimacy may be facilitated by drinking together with their female partner, but their feeling of intimacy may be hindered when their female partner drinks outside of the relationship. Both uncertainty and intimacy are not only informative about the current state of relationship, but have been shown to have predictive value in relation to the course of romantic courtship. Longitudinal and retrospective studies have consistently identified high uncertainty and low intimacy as strong predictors of relationship dissolution (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2010; Parkes & Adelman, 1983). Accordingly, the possible impact of women’s alcohol usage on their own and partner’s uncertainty and intimacy in the early phase of premarital courtship has the potential to affect long-term relational functioning and stability. These findings shed light on the potential benefits and pitfalls of various drinking behaviours on couples’ intimacy and turmoil in early phase of dating relationships. They also lay the foundation for future research, relationship advisers and health practitioners, and dating couples to identify ways to maximise the benefits of drinking and minimize potential negative relational ramifications.
Strengths and Limitations

This study has a number of strengths. Romantic courtships are inherently dyadic in nature. While partners’ ratings showed moderate to high concordance, the lack of perfect agreement in this study highlights the value of collecting responses from both members of the dyad to generate a more comprehensive and accurate picture of relationship functioning. The use of APIM as the data analytic method allowed for estimation of the effects of men’s and women’s drinking on their own and their partners’ feelings of relationship turmoil and intimacy while controlling for the interdependence inherent in dyadic data. The results generated from the utilization of a dyadic research design and data analytic method offered the opportunity for enhancing our understanding of the interpersonal dynamics embedded in the early stage of romantic relationship development. In assessing participants’ drinking behaviour, this research dispersed attention across two drinking situations - drinking outside of the relationship without partner and drinking in the relationship with partner. As such, this study provided greater detail in the various ways in which alcohol usage can affect relational turmoil and intimacy.

The findings of this study should be considered in the context of several limitations. Deriving from theories and previous findings, medium to large associations were hypothesized between alcohol usage, intimacy and relational turbulence. The statistically non-significant paths in the studied models may reflect that such relationships do not exist in the real world. Alternatively, the strength of the relationships may be small. While a sample size of 66 couples in the current study is fairly typical of research with dyads, it may lack sufficient power to detect small effect sizes in path models (Kenny et al., 2006). On the other hand, given the limited
power of the current sample size, the discovery of statistically significant effects in the current model suggests robust effects between couples’ drinking and uncertainty, and between drinking and intimacy.

Similar to Studies One and Two, the sole use of university students as university participants hampers the generalizability of results. There is suggestion that, although college students and single adults in the community share similarities in dating activities, there are slight differences in their definition and objectives of dating (Mongeau et al., 2007), as well as drinking patterns (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002). Thus, it is unclear whether individuals in the community experience turbulence and intimacy in their dating lives in the same manner as university students do. Furthermore, only heterosexual dating couples were recruited. Consequently, the findings may not apply to other forms of romantic relationships, such as homosexual relationships and marital relationships.

The use of a cross-sectional design in the current study restricted the ability to investigate temporality and causality between variables. Although the current model proposes that couples’ alcohol use affects their experiences of relational turbulence and intimacy, the present findings should not be interpreted as causal relationships. It is quite possible that relational turbulence and relationship quality affects alcohol use. This alternative pathway is alluded to by the negative association between relationship quality and levels of alcohol consumption observed in previous research (Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006). As such, it may be fruitful for future research to employ a longitudinal design to establish the temporal order between alcohol usage, relational turbulence, and intimacy.
Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of alcohol usage between dating partners on their own and their partners’ experiences of intimacy and relational turbulence. A dyadic research design was employed to provide a more comprehensive picture of interpersonal dynamics in dating relationships. APIM SEM revealed only women’s drinking had potential relational impacts. Specifically, to the extent that women consumed alcohol outside of the relationship, they also reported greater levels of uncertainty about the relationship. On the other hand, men’s feelings of intimacy was negatively associated with women’s alcohol consumption outside of the relationship, but showed a positive association with women’s drinking in the relationship. The current findings are illustrative of the complex links between alcohol use and romantic courtship, and contribute to the appreciation of the diverse effects of drinking on relationship quality and experience.
Chapter 6: General Discussion

In the current alcohol-supportive social milieu, greater understanding into the impact of drinking has become an important research objective. This thesis focuses specifically on the impact of alcohol usage on the quality and subjective experiences of early romantic courtship. While popular media and pop psychology columns often have their opinions about the effects of drinking on romantic relationships, there is surprisingly little research available that specifically addresses the early phase of dating relationship. A review of the sparse literature identified several pertinent gaps in the current knowledge of alcohol usage in the early development of romantic courtships. As such, this thesis was conducted with two main goals – (1) to generate a greater understanding on the drinking patterns within young adults’ dating relationships and (2) to examine the consequences of such drinking practice on the quality (intimacy) and subjective experience (turbulence) of early romantic partnership. This thesis has reported findings from three separate but related sequential studies that were performed to address these central thesis goals.

Current Findings

The first two studies in this thesis were intentionally exploratory in nature to shed light into a scarce field of research. Study One was designed to generate empirical data on young adults’ drinking behaviour on dates and the factors that may drive alcohol usage on dates. It also aimed to investigate the effects of such drinking pattern on perceived relationship quality. It involved the administration of an online questionnaire to 282 university students who were single but had previous dating experiences. Intimacy represents a central component of relationship quality (Fletcher
et al., 2000; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002), and was thus chosen as the outcome variable in this study. The results illustrated that alcohol usage is prevalent on dates with 75% of participants reporting alcohol consumption when alcohol was available on their dates. The amount of alcohol consumption varied greatly and on average participants drank 2-3 standard drinks on dates. A series of multiple regression analyses showed that, contrary to the body of literature on psychological factors behind drinking, alcohol usage on dates was primarily driven by behavioural factors such as one’s general drinking tendencies and the partners’ alcohol consumption on the date. However, while general drinking tendency may affect alcohol usage on dates, it did not appear to play a predictive role for the feeling of intimacy. Rather it was the alcohol consumption on a date that predicted feelings of dating intimacy. Results showed that alcohol usage by oneself and partner may affect the level of intimacy experienced by women, but not men. Women’s alcohol consumption on a date appeared to be conducive to their own intimacy in an expectancy-congruent manner, whereas their male partners’ drinking actually shared a negative association with women’s feeling of intimacy.

The objective of Study Two was to extend the previous study by generating an unmitigated account of dating experiences through the themes that emerged from participants’ natural discourse. Specifically, this study explored young adults’ expectations about alcohol usage on a date and their experiences of alcohol-related outcomes. In addition, the relational turbulence model (RTM) was identified as the guiding theoretical framework for investigating the possible impact of alcohol use on relationship experience. This study employed a qualitative paradigm whereby a subset of participants (n = 44) from Study One was invited to return for an in-depth
semi-structured interview of their experiences on dates that took place subsequent to
Study One. Using hybrid inductive and deductive thematic analyses (Boyatzis, 1998),
themes of relational expectancy surfaced from participants’ discourse. This suggests
people hold expectations that alcohol consumption on a date is conducive to the
experience and quality of the relationship. However, participants also expressed how
alcohol use by themselves or their partners added to their sense of uncertainty. In
addition to a host of subjective positive and negative impacts of alcohol usage,
participants discussed how their partners’ alcohol usage had both facilitative and
interfering effects on their pursuit of personal and dating goals. These findings
provided support for the conceptualization that alcohol use in dating courtships affects
the experiences of relational turmoil.

Building on the results from Studies One and Two, Study Three aimed to investigate
the impact of couple’s alcohol usage within and outside of the relationship on both
relational turbulence and intimacy. This study extended the preceding studies in
several ways. Firstly, it examined relationship functioning over a longer period of
relationship development (i.e. dating relationships of up to 23 months in duration) to
provide a broader overview of the early phase of courtship. Secondly, while the
preceding studies recruited individuals only, this study supplemented previous
findings by utilizing a dyadic design. There is an increasing recognition that romantic
relationship is not only influenced by individuals’ qualities, but also a product of the
dynamic interplay between partners’ characteristics (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband,
2006). Thus, this study aimed to generate a more detailed and comprehensive picture
of dyadic functioning in dating relationships by recruiting both members in a dating
relationship (n = 66 couples) to complete a paper questionnaire. Using Structural
Equation Modelling within the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model, it was revealed that only women's drinking appeared to have significant effects on relational outcome. Results showed that women’s drinking in the absence of their partner was positively associated with their own uncertainty. Women’s drinking outside was also negatively associated with their male partners' intimacy, though men’s feelings of intimacy shared a positive association with women’s alcohol usage in their presence. Overall, women’s drinking without their partner appeared to have negative impacts on their own and their partner’s experiences of dating relationship. On the other hand, it seemed women’s drinking with their partner may have a positive effect on the male partners’ perception of relationship quality.

There were both consistencies and discrepancies in the findings across the three studies. Collectively, the studies illustrated that alcohol usage is a common phenomenon in young adults’ dating relationships. The majority of individuals who participated in these studies consumed alcohol within the context of their early courtship. The findings further suggested that alcohol use is related to the experience of increased relational uncertainty, especially for women. Alcohol consumption by dating partners may also affect intimacy. Study One revealed that women’s drinking on dates may be conducive to her own feelings of intimacy, but partner’s drinking may be detrimental to women’s intimacy. These associations, however, were not replicated in Study Three. Study Three illustrated that men’s sense of intimacy was linked to women’s drinking. Specifically, men’s feelings of intimacy appeared to benefit from times when women drank in their presence, but it seemed that men’s intimacy was impeded by their female partner’s drinking outside of the relationship.
Another inconsistency centres on partner interference. While Study Two showed that alcohol usage within the romantic courtship can be perceived as interference towards personal pursuits, this was not replicated in Study Three. The heterogeneity in findings is illustrative of the recurring theme throughout this thesis that drinking has complex and diverse impacts on romantic relationships.

The variations in findings may be a result of differences in methodology across the three studies. While the administration of an online questionnaire (Study One) afforded greater anonymity to participants and allowed the researcher to access a large number of potential participants, the quality of online data and validity of findings may be affected by the lack of a controlled environment and respondent characteristics (e.g. lack of motivation, distorted response) (Couper, 2000; Fouladi, McCarthy, & Moller, 2002; Wright, 2005). Research has shown that web-based responses and data from traditional paper questionnaire can differ in subtle ways (e.g. Wang et al., 2005). The responses may be further affected by some of the methodological choices in research design. For instance, having both members of the dyad completing paper questionnaires (Study Three) in the same room (albeit with no verbal communication and reassurance of confidentiality) in the presence of the researcher may place them under greater pressure to feel as though they need to respond in a certain way (e.g. conform to social or partner’s expectation). The overall survey methodology has also been criticized for its forced-choice fix-response, which may not reflect real-life experience (Beiske, 2003). On the other hand, interviews (Study Two) can generate unmitigated data with greater breadth and depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994), though it may be affected by social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, and interviewer bias (Bowling, 2005). Each methodology is associated with its
advantages and disadvantages. As such, the possibility that these methodological differences contribute to the differential findings across the current three studies cannot be discounted.

The heterogeneity of findings may also be a result of subtle differences in research focus across the three studies. Study One enquired about participants’ most recent dating experience and Study Two invited young adults who had recently formed romantic partnerships (i.e. duration younger than 7 months), whereas Study Three involved couples who have been together for a longer period of time (i.e. duration younger than 23 months). Although results showed that relationship duration was not significantly associated with intimacy and relational turbulence, it may indirectly affect relationship experiences through changes in factors such as commitment (Sternberg, 1997), routines (Pearson, Child, & Carmon, 2011), and couple identities and roles (Acitelli, Rogers, & Knee, 1999). These hypotheses may be tested in future research.

Implications
The current investigations laid a sound foundation for future research and theory development. For instance, while the literature and results of Study Two has alluded to the usefulness of the RTM model in conceptualizing the impact of drinking on the early phase of romantic relationships, the results of Study Three suggested alcohol usage is linked only to uncertainty, but not partner interference. Further research can assist in establishing the usefulness of RTM in the drinking-dating context, and to test the hypothesis that alcohol usage by dating couples evokes relational turbulence only by affecting their sense of uncertainty about the relationship. The present studies also
point to the differential effect of gender on the associations between drinking and relational outcome, and have hypothesized reasons as to why women and men may have different relational experiences in relation to drinking (please refer to discussion sections of Chapters Three and Five). These findings will benefit from further investigations and replications. Together, the current findings and the suggested hypotheses provide a springboard for future development of theories into the impact of drinking on relational outcomes.

Dating represents a critical phase of romantic courtship. It is a central path in the progression towards stable long-term relationships and marriage (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). The turbulent nature (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001) and heightened vulnerability towards relational dissolution (Felmlee et al., 1990; Le et al., 2010) in this phase of romantic partnership necessitate greater insight into the conditions under which factors, such as alcohol usage, are beneficial or unfavourable to the relationship. This thesis, along with other research (Lee et al., 2010; Park, 2004), shows that drinking can simultaneously have both positive and negative impacts on romantic relationships. The results of the present studies demonstrated that the effects of drinking are dependent on a range of factors, including gender, context of alcohol use, and whether the person of interest is the drinker or the partner of the drinker. The heterogeneity in findings precludes this thesis from offering firm recommendations regarding alcohol usage within the context of early dating relationships. While the lay public, advice columns, and popular media often have implicit theories about the role of alcohol in romantic courtships, the findings in this thesis indicate that blanket statement should not be made regarding the conduciveness of alcohol use on dating relationships. In highlighting the differential impacts of alcohol use on intimacy and
uncertainty, this thesis assists dating couples and relationship advisors by generating greater insights into the potential relational benefits and pitfalls of alcohol usage. The co-occurrence of positive and negative alcohol effects also suggests that one should consider the potential advantages of drinking in light of the possible negative consequences when deciding whether to drink or not. A major factor to consider may be the amount of alcohol consumed, however the current studies were restricted to university students who reported drinking moderate amounts only on dates. It should be noted that while the results of the present three studies did not uncover any serious negative ramifications of drinking, one should not neglect the more severe adverse consequences documented in the literature such as date-rape and unwanted sexual activities (e.g. Abbey, 2002).

Being cognizant about the impact of alcohol usage on intimacy and relational turbulence is not only important for dating couples’ current courtship experiences, but there may also be implication for the future course of relationship development. Research has shown that the pattern of drinking between dating couples in early courtship foreshadows the quality, functioning, and stability of a later marital relationship (Leonard & Roberts, 1998). Additionally, a number of studies have illustrated that low intimacy and high uncertainty are strong predictors of relationship instability and dissolution (Connelly, 2009; Field, 2010; Parks, 1983). This thesis has shed light on the differential impact of alcohol use on intimacy and relational turbulence, which can lay the foundation for future research to investigate ways to minimize the risk of relational distress in relation to couples’ alcohol use and enhance relational success.
Future Research

The results of this thesis have pointed to a number of directions for future research. This thesis examined the impact of the quantity of alcohol consumption (Studies One and Three), as well as drinking within and outside of the relationship (Study Three). While this provided some initial insight into the relational effects of drinking, future research may wish to investigate the consequences of other types of drinking behaviours within dating relationships. Young adults’ dating discourse from Study Two alluded to the effects of discrepancies in alcohol usage between dating partners as a source of interference towards attainment of dating goals. This is supported by studies that have documented the deleterious impact of dissimilarities in drinking behaviour between couples (Hornish & Leonard, 2007; Leadley et al., 2000; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Additionally, while the current samples were primarily composed of individuals who drank within the normative range, studies have suggested that relational consequences are most pronounced when one or both partners consume alcohol at pathological levels (Fischer et al., 2005; Torvik et al., 2013). [Please refer to Appendix M of this thesis for an additional study that explored the themes of relational turbulence in a sample of individuals with Alcohol Use Disorders.]

The complexity of the associations between couple’s alcohol use and relational outcome implies a greater need for research that can track the temporal and dynamic operation of these variables. The literature may benefit from longitudinal dyadic research designs that can capture the extent to which various drinking behaviours can affect turbulence and intimacy, and vice versa. Moreover, future research could capitalize on statistical advances and utilize analytic techniques that not only captures
changes across several waves of data, but also takes into account individual differences in changes over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For instance, in longitudinal courtship data, researchers could examine the impact and predictive value of levels of alcohol usage, turbulence, and intimacy between couples at different waves, as well as the changes in these variables over time. This is pertinent to relationship research given courtships begin with the joining of two separate individuals who subsequently exert mutual influences on each other over time (Collins et al., 2009). Thus, the aforementioned research method will allow for closer approximation of the dynamic interplay between dating partners within the varying nature of their dating courtships.

All the studies in this thesis have used relatively homogeneous samples. The majority of the participants were Caucasian heterosexual young adults who were studying at a university in Australia. As such, it remains to be seen to what degree alcohol usage influences couples’ dating processes in diverse cultures, socioeconomic strata, sexual orientation, and age groups. Replicating studies across diverse populations will not only enhance insight into the associations between couple’s alcohol usage, relational turbulence and relationship development, but can also begin to provide greater specificity into identifying how, for whom, and under what circumstances is drinking beneficial and harmful to the quality and experience of romantic relationships.

Alcohol use is a widely accepted practice in most Western societies. In addition to alcohol usage, future research may wish to broaden the exploration and investigate the impact of other commonly and often concurrently used substances, such as tobacco, coffee, and illicit drugs, on relationship quality and subjective experiences. Given the
significance of romantic partnership in young adulthood and beyond (e.g. Doherty & Feeney, 2004; Khaleque, 2004; Roisman et al., 2004), these research efforts can extend our understanding of the ways in which prevalent substance-related cultural practices affect the development of romantic courtships.

Concluding Remarks

In most Western societies, alcohol usage is intricately woven into the fabric of romantic relationships in young adulthood. However, there has been little research attention on the effects of drinking on the relationship experience and quality, especially in the early phase of dating courtship. With a foray of romantic activities and alcohol usage dominating young adulthood, the sparse research into this topic is lagging behind public and popular interests. Thus, this research thesis aimed to achieve a better understanding of current patterns of drinking and dating and the impact such practice may have on the subjective experience of intimacy and turbulence.

This thesis involved three sequentially developed studies that utilized quantitative and qualitative, as well as individual and dyadic, approaches. The findings empirically demonstrated the prevalent use of alcohol within the context of early romantic courtship. Results showed that drinking by dating partners had mixed effects on the experience of intimacy and turbulence, and these effects varied depending on factors such as gender and context of alcohol usage. The findings of this thesis have both research and practical implications. Given the host of potential personal and relational consequences that can stem from alcohol usage, further research effort is
warranted and would help clarify the complex and diverse connections between drinking and the quality and experiences of the early phase of romantic relationships.
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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet and Participation Consent

(Study One)

The role of alcohol in the dating experience

This research project aims to examine the role of various factors (e.g. context of the date, apprehension and outgoingness) in establishing romantic relationships. It is conducted as partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Psychology degree. This research involves two studies – (1) a questionnaire and (2) a follow-up interview – that will be conducted in 2 sittings.

This research seeks **ANU undergraduates (18-25yrs)** who are currently **single** (i.e. not in an exclusive romantic relationship) and **drinks** occasionally. The questionnaire takes approximately 30mins to complete. The follow-up interview is scheduled to be conducted around mid-semester 2, 2011. Based on the contact information you provide in the questionnaire, you will be contacted in semester 2 to arrange for the interview. Further details of the interview study will be provided closer to the date.

The data and contact details you provide will only be accessible to the researchers and will not be released to any other individuals so far as allowed by the law. The data will be stored electronically in computer files for 6 years. Participants’ names will not be used during data coding and analyses to preserve the confidentiality of individual participants. Instead, all participants will be represented by numerical codes. Outcomes of this project may be published or reported. If this is the case, it will be done in a way that ensures no participants are identifiable.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the project at any time. Once you informed researchers (Sonia or Bernd) of your wish to withdraw from the project, records of your questionnaire responses will be removed from the computer files. Your participation or non-participation in this research will have no bearing on your standing in class or academic grades.

We do not expect your participation in this research to be associated with any risk. Potential benefits include contributing to scientific knowledge on ways to enhance feelings of intimacy on dates and relationship development. You may choose to receive an electronic summary of the results of the project.
You will be reimbursed for your participation in this research. The amount of reimbursement is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of participants</th>
<th>Reimbursement</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 and 2</td>
<td>1-hour course credit after questionnaire AND 1.5-hour course credit after interview</td>
<td>$25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 but not semester 2</td>
<td>1-hour course credit after questionnaire AND $20 cash after interview</td>
<td>$25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not enroll in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1, but enrolled in semester 2</td>
<td>Receive 1.5-hour course credit (as reimbursement for interview) and $5 cash (as reimbursement for questionnaire) after completing interview</td>
<td>$25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in 2011</td>
<td>$25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview</td>
<td>No option 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact Sonia Ip (Candidate for Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) at The ANU) on 6125 2983 or Sonia.Ip@anu.edu.au. This research is being supervised by Dr Bernd Heubeck (Senior Lecturer in Psychology at The ANU) and he can be contacted on 6125 0635 or Bernd.Heubeck@anu.edu.au. If you have any ethical concerns about the conduct of this study you can contact the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee on 6125 3427 or human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. This study has been approved under the ANU Human Ethics Committee Protocol 2010/592.

If you consent to take part in the questionnaire study of this research project, please click “NEXT”.

---

For the reimbursement details:

- **Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 and 2**
  - Option 1: 1-hour course credit after completing questionnaire AND 1.5-hour course credit after completing interview.
  - Option 2: $25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview.

- **Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 but not semester 2**
  - Option 1: 1-hour course credit after completing questionnaire AND $20 cash after completing semester 2 questionnaire.
  - Option 2: $25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview.

- **Did not enroll in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1, but enrolled in semester 2**
  - Option 1: Receive 1.5-hour course credit (as reimbursement for interview) AND $5 cash (as reimbursement for questionnaire) after completing interview.
  - Option 2: $25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview.

- **Not enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in 2011**
  - Option 1: $25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview.
  - Option 2: No option 2.

---
Appendix B: Online Questionnaire (Study One)

A date is any pre-arranged social activity with a person where there is some romantic interest. Sometimes, the activity is not explicitly communicated as a "date" between interacting pair. However, it is considered a date when 2 persons who are romantically interested or attracted try to get to know each other better while doing an activity together. Examples of where a date takes place - restaurant, cinema, party, etc. Note that dates are not limited to the above examples.

1. Have you ever gone on a date before where alcohol was available? (You may not necessarily be drinking)
   - Yes
   - No

Think of the last date you went on where alcohol was available (and you may not necessarily be drinking).

2. How many days ago was the date?

3. Where did this date take place? (e.g. restaurant, cinema, etc)

4. How many dates have you had with this date-partner before this date (including the date in question)?

5. When this date was set up, what did you want to come out from it most?
   - Friendship
   - A causal relationship
   - A causal open relationship
   - A steady relationship

Please move the slider to the point that corresponds to how you felt.

When the date was set up, (0=not at all; 5=neutral; 10=very well/very much)

6. How much did you understand your date-partner?

7. How favourable was your impression of your date-partner?

8. How emotionally close did you feel towards your date-partner?

9. How certain were you about where your relationship with your date-partner was heading?
10. How much did you want a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

11. How committed were you to starting a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

12. During this date, how many standard drinks did you have?

13. During this date, how many standard drinks did your date-partner drink?

**During this date**, (0=not at all; 5=neutral; 10=very well/very much)

14. How much did you understand your date-partner?

15. How favourable was your impression of your date-partner?

16. How emotionally close did you feel towards your date-partner?
17. How certain were you about where your relationship with your date-partner was heading?

18. How much did you want a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

19. How committed were you to starting a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

At the end of the date, (0=not at all; 5=neutral; 10=very well/very much)

20. How much did you understand your date-partner?

21. How favourable was your impression of your date-partner?

22. How emotionally close did you feel towards your date-partner?

23. How certain were you about where your relationship with your date-partner was heading?

24. How much did you want a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

25. How committed were you to starting a romantic relationship with your date-partner?

26. In general, how often do you have a drink containing alcohol?
   Monthly or less
   2-4 times a month
   2-3 times a week
   4 or more times a week

27. How many standard drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?
   1 or 2
28. How often do you have 6 or more standard drinks on 1 occasion?
   Never
   Monthly or less
   2-4 times a month
   2-3 times a week
   4 or more times a week

The following is a list of reasons people sometimes give for drinking alcohol on a date. Thinking of the times you drank alcohol on a date, how often would you say that you drank for the following reasons? There is no right or wrong answer. Just give your honest responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>Half the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Because it is easier to share my innermost thoughts and feelings with date-partner after drinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>So that my date-partner feels more comfortable sharing personal information with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>So that both me and my date-partner feel more comfortable having an intimate one-on-one conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Because drinking helps me feel more relax about the date situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>To appear more relax in my date-partner's eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>To feel or look more attractive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Because drinking makes me look more appealing in my date-partner's eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>To help me become more sociable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Because my date-partner will find me more fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Because I feel more affection towards my date-partner when I am drinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Because drinking helps me and my date-partner feel emotionally closer to each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>To make it easier for me to consider having sex with my date-partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Because if I drink, my date-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
partner will also enjoy a drink

42. So that my date-partner will also drink and reveal his/her "true self"  
43. Because drinking is what people do on a date  
44. Because my date-partner expects me to drink

Please read each of the following statements carefully and indicate how true it is of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not true of me at all</th>
<th>Slightly true of me</th>
<th>Moderately true of me</th>
<th>Quite true of me</th>
<th>Very much true of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>I am usually worried about how my date will perceive me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>I am afraid that my date will form an unfavourable impression of me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>I am not concerned that I will say or do the wrong things when I am with my date.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>I worry about what my date will think of me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>It doesn't worry me if my date will notice my shortcomings.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on my date.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>When I am talking to my date, I worry about what he/she may be thinking of me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.</td>
<td>My date's opinions of me do not bother me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please read each of the following statements carefully and indicate how true it is of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not true of me at all</th>
<th>Slightly true of me</th>
<th>Moderately true of me</th>
<th>Quite true of me</th>
<th>Very much true of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>I will only go on a date if I know where it is going to take me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>I don't like the idea of dating different people.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Going on a crazy date is not my idea of fun.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>I'd rather the date be quiet and low</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
key than wild and uninhibited.

57. I never ask for or agree on a date on the spur of the moment. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

58. I only like dates that are full of changes and excitement. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

59. I like new and exciting dates, even if it means breaking rules. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

60. I prefer to go on a date with someone who is exciting and unpredictable. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

This section refers to all the romantic relationships (i.e. having an exclusive relationship) you have had.

61. Have you ever had a boy/girlfriend before? Yes ☐ No ☐

62. How many romantic relationships have you ever had? ☐

63. Please list how many months each romantic relationship lasted, like this: 1st-6months, 2nd-3months, 3rd-12months and so on.

64. How many romantic relationships did you have in the last 12 months?

A date is any pre-arranged social activity with a person where there is some romantic interest. Sometimes, the activity is not explicitly communicated as a "date" between interacting pair. However, it is considered a date when 2 persons who are romantically interested or attracted try to get to know each other better while doing an activity together.

65. Have you ever gone out on a date before? Yes ☐ No ☐

66. Which best describes you now? Not dating ☐ Dating or seeing one person casually ☐ Dating or seeing more than one person casually ☐ Mostly going out with one person and dating a few others ☐

67. Which usually describes you? Have never dated ☐ Rarely date ☐ Dating casually, without an exclusive commitment ☐ Involved in an exclusive relationship with someone ☐

68. How old were you when you had your first date?

69. How many people have you ever dated in your whole life?

70. How many people have you dated in the last 12 months?
71. How many days ago did you last go on a date?
72. Where did the date take place? (e.g. restaurant, cinema, etc)
73. Did you drink alcohol on your last date?
   Yes
   No
74. How often do you drink alcohol while on a date?
   Never
   Rarely
   Sometimes
   Often
   Always
75. Are you...?
   Male
   Female
76. How old are you?
77. In what country were you born?
78. What language(s) is(are) spoken at home?
79. Which ethnic group do you belong to?
   Caucasian
   Asian
   Other (please specify)
80. What year and what month did you enter ANU?
81. What degree(s) are you currently enrolled in?
82. How many years of your degree have you completed?
83. What are you majoring in?

Contact details
A follow-up study will be conducted in semester 2, 2011.
Please provide your details so that we can contact you for the follow-up study. Your contact details are
confidential and will only be accessible by the researchers of this study (Sonia Ip and Dr Bernd
Heubeck).

Your name is ____________________________

Home and mobile phone numbers ____________________________

Email address ____________________________
Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet (Study Two)

This research project aims to examine the role of various factors (e.g. context of the date, apprehension and outgoingness) in developing romantic relationships. It is conducted as partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree. This research involves two parts - (1) a questionnaire and (2) a follow-up interview. You have already completed the questionnaire and you are now invited to take part in an interview.

The interview (and the associated survey) takes approximately 1.5 hour to complete. It will be led by Sonia and you will be chatting to her independently. In the interview, you will be invited to talk about your dating and drinking experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded and will later be transcribed. Both the audio and written record of the interview will be securely stored for 6 years. Your name will be avoided during the interview process as much as possible to preserve your anonymity. Outcomes of this project may be published or reported. If this is the case, it will be done in a way that ensures no participants are identifiable.

Participation is voluntary. The interview is an opportunity for you to tell your story and you don’t need to answer questions you don’t feel comfortable with and you may withdraw from the project at anytime. Once you informed researchers (Sonia or Bernd) of your wish to withdraw from the project, records of your questionnaire responses and interview will be destroyed. Your participation or non-participation in this research will have no bearing on your standing in class or academic grades.

We do not expect your participation in this research to be associated with any risk. Potential benefits include having an opportunity to talk and process your dating and drinking experiences. Your participation will be able to make an invaluable contribution to scientific knowledge on experiences of intimacy on dates and relationship development.
You will be reimbursed for your participation following the interview. The amount of reimbursement is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of participants</th>
<th>Incentives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 and 2</td>
<td>1-hour course credit after questionnaire AND 1.5-hour course credit after interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1 but not semester 2</td>
<td>1-hour course credit after questionnaire AND $20 cash after interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not enroll in 1st year psychology courses in semester 1, but enrolled in semester 2</td>
<td>Receive 1.5-hour course credit (as reimbursement for interview) and $5 cash (as reimbursement for questionnaire) after completing interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enrolled in 1st year psychology courses in 2011</td>
<td>$25 cash after completing both questionnaire and interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact Sonia Ip (Candidate for Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) at The ANU) on 6125 2983 or Sonia.Ip@anu.edu.au. This research is being supervised by Dr Bernd Heubeck (Senior Lecturer in Psychology at The ANU) and he can be contacted on 6125 0635 or Bernd.Heubeck@anu.edu.au. If you have any ethical concerns about the conduct of this study you can contact the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee on 6125 3427 or human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

This study has been approved under the ANU Human Ethics Committee Protocol 2010/592.
Appendix D: Participants' Consent (Study Two)

Consent to participate in the interview was obtained verbally and audio-recorded.

The following questions were asked in the process of obtaining consent.

Interviewer: “We are now starting the recording.”
Interviewer: “Do you consent to being recorded in this interview?”
Interviewer: “Have you read the participant information sheet?”
Interviewer: “Do you have any questions about the information on the participant information sheet?”
Interviewer: “Do I have your consent to do the interview?”
Appendix E: Pre-interview Questionnaire (Study Two)

Please provide your details (i.e. the ones you gave in the previous survey). This will allow me to combine your responses today with your last survey.

Name ___________________________ Phone no. ___________________________
Email ____________________________

A date is any pre-arranged social activity with a person where there is some romantic interest. Sometimes, the activity is not explicitly communicated as a "date" between interacting pair. However, it is considered a date when 2 persons who are romantically interested or attracted try to get to know each other better while doing an activity together.

a) Which best describes you now?
   i. Not dating
   ii. Dating or seeing one person casually
   iii. Dating or seeing more than one person casually
   iv. Involved in an exclusive relationship with someone

In the past 3 months...

b) How many people have you been romantically interested in or attracted to? __________________

c) Of these people who you are/were romantically interested in, how many of these people did you go out on a date with? __________________

d) In total, how many dates did you go on with these romantic interest? __________________

e) How many of these dates would you consider successful? __________________

f) How many of these dates (as noted in q(s) (g)) would you consider unsuccessful? __________________

g) On how many of the dates you had in the past 3 months did you have a drink containing alcohol? __________________

h) On how many of the dates you had in the past 3 months did your partner have a drink containing alcohol? __________________

i) On average, how many standard drinks did you have when you were on a date? __________________

j) Males only → How many of the dates involved you drinking 6 or more standard drinks? __________________

Females only → How many of the dates involved you drinking 4 or more standard drinks? __________________

k) How many romantic relationship(s) were you involved in in the past 3 months? __________________
Appendix F: Guiding Questions in Semi-Structured Interview (Study Two)

- Tell me about your dating experiences since you filled out the online questionnaire.
- What were all the things you thought about your partner on the date?
- What do you think were all the things your partner thought about you on the date?
- What, if anything, were you and/or your partner uncertain about on or after the date?
- What, if any, were the ways in which your partner affected you at or around the time of the date?
- How much, if any, did you and your partner drinking on the date?
- How positive or negative was the overall effect of drinking for this date?
- What are your beliefs regarding drinking on a date?
- What was the outcome of the date?
Appendix G:  Coding Manual for Dating Experiences (Study Two)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Evaluation of the dating experience</td>
<td>Participants’ explanation of whether their dates were successful or unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>The doubts one have in relation to the dating relationship</td>
<td>Participants’ recount of their doubts, questions, anxiety and uncertainty relating to the date, themselves, their partner or the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>The dyadic system of behaviour between the partners</td>
<td>Participants’ recount of how their partners facilitate or interfere with their goals or daily tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Outcome of the date</td>
<td>Participants’ description of the result of the date, including immediately after date and the long term relational outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol expectancies</td>
<td>The anticipated effects of alcohol</td>
<td>Participants’ beliefs about the effects of alcohol.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol effects</td>
<td>The actual effects of alcohol</td>
<td>The positive and negative impact of alcohol on the specific dates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Examples of Thematic Coding using NVivo (Study Two)

Around that time of the date, how big of a role was he playing in your life?

Pretty big because it was holiday and then it was the time we had kids back in us. And then we went away. I think when he went away, I realized I have been seeing him a lot, and so when I went away, I actually missed him.

How much was he affecting your daily life or your daily routine?

I probably see him every day and he was part of that. We started playing at each other’s house, so that definitely changed where I was.

Did you do on the date, anything was involved?

Yes, but not that much on.

How much flowed?

2-4 standard drinks, 3-4 beers.

Do other drinks were you guys involved?

Not big, definitely made me feel happy. I think it also made both of us confident. He magic to talk to his friends and him magic to interpret me. He likes friends. What did he drinking on the date tell you about him as a person?

I think he was comfortable and relaxed enough to do it. And the didn’t mind all at all. I think he he done that, I would think he was nervous on need confidence and for being nervous. If he hadn’t drunk and I had it, I would’ve made things uncomfortable.

Any more?

Maybe I would be in that happy state and he wouldn’t have been.

What did his drinking tell you about his personality or character?

Then he fun, because he didn’t in moderation, he plays it safe. Now and chill.

Alcohol had positive or negative on the overall effects of thinking for the date?
Interviews (Male HIGH)

How was she drinking during the party?

She was very social and had several drinks. I can say another guy thought she was too high when she became more playful.

I think she was more social and didn't drink a lot. I can say another guy thought she was too high when she became more playful.

And what else do you think about her personality and character?

She was very social and had several drinks. I don't think she was too high when she became more playful.

What positive or negative was the overall experience of drinking for this date?

It was a positive experience. But I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.

Would you say she's an alcoholic?

I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.

What positive or negative was the overall experience of drinking for this date?

It was a positive experience. But I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.

Would you say she's an alcoholic?

I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.

What positive or negative was the overall experience of drinking for this date?

It was a positive experience. But I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.

Would you say she's an alcoholic?

I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone. I think it's important to be aware of how much alcohol affects someone.
Appendix I: Definitions for Alcohol-Impact Theme (Study Two)

Positive Impact of Alcohol Use

_Become more extraverted:_ Intoxicated individuals believed they are happier, and rated their behaviours as more confident, flamboyant.

E.g. “The drink made me a little happier. I think it also made both of us confident.” (participant #28, female).

_Facilitate conversation:_ Individuals became more talkative and outspoken, and conversation flown more smoothly following alcohol consumption.

E.g. “Alcohol was like a social lubricant. Conversations were a lot easier.” (16, m).

_Fun:_ Individuals perceived the date to be more fun and exciting following intoxication.

E.g. “It made things that usually seem silly, like dancing, more acceptable and fun” (346, m).

_Get to know each other better:_ Individuals explained that partner’s alcohol usage conveyed information about their personality and likes/dislike.

E.g. “After drinking, a different side of his personality got a little bit more out” (292, f).

_Improve date atmosphere:_ The date environment and atmosphere became more romantic with the presence of alcohol.

E.g. “I think a good thing with drinking on date is that it can make the atmosphere better” (23, f).
Increase flirting and expression of romantic interest: After drinking, individuals became more friendly, flirtatious, and affectionate, and found it easy to convey their romantic interest to their partners.

E.g. “I became a bit more flirty, which may have told him that I am interested and want another date” (119, f).

Relational escalation: Drinking assisted the development of relationship, such as acknowledging the status of the relationship, increase likelihood of desired sexual outcome.

E.g. “I think when you drink... you end up having something that goes further. You will end up sleeping with someone. I think relationship develops after that.” (83, f).

Relaxation: Individuals felt more relaxed and less inhibited after consuming alcohol.

E.g. “I think it’s hard sometimes to go on a date. I’ve done it before - being sober - but it’s easier to have a drink and you can relax a bit more” (97, f).

Negative Impact of Alcohol Use

Cost of alcoholic beverage: Individuals reported that the cost of purchasing alcoholic beverage is expensive.

E.g. “The only bad thing about the date was I spent a lot of money buying drinks” (24, m).

Destructive verbal communication: Individuals stated they (or their partner) became verbally aggressive, spoke hurtful messages, or swore following alcohol consumption.
E.g. “After I started drinking, I guess I felt like I couldn’t control what I was saying... which is not really good for a date” (34, f).

**Displayed negative behaviour:** Alcohol consumption led to the emergence of negative and undesirable behaviour such as vomiting and being boisterous. E.g. “Halfway through the night, I got so drunk and I just completely lost it... throwing up everywhere... and the date just went downhill.” (34, f).

**Elicitation or exacerbation of negative emotions:** The consumption of alcohol on the date led to negative emotions such as anxiety and dislike. E.g. “When we went out, she drank a lot and alcohol amplifies a lot of the bad feelings between us” (16, m)

**Excessive self-focus:** Individuals noted that drinking partners became self-focused and ignored others’ needs when intoxicated. E.g. “After drinking... it looked like he didn’t really care about me, just himself. It looked like he just wanted to show his own thoughts, but he was not too concerned about my ideas” (23, f).

**Inability to drive:** Individuals were not legally able to drive following alcohol consumption, which caused inconveniences for the individual, their partner, and the progression of the date. E.g. “I couldn’t drive after having a few so that didn’t make me look too manly. So it was annoying that we had to walk home. Sometimes we had to catch a cab, so that’s annoying” (393, m).

**Uncertainty regarding one’s evaluation of partner:** Participants had doubts about their decisions following alcohol consumption, and they reported questioning the suitability of their drinking partner and the budding relationship.
E.g. "I guess you don't really get to know the person, just the person under the influence [of alcohol]" (148, m).
Appendix J: Participant Information Sheet (Study Three)

Participant Information Sheet

The Development of Romantic Relationships in Early Adulthood

This research project aims to examine the course of romantic relationship in early adulthood and the influence of alcohol in relationship development. We are recruiting dating-partners (including both casual dating and steady dating) who (1) have been dating for less than 24 months, (2) aged between 18 and 25 years, (3) do not have children, and (4) that the female partner is not currently pregnant.

You and your partner are invited to fill out a questionnaire, which takes approximately 45mins to complete. Although both you and your partner need to come to the lab together, no interaction is required during the completion of the questionnaire. To maximize the efficiency of data collection, there may also be other participants in the room. However you will not be asked interact with them.

The data and contact details you provide will only be accessible to the researchers and will not be released to any other individuals so far as allowed by the law. It is your decision how much you share with your partner outside the lab. However, we ask that you respect your partner’s privacy and refrain from asking him/her about his/her responses if he/she does not wish to discuss.

The data will be stored electronically in computer files for 6 years. Participants’ names will not be used during data coding and analysis to preserve anonymity of individual participants. Instead, all participants will be represented by numerical codes. If any data from this research is published or reported, it will be done in a way that ensures no participants are identifiable.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the project at any time without providing a reason. Your participation or non-participation in this research will have no bearing on your standing in class or academic grades.

We do not expect your participation in this research to be associated with significant risk. Potential benefits include having the opportunity to reflect on your relationship and contributing to scientific literature on relationship development.
To thank you for your time and effort in this research, you will receive $10 when you and your partner complete the questionnaire (i.e. $20 per couple). If you are a first-year psychology student, you may choose to receive 1-hour research credit instead of the monetary reimbursement. In addition, one couple will also be randomly selected (approx. 1 in 75 chance) to receive a dinner for two (value at $150) in a restaurant in Civic. If you are selected, you will be contacted at the end of the data collection phase of this study (around Oct 2012).

If you have any queries or wish to know more, please contact Sonia Ip (Candidate for Doctor of Psychology (Clinical)) on 6125 2983 or Sonia.Ip@anu.edu.au. This research is being supervised by Dr Bernd Heubeck and he can be contacted on 6125 0635 or Bernd.Heubeck@anu.edu.au. You are also encouraged to contact the researchers following the completion of the questionnaire should you have any concerns or queries. If you have any ethical concerns about the conduct of this study you can contact the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee on 6125 4807 or human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

This study has been approved under the ANU Human Ethics Committee Protocol 2012/007.
Consent Form

The Development of Romantic Relationships in Early Adulthood

Researchers: Ms. Sonia Ip (Candidate for Doctor of Psychology (clinical))
Dr Bernd Heubeck (Senior Lecturer in Psychology)
Prof. Don Byrne (Head of Department of Psychology)

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand what participation in this study will involve. I have been given the opportunity to discuss any queries and concerns regarding the study with the researchers.

I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I am aware that I can withdraw from the studies at any time. I understand that I will be reimbursed for my participation in this research in accordance to that stated in the participant information sheet.

I have been informed that the researchers will not share my responses and information with any other individuals so far as allowed by the law. Furthermore, no material that could identify me will be used in any publications or report arising from this research project. I have been reminded that I should respect my partner’s privacy and refrain from asking him/her about his/her responses in the questionnaire if he/she does not wish to discuss.

I am aware that I can contact the researchers if I have any queries or concerns as a result of participation in this study.

I have had time to consider whether to participate.

__________________________(full name) consent to take part in this study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

This study has been approved under the ANU Human Ethics Committee Protocol 2012/007.
Please tick the box if you wish to receive a summary of the findings of this study. Please also provide the email address you would like the summary to be sent to.

Email: ____________________________________________

One couple will be randomly selected to receive a dinner for two (value at $150) in a restaurant in Civic. Please clearly print your name and email if you wish to be considered. The researchers (Sonia and Bernd) will use this information to contact you if you are selected. Your contact details will remain confidential and will only be accessible to the researchers.

Name: ____________________________________________

Email (if not provided above): ____________________________________________
Appendix L: Questionnaire (Study Three)

In this questionnaire, **casual dating** refers to the period when 2 persons with some romantic interest try to get to know each other better *before* the start of a romantic relationship.

On the other hand, **steady dating** is defined as the interaction between 2 persons who are *in* a romantic relationship with some forms of mutual commitment, promise or exclusivity.

We are interested in knowing a bit about you and your relationship with your partner. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can.

1. How old are you?  
   ______ years ______ months

2. What is your biological sex? (please circle)  
   Female  Male  Other (please state ________)

3. Are you currently a university student?  
   a) If YES, how long have you been a university?  
   ________ months

   b) If NO, what is your occupation?  
   ____________
4. What do you identify yourself as? (Please circle)

Caucasian  Asian  Indigenous  Others (please state ___________)

5. What is your sexual preference? (Please circle)

Heterosexual  Homosexual  Bisexual  Other

6. How many romantic relationships have you ever been in? (including the one with your current dating partner)

7. Are you and your partner currently...? (Please circle)

Casually dating  Steady dating  Engaged to be married

How long have you and your partner been casually dating?

______________ months

How long did you and your partner casually date prior to entering a steady romantic relationship?

______________ months

How long have you and your partner been steady dating?

______________ months

How long have you been engaged to your partner?

______________ months
8. How often do you and your partner sleep in the same household in the past 4 weeks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily or almost everyday</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Fortnightly</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Handling finances</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Matters of recreation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious matters</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrations of affection</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex relations within the relationship</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex relations with others outside the relationship</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conventionality (correct or proper behaviour)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy of life</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ways of dealing with family members</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>11.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims, goals and things believed to be important</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amount of time spent together</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Making major decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leisure time, interests and activities</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Career decisions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Drug use</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Alcohol use</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>More often than not</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>How often do you discuss or have you considered terminating your relationship with your current partner?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>In general, how often do you think about things between you and your partner are going well?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>How often do you confide in your partner?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>How often do you ever regret that you dated your current partner?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>How often do you and your partner quarrel?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>How often do you and your partner “get on each other’s nerves”?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>How often is jealousy an issue for you in the relationship?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>How often is jealousy an issue for your partner in the relationship?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
26. How much outside interest do you and your partner engage in together?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All of them</th>
<th>Most of them</th>
<th>Some of them</th>
<th>Very few of them</th>
<th>None of them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than once a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once or twice a week</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>More often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a stimulating exchange of ideas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laugh together</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calmly discuss something</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work together on a project</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31. Please mark a cross on a point on the scale which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship at this point in time. The middle point, “happy” represents the degree of happiness of most relationships.

Extremely unhappy | Fairly unhappy | A little unhappy | Happy | Very happy | Extremely happy | Perfect

32. Please circle one statement that best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship.

a. I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

b. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.

c. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.

d. It would be nice if my relationship succeeds, but I can’t do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.

e. It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

f. My relationship can never succeed, and there is nothing more that I can do to keep the relationship going.
The following questions ask about you and your partner's drinking. Please choose the answers (on the right-hand side) that best describe the alcohol use between you and your partner. Please circle only one answer for each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 standard drink equals</th>
<th>1 ½ Standard drink equals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light Beer 425ml 2.9% Alcohol</td>
<td>Full Strength Beer 285ml 4.9% Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortified Wine 60ml 20% Alcohol</td>
<td>Spirits 30ml 40% Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine 100ml 12% Alcohol</td>
<td>Full Strength Can or Stubbie 375ml 4.9% Alcohol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) In the past 4 weeks, how often did you spend time with your partner?  
- Once  
- every 3-4 weeks  
- Fortnightly  
- Weekly  
- 2 - 3 times per week  
- Everyday or almost everyday

2) How often did you have a drink containing alcohol?  
- Never  
- (go to)  
- Once  
- 2 - 4 times per month  
- 2 - 3 times  
- 4+ times per
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Per Week</th>
<th>Per Month</th>
<th>Per Month</th>
<th>Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>How many standard drinks of alcohol did you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>If you are female, please answer qs 4a. If you are male, please answer qs 4b.</td>
<td>4a. How often have you had 4 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4b. How often have you had 6 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td>5) How often did you have a drink containing alcohol?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>2-4 times per month</td>
<td>2-3 times per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>How many standard drinks of alcohol did you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?</td>
<td>N/A or</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>If you are female, please answer qs 7a. If you are male, please answer qs 7b.</td>
<td>7a. How often have you had 4 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Fortnightly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7b. How often have you had 6 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the past 4 weeks...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never (go to page 12)</th>
<th>Once</th>
<th>2 - 4 times per month</th>
<th>2 - 3 times per week</th>
<th>4+ times per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8) How often did you and your partner drink together?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) When drinking together, how many standard drinks of alcohol did you (referring to yourself, not your partner) drink?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>3 - 4</td>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>7 - 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) If you are female, please answer qs 10a. If you are male, please answer qs 10b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10a. When you and your partner drink together, how often have you (referring to yourself, not your partner) had 4 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10b. When you and your partner drink together, how often have you (referring to yourself, not your partner) had 6 or more standard drinks on a single occasion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daily or almost daily
Please rate how certain you are about the degree of involvement that you have in your relationship at this time. Please note we are not asking you to rate how much involvement there is in your relationship, but rather how certain you are about whatever degree of involvement you perceive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently, how certain are you about...</th>
<th>Completely or almost completely uncertain</th>
<th>Somewhat uncertain</th>
<th>Slightly uncertain</th>
<th>Slightly certain</th>
<th>Somewhat certain</th>
<th>Completely or almost completely certain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Whether or not you want the relationship to work out in the long run?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Whether or not you want the relationship to last?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) How much you like your partner?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) How important the relationship is to you?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) How much you are romantically interested in your partner?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Whether or not you are ready to commit to your partner?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Whether or not your partner is ready to commit to you?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) How committed your partner is to the relationship?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Whether or not your partner wants to be with you in the long run?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) How important the relationship is to your partner?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Whether or not your partner wants the relationship to work out in the long run?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much your partner is attracted to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>How much your partner is attracted to you?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>Whether or not the relationship will work out in the long run?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>Whether or not you and your partner feel the same way about each other?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15)</td>
<td>Whether or not you and your partner will stay together?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16)</td>
<td>Whether or not the relationship is a romantic one?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17)</td>
<td>The boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behaviour in the relationship?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18)</td>
<td>Whether or not your partner likes you as much as you like him/her?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19)</td>
<td>Whether or not it is a romantic or a platonic relationship?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20)</td>
<td>How you can or can’t behave around your partner?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Currently, ...</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21)</td>
<td>My partner helps me to do the things I need to do each day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22)</td>
<td>My partner helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23)</td>
<td>My partner helps me to use my time well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24)</td>
<td>My partner interferes with the amount of time I spend with my</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
friends.

25) My partner interferes with my ability to use my time well.

26) My partner interferes with the things I need to do each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please rate how you perceive your current partner and dating relationship at this point in time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How connected are you to your partner?</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How intimate is your relationship?</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How close is your relationship?</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5  6  7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix M: Debriefing Sheet (Study Three)

**The Risk of Excessive Alcohol Consumption**

Alcohol is the most widely used legal drug in Australian society. Drinking alcohol can play an enjoyable role in many people's lives. While drinking a small amount is not harmful for most people, regular drinking of a lot of alcohol can cause health, personal and social problems.¹

Drinking a lot of alcohol regularly over time can cause problems in many areas of your life, including:

- **Relationships and family**
  - E.g. arguments over drinking or when drunk
- **School, study and work**
  - E.g. poor performance, extra days off
- **Finances**
  - E.g. spending too much money on alcohol, fines from legal issues as a result of alcohol use
- **Health**
  - E.g. injuring yourself while under the influence of alcohol (such as drink driving, getting into fights or falling over) or due to heavy consumption over time (such as brain injury, loss of memory, cancer, high blood pressure, weight gain, liver cirrhosis, sexual dysfunction).

Long-term heavy drinking can lead to tolerance and dependence.

**Tolerance** means that you must drink more to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts. Despite this tolerance, the long-term effects remain damaging, as the drinkers who have greater tolerance for alcohol are likely to be those who experience higher blood alcohol levels more frequently.

**Dependence** refers to situations where a person feels a strong need to drink so that drinking is given priority over other behaviours that the person had previously found much more important.

To minimize the risk of short- and long-term alcohol-related harm, the Australian Alcohol Guidelines² recommends the following.

**For men**
- Drinks should be consumed at a moderate rate. E.g. no more than 2 standard drinks in the 1st hour and 1 standard drink per hour thereafter.
- An average of no more than 4 standard drinks a day.
- Not more than 6 standard drinks in any one occasional heavy drinking day (no more than 3 days per week).
- 1 or 2 alcohol-free days per week.

**For women**
- Drinks should be consumed at a moderate rate. E.g. no more than 1 standard drink per hour.
- An average of no more than 2 standard drinks a day.
- Not more than 4 standard drinks in any one occasional heavy drinking day (no more than 3 days per week).
- 1 or 2 alcohol-free days per week.

For more information, or if you need support and treatment to reduce your alcohol intake, you should get in touch with:
- Your GP
- Alcohol and Drug Information Service in ACT (02) 6205 4545
- ACT Alcohol & Drug Service (02) 6207 9977

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Appendix M:

Qualitative Insights into the Experience of Relational Turbulence in Alcohol Use Disorders

Problematic alcohol use is highly prevalent and its impact on relationships is recognized in popular media and literature. However, alcohol use is a dynamic phenomenon and sparse research has investigated the changes in relationship processes as individuals attempt to modify their addictive behaviours. This qualitative study aimed to explore individuals’ current and past experiences in romantic relationships as they progressed through various stages of alcohol use as conceptualized by the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). It utilized verbal discourse that emerged naturally within the therapeutic dialogue with 10 clients (5 males and 5 females; mean age = 33.4 years) who presented to an Alcohol and Drug Service and met DSM-IV criteria for Alcohol Abuse or Alcohol Dependence. The content of the therapeutic discourse was analyzed using a hybrid inductive and deductive thematic approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The results illustrate the subjective experiences of uncertainty and perceptions of partner interdependence as individuals commit to behavioural change. This study has implications for theoretical conceptualization and clinical practice in the field of alcohol use disorders.
Excessive alcohol use is a widely recognized problem in Western society. The DSM-IV captured this phenomenon under the concept of alcohol use disorders, which includes both alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Approximately 17.5 million adults (i.e. 8.5% of the population) in America meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence (Stinson et al., 2005) and this epidemiological pattern of harmful alcohol use is comparable across the Western nations (Degenhardt et al., 2008; Monteiro, Rehm, Taylor, & Stockwell, 2008).

Alcohol abuse and dependence are not static, but dynamic disorders. They are characterized by variation in the patterns of alcohol use as a function of the individual’s motivation to address their problematic drinking. This is conceptualized in the Transtheoretical Model, which accounts for the cycle of change in relation to maladaptive behaviours (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). It explains that individuals with substance addiction progress through five stages in their attempts to modify their maladaptive behaviours. The stages are precontemplation (no intention to change drinking behaviour), contemplation (considering changing drinking behaviour in the near future), preparation (making initial steps towards behavioural change), action (using concrete strategies to make overt changes in drinking behaviour), and maintenance (active efforts to sustain behavioral change). Research suggests relapses are common and individuals with alcohol use disorders often go through the cycle several times before they can successfully exit the cycle and terminate their addiction (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992).
Individuals with alcohol use disorders are at risk of harmful short-term and long-term consequences, with physical and mental illnesses as two of the most widely studied outcomes in the literature (see Cargiulo, 2007, for a review). Furthermore, humans are embedded in social networks and an extensive body of literature has documented the relational costs of heavy alcohol use (see Marshal, 2003, for a review). In spite of the vast literature on the impact of alcohol use on relationship functioning, our understanding is limited by the preponderance of research that views alcohol use disorders as a static unitary phenomenon with certain fixed effects. As a result, investigation into the relational impact that occurs as individuals modify their drinking behaviours has escaped scholarly attention.

**Transitioning Across the Stages: A Relational Perspective**

The transition across the stages of change represents a period of instability in lifestyle, as well as disruptions to established drinking habits (DiClemente, Schlundt, & Gemmell, 2004). The Relational Turbulence Model (RTM) is a theoretical perspective that can shed light into the relational processes that occur during times of transition (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). It emphasizes that transitions, defined by proponents of RTM as changes in the behavioural patterns (Knobloch, 2007), are turbulent because they evoke experiences of uncertainty (*relational uncertainty*) and interruptions to routine (*partner interference*) (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).

Relational uncertainty is an intrapersonal experience of the extent to which one can have confidence about the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). The RTM specifies 3 sources of doubts: (1) *self uncertainty* concerns doubts about the nature of one’s involvement in the relationship, (2) *partner uncertainty* refers to the experience
of doubts about partner’s involvement in the relationship, and (3) relationship uncertainty addresses doubts about the nature of the dyadic relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). On the other hand, the negotiation of interdependence is an interpersonal process which refers to the mutual influence between partners on each other’s routines and behaviours (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). The RTM proposes 2 types of interdependence: (1) partner’s interference relates to the degree to which the partner impedes one’s actions and goals, and (2) partner’s facilitation refers to the extent the partner promotes an individual’s performance and goals (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).

The present study was interested in exploring the experiences of turbulence in courtships in romantic relationships as individuals modify their alcohol usage. Relational turbulence is a plausible candidate for reflecting changes in romantic relationships according to both theoretical conceptualization and empirical evidence (as discussed in the preceding and subsequent paragraphs). Furthermore, the results from Studies Two and Three of the current thesis have illustrated the impact of alcohol usage on individuals and couple’s experience of turmoil, and thus laid the foundation for the extension of this area of research into a clinical population. This study uses verbal transcripts of therapy sessions with clients from an alcohol and drug counseling agency in Canberra, Australia who presented with Alcohol Use Disorders. This study did not intent to evaluate the efficacy of the therapeutic intervention itself. Rather, the aim is to elucidate clients’ current and past experiences of relational turmoil as a result of alcohol use while delivering widely accepted evidence-based interventions (including Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy and Motivational Interviewing).
Alcohol Use and Relational Uncertainty

Excessive alcohol use has been described as an uncertainty-provoking event in romantic relationships (Emmers & Canary, 1996). Discourse from interviews on young adults' dating experiences revealed alcohol usage on dates evoked or exacerbate doubts about their own decisions and actions on the dates, as well as questions about their partners' personality and character (Study Two). Research that adopted a multifaceted conceptualization of alcohol use revealed that individuals at later stages of behavioural change had greater levels of worry and anxiety compared to pre-contemplative individuals (DiClemente & Hughes, 1990). The uncertainty may pertain to fears and worries about the severity and persistence of alcohol use, as well as the affective and relational consequences of heavy drinking (Wanberg, 1983). There is also evidence to suggest that this population endorsed specific personal and treatment-related doubts and worries in relation to seeking help for their problematic alcohol use (Saunders, Zygowicz, & D'Angelo, 2006). Additionally, women who grappled with alcohol and relationship problems expressed uncertainty about the anticipated impact of their alcohol use on their romantic relationships (Kelly, Halford, & Young, 2002).

Although the literature has alluded to various facets of uncertainty that confronts individuals with alcohol use disorders, no investigation to date has systematically explored the topic of relational uncertainty in-depth. Furthermore, with the exception of DiClemente and Hughes' (1990) study, knowledge into the changing experiences of uncertainty as individuals modify their drinking behavior has been a neglected topic in this field. As such, the following research questions arise:
RQ1: What are the themes of uncertainty experienced by individuals with alcohol use disorders?

RQ2: How does the experience of uncertainty vary across the stages of behavioural change?

Alcohol Use and Partner Interdependence

Excessive alcohol use can interfere with relationship functioning in various ways. Research has indicated that disagreements between couples about drinking behaviour were more likely to occur on days when binge drinking took place (Fischer et al., 2005). Heavy drinking over a period of time was further associated with greater conflicts and aggression, as well as less positive tone in couple communication (Fischer, et al., 2005; Leonard, 2005; Rothman, McNaughton Reyes, Johnson, & LaValley, 2012). For women, their problematic drinking not only increases the risk of perpetration, but also the likelihood of being a victim of partner violence (White & Chen, 2002). Marshal (2003) argued there is substantial support for the negative impact of problematic alcohol use on relationship functioning. In contrast, there is a paucity of research that explores the facilitative effects of heavy alcohol use on relationship processes.

While heavy drinking can affect relationship functioning, the reverse has also been investigated. A study followed a group of individuals without alcohol use disorder at baseline and found that martial dissatisfaction was associated with a 3.7-fold increase in the risk of developing alcohol abuse or dependence at the 12-month follow-up (Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006). Subsequent studies reported similar findings (Overbeek et al., 2006; Whisman, 2007) and further suggest that baseline marital
dysfunction is a risk factor for developing alcohol use disorder. Furthermore, women who experienced marital distress were at greater risk of alcohol relapse (Walitzer & Dearing, 2006). These findings allude to the disruptive effects relationship malfunctioning can have on drinking behaviour.

However, the association between romantic relationship and alcohol use is not always a negative one. Attesting for the facilitative effects of relationship quality on drinking behaviour, research has consistently demonstrated the protective effects of marriage against problematic alcohol use (e.g. Harford, Hanna, & Faden, 1994). Compared to married individuals, those who were never married, separated or divorced were more likely to consume alcohol at greater amounts (Hanna, Faden, & Harford, 1993; Power, Rodgers, & Hope, 1999). Among the unmarried, romantic involvement appeared to have health benefits as individuals who were in a relationship tended to drink less than those who were single (Pedersen, Lee, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2008).

This brief review illustrates the bidirectional impact between alcohol use and relationship functioning. However, the literature in this area is composed of disparate research, and as a result, the present knowledge is scattered and disjointed. A lack of integration of the multitude of effects between drinking and relationship development provides an impetus for systematic investigation to weave together the diverse findings into a cohesive account. This need is echoed by scholars, such as Reis (2007), who advocated for a synthesis of related research into a coherent model in order to advance the field of relationship science. Accordingly, the current study aimed to simultaneously explore both the prominent themes of facilitation and
interference that occur in the relationship as individuals attempt to change their maladaptive drinking behaviour. The following research questions were put forward:

RQ3: What are the themes of interdependence encountered by individuals with alcohol use disorder?

RQ4: How does interdependence change as individuals modify their drinking behaviour?

Method

Research Approach

This qualitative study was conceived within an exploratory paradigm (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given that the relational impact of alcohol use has not been conceptualized within the RTM framework in existing research, a qualitative exploratory approach was selected as it affords greater flexibility in gathering data that reflects real-world experiences and in generating hypotheses for future research.

The implementation of research on individuals with alcohol use disorders is challenging. Research advancement must be considered within the ethical standards of clinical practice. Majority of clients who present to substance use counseling agencies are ambivalent about attending therapy (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Thus, the implementation of research in this setting should be discrete and blends naturally within the therapeutic environment to minimize disruption to the counseling process. Thus, rather than using questionnaires or other methodology that may be perceived as intrusive and bothersome by the clients, this study utilized the verbal transcript that are generated within the natural therapeutic dialogue to achieve the research aims. It
employed an idiographic framework which aimed to generate in-depth understanding of individuals' perceptions and interpretations of their worlds (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Study Setting**

Data collection was conducted at the ACT Health Alcohol and Drug Service Counseling and Treatment Service (CTS) in Canberra, Australia, from April to July 2012. This agency provides free counseling and treatment services for individuals with problematic substance use. This study was approved by the ethics committees at the ANU and the ACT Health Department.

**Participants and Researchers**

The researcher’s clients were informed of this study at the initial assessment session and were told that their participation was voluntary. Ten clients (5 female, 5 male; 9 Caucasians, 1 Pacific Islander) who ranged in ages from 21.9 to 40.6 years ($M = 33.45$, $SD = 5.34$) consented to participate in this study. Clinical assessment indicated that these participants all met the DSM-IV’s (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) criteria for alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence. On average, the participants had 4.50 one-hour sessions at CTS ($Mdn = 4$, $SD = 4.06$). To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified only by numeric codes in the data transcription, analysis and reporting. All assessments and therapies with these participants were conducted by the researcher. The researcher was a Registered Psychologist undergoing doctoral-level placement at the CTS and was supervised by two Clinical Psychologists (MW and BH).
Data Collection

All assessment and therapy sessions between the researcher and the participants were audio-recorded. There were no specific interview questions pertaining to this study. Rather, all the data emerged from the natural discourse of therapy sessions between the researcher and the participants. The therapeutic approach centered on evidence-based interventions, including Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (Baker, Bucci, Kay-Lambkin, & Hides, 2007) and Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) for substance use disorders. The recordings were transcribed and entered into the QSR NVivo 9 data management program.

Data Coding

Using NVivo, the data were firstly conceptually ordered into the various stages of change using the method outlined in Strauss and Corbin (1998). The classifications were made according to the participants’ expressed levels of motivation to change at the time of the relationship event, as well as the contextual information the participants provided to the therapist throughout the therapeutic contact. An inductive coding framework (see Appendix M.1) was developed, guided by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) approach to creating qualitative codes. These codes are defined in accordance with the conceptualization in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982, 1992; Prochaska, et al., 1992). The determination of the participants’ stages of change at the time of assessment was based on information derived from through clinical interviews. This form of classification allows for the elucidation of similarities and differences in the nature of participants’ relationship as they progress through various stages of change.
After the material was conceptually ordered into the various stages of change, they were further coded into the domains of uncertainty and interdependence within each stage of change. An inductive coding framework was developed (see Appendix M.2.) in accordance with the conceptualization in the RTM (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001).

**Verifying Reliability**

To attest for the reliability of the classification of material into the stages of behavioral change, after the initial coding by the researcher, each quote was assigned a number and then randomly selected using the random number generator function in Microsoft Excel program. The quotes corresponding to the number on the generator was given to one of the supervisors (MW) for re-coding using the key in Appendix G. The inter-rater reliability was 90%. The maximization of the reliability of uncertainty and interference coding is detailed in a previous study (refer to Chapter Four of this thesis). In essence, a second coder was recruited and the coding manual was refined until both coders achieved 100% agreement in selected data. After all the material was coded, the researcher and another supervisor (BH) discussed the result to ensure there was consensus in the analysis.

**Results**

At the time of assessment, participants were at various stages of change: 1 in pre-contemplation, 2 in contemplation, 2 in preparation, 4 in action, and 1 in the maintenance stage. All of the participants had progressed through various stages of change in their drinking behaviours at some point in their lives. They voiced
relational issues related to times when they were in pre-contemplation (n=8), contemplation (n=8), preparation, (n=5), action (n=6), and maintenance (n=3).

Themes of Relational Uncertainty (RQ1)

Drawing from the RTM, RQ1 explores the issues of relational uncertainty experienced by individuals with alcohol use disorder. Three issues of uncertainty emerged from the data, which were self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and alcohol uncertainty.

**Self and partner uncertainty.** The theme of self and partner uncertainty that surfaced from the therapy content refers to the questions participants asked about themselves and their partners in relation to their involvement in the relationship. One common area of uncertainty voiced by participants related to their readiness for romantic involvement. One participant, for instance, noted, “this relationship is making me nervous (be)cause it is not what I am looking for right now. I don’t know whether I am ready for it yet” (participant number 2). On the other hand, some of the participants raised concerns regarding the extent to which being with their partners was conducive towards their recovery. These doubts stemmed from competing interest between romantic relationship and their recovery from problematic alcohol use. As illustrated by one participant’s remark: “[My partner] has a drinking problem as well. Yes he has a good job and earns good money, but he is a big drinker... I want to get help. Should I be in this relationship?” (4). These themes reveal the intersection between alcohol usage and romantic involvement in the evocation of doubts about the participants and their partners.
**Relationship uncertainty.** The emergence of the theme of relationship uncertainty encompasses the doubts participants had about their romantic relationships. One notable worry expressed by participants relates to the potential *relational consequences* if their partners discovered the full extent of their past and current alcohol usage. As one participant disclosed, “Hiding this alcohol thing from her, I am afraid she will find out eventually. She will ask have I been drinking. Or she will see a bottle somewhere eventually” (8). Some participants reported that they had engaged in regrettable behaviours while intoxicated. These participants raised concerns about the impact on the relationship should their partners find out about the alcohol-related incidents: “That was a narrow escape... I don't know how she will react if she finds out” (1). Thus participants expressed considerable concerns about the immediate and long-term consequences of their alcohol use on their relationships.

**Alcohol uncertainty.** Lastly, the theme of alcohol uncertainty that arose from the discourse represented participants’ questions about their alcohol use. Participants expressed puzzlement about the *reasons behind their problematic drinking* and were strained to identify the factors that maintain their alcohol use. One participant, for instance, asked, “why do [my partner and I] drink when we are already happy? We are doing good things together, why do we need to drink copious amount of alcohol?” (2). At other times, participants communicated their sense of uncertainty regarding the *recovery outlook*: “It scares me. I mean how long is this going to take? How many years to get over this? My drinking, the way I drink, my issues, all of it” (4). As such, this theme illustrates the ambiguity in participants’ understanding of their disorder, as well as its prognosis and treatment options.
Relational Uncertainty across the Stages of Change (RQ2)

The spread of uncertainty themes across the stages of change is illustrated in Table M.1. Varying forms of uncertainty was raised in most of the stages, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, and action stages.

Table M.1. Emergence of uncertainty themes across the stages of behavioural change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of change</th>
<th>Emergence of uncertainty theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-contemplation</td>
<td>self and partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>self and partner, relationship, alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>self and partner, alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>self and partner, relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes of Interdependence (RQ3)

RQ3 examines the issues of interdependence encountered by individuals with alcohol use disorder. Themes of interference and facilitation became apparent in the participants’ discourse.

Interference. The theme of interference involved ways in which partners had hindrance effects on the participants. One content area pertained to partners’ influence in worsening the problematic alcohol use. Some participants noted that their partners held permissive attitudes towards alcohol use and thus encouraged heavy drinking in the relationship: “He made it ok to drink every day, but it just
became Groundhog Day... Making it through the day and then he is there again, my magic genie with the alcohol” (2). This permissive attitude, in addition to the partners heavy drinking, disrupted participants’ efforts to modify their own alcohol use. One participant, for instance, explained: “I got weekend leave about 3 month into rehab and I went home to my husband... He was still drinking in front of me. And I ended up picking up a drink again” (5). Additionally, some participants attributed their alcohol use to their experiences in dysfunctional relationships. For example, one participant remarked: “I think a lot of my problem is that I’ve been unhappy in the marriage, so I turned to the bottle” (3). These quotes captured the various ways in which partners form a barrier in the participants’ effort to change their alcohol use.

Another theme of interference that surfaced from the discourse revolved around the deleterious impact of drinking on the relationship. A common issue raised by participants were the evocation of arguments with their partners as a result of alcohol use. As one participant illustrated, “We just had our 5th anniversary the other night. Beautiful night, ended with fighting, (be)cause of alcohol. We just had one too many and start picking on each other” (3). Another participant shared her insights into the possible consequences of alcohol-related disputes: “[Alcohol] will destroy our relationship... When we are not drinking, we have the best time. When we are drinking, we both became horrible” (4). One of the strategies participants employed to minimize the likelihood of arguments was to avoid disclosure of their drinking. As such, the relationship is filled with secrecy. For example, one participant asserted: “I am actually quite sneaky about my drinking... But I am certainly unhappy about being dishonest and trying to hide things from my wife” (6). In the end, the alcohol use had led to the desolation of relationships for some of the participants: “My
husband and I have separated. I think one of the main reasons that we separated is drinking. And that's for both of us” (3). Overall, participants voiced a range of destructive effects that drinking had on their romantic relationships.

**Facilitation.** The theme of facilitation embodied ways in which partners had positive influence on the participants. One of the facilitative effects that arose from the data was the partners’ provision of assistance and support as participants worked towards achieving desired changes in drinking behaviour. An example of facilitation included partners’ encouragement to cease drinking: “My girlfriend knows about my drinking and she told me she is not too happy about it. And I am slowly listening to her now” (10). Partners also facilitated recovery by motivating participants to seek treatment. As summarized by one participant: “He is supportive of me coming to therapy. He said he won’t drink either so I wouldn’t be tempted” (4). Thus, when the partners recognize participants’ harmful alcohol use, they may act to assist participants in modifying their drinking behaviour.

On the other hand, participants also highlighted the facilitative effects of partners’ alcohol use on romantic relationship development. More specifically, the central role of alcohol use in the initiation of romantic relationships was raised: “I met most of my boyfriends around alcohol back then. They were really short [relationships]… but I met a lot of partners through it” (9). Others suggested the concordance of alcohol use between participants and their partners promoted relationship development: “We were perfect for each other because he was a big drinker and I was a big drinker” (5). These quotes illustrated the possible advancement in romantic relationships from mutual alcohol use between couple members.
Themes of Interdependence across the Stages of Change (RQ4)

Themes of partner interdependence were expressed across all the stages of alcohol use (see Table M.2). Of interest, while partners’ facilitation in changing alcohol use was voiced across most stages, participants did not perceived this in the pre-contemplation stage. Instead, only the facilitative effect of drinking in relationship formation was raised in this early stage of change. In terms of the themes of interference, partners’ disruption to the participants’ recovery and the romantic relationship were consistently reported across all stages of change.

Table M.2. Emergence of interference and facilitation themes across the stages of behavioural change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of change</th>
<th>Emergence of facilitation theme</th>
<th>Emergence of interference theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-contemplation</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>relationship, behavioural change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>behavioural change</td>
<td>relationship, behavioural change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>behavioural change</td>
<td>relationship, behavioural change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>behavioural change</td>
<td>relationship, behavioural change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>behavioural change</td>
<td>relationship, behavioural change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The intricate link between alcohol use and intimate relationships has captured extensive scholarly interest over the years. This study sought to enhance our understanding by exploring the relational impact as individuals with alcohol use disorders contemplate about modifying their drinking behaviours. Drawing from the RTM, this study focused on individuals’ experiences of relational turbulence (i.e. sense of uncertainty and perception of interdependence).

Experiences of Relational Turbulence

The RTM proposed that individuals in romantic relationships experience relational turbulence, characterized by uncertainty and partner interference, at times of behavioural change (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). The results illustrate three areas of uncertainty experienced by individuals with alcohol use disorders. These are self and partner uncertainty, relationship uncertainty, and alcohol uncertainty. The doubts these individuals had about themselves, their partner, and the relationship complements existing findings in the general population (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001; Study Two of this thesis). However, compared to the uncertainty endorsed by the non-clinical sample, the content of relational uncertainty voiced by individuals with alcohol misuse drew intimate links between their doubts and alcohol use.

Indeed, close examination of the data revealed a distinct theme of alcohol uncertainty which was reflected in questions individuals had about their alcohol use. The dominance of alcohol content within the themes of uncertainty echoes previous research on other mental and physical health disorders, such as depression and infertility, which illustrated the endorsement of illness-specific uncertainty by those
who suffer from the problems (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; Steuber & Solomon, 2008).

The current findings also indicate that participants perceived interference from their partners in relation to alcohol use and relationship development. The discourse revealed that partners can both impede or promote participants’ commitment to behavioural change. At the same time, participants reported partners’ drinking can affect relationship development in that it could both deter and advance the romantic relationship. The themes of partner interference raised by individuals with alcohol use disorders were consistent with findings of co-dependency between addicted couples (T. W. Miller et al., 2002). These forms of interference to participants’ mental health and relationship processes also shared similarities with the experiences of depressed individuals (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012), and further highlighted the detrimental effects partners can have on personal wellbeing and romantic relationships in clinical populations. On the other hand, the facilitative effect of partners in alcohol use disorder has long been a neglected area of research. Consistent with findings that partners exert some of the pressure to change (Selin, Holmila, & Knibbe, 2009), the current study elucidated that partners, at times, can be an important source of support for individuals who are trying to change their drinking behaviour. Additionally, while heavy drinking can have detrimental relational consequences, the findings suggest alcohol may initially play a critical role in promoting relationship formation. This facilitative effect may be driven from the selection effects of choosing a romantic partner who is compatible in drinking (Wiersma, Fischer, Harrington Cleveland, Reifman, & Harris, 2010), or may result from the social enhancement property of alcohol (Nezlek, Pilkington, & Bilbro, 1994; Sayette et al.,
2012). When considered together, these findings suggest reciprocal influences between alcohol use and relationship processes across the stages of change.

The RTM predicts a peak in uncertainty and partner interference at times of transition (Knobloch, 2007). Inspection of the themes showed that uncertainty was present across all the stages of change. This means that individuals with alcohol use disorders had doubts and questions through every phase of their attempt to change their drinking behaviour, though the issues and sources of uncertainties vary qualitatively at different stages. Similarly, although the themes of facilitation and interference showed slight qualitative variations across the stages of change, the subjective experience of partner interdependence was present throughout participants’ discourse. This is the first study to empirically investigate the experience of relational turmoil during transitions in drinking behaviours among those with alcohol abuse and dependence issues. The themes that emerged from the unmitigated therapeutic discourse provide initial data-driven evidence of the turbulent issues confronted by individuals at various stages of addressing their alcohol misuse. These distressing issues have the potential to negatively affect both the individuals’ attempts to change drinking modification and the course of their romantic relationships.

Clinical and Theoretical Implications

The present study demonstrated the application of RTM to a clinical population and its utility in understanding the relational processes experienced by individuals with alcohol use disorders. The purpose of this exploratory study was not to quantify or compare the experiences of uncertainty and interference between individuals or within an individual at different time points. Rather, it was to generate detailed
understanding of individuals’ experiences of relational turbulence during their efforts to achieve changes in alcohol usage. The findings from this exploratory study provide the empirical foundation for further hypotheses testing into the turmoil encountered by those with alcohol misuse.

The current findings have implications for professionals who work with individuals with problematic alcohol use. Directing attention to romantic relationship functioning when treating alcohol misuse is critical as relationship distress and alcohol problems can exacerbate each other (Halford, Markman, Kling, & Stanley, 2003). The present results suggest individuals’ doubts about themselves, their partners, the relationship, and their alcohol use, in addition to their partners’ disruption to their recovery and relationship, all contribute to the experience of turmoil. This highlights the importance of considering both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors in the exploration of distress and barriers to effective behavioural change.

As such, helping clients to draw the connection between their alcohol use, their experiences of turmoil, and the quality of their relationships may provide an avenue to change drinking behaviour and to improve relationship functioning. Treatment programs that targets alcohol misuse should also address relationship difficulties. For example, in accordance with the principles of motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002), clinicians may wish to reflect on the clients’ sense of uncertainty in order to amplify participants’ ambivalence. The state of cognitive dissonance drives one’s motivation to resolve the sense of ambivalence, which in turn increases commitment to behavioural modification. Clients may also benefit from discussion of strategies to overcome partner interference that is impeding effective behavioural
change. Of equal importance, clinicians should also be aware of the facilitative
effects partners may have in the reduction of alcohol use. This constitutes an
important protective factor in therapy and should be amplified where possible. Indeed
there is increasing recognition of the importance of incorporating a relationship
component and recruiting partners in treatment of alcohol use disorders to enhance
both mental wellbeing and relationship functioning (Powers, Vedel, & Emmelkamp,
2008).

Limitations and Future Directions
There are several caveats that should be noted in interpreting the current findings.
Firstly, although there is variation in the current sample in terms of gender,
relationship status, and current stages of change, the participants were mostly of a
Caucasian background in early or mid-adulthood and all had attended professional
counseling. It is possible that individuals with problematic alcohol use who do not
seek treatment and those from different ethnic background or age group may have
differing experiences of the relational impact of their drinking. Future studies should
address this limitation.

Secondly, the current findings are based on participants’ discourse in therapy. While
this has provided a valuable source of naturally occurring account of their
experiences, the finding is limited by the data’s cross-sectional nature and
participants’ retrospective report of events. Researchers may wish to use the present
findings to inform measurement development that can deliver precision in assessing
the experience of relational turbulence in the alcohol misuse population. This
measure may provide the foundation for future quantitative and longitudinal research,
which allows for confirmation of the current exploratory findings and to examine the within-subject variations in relational turbulence across time and stages of change. Future work may also wish to gather data beyond the individuals and recruit both the person with alcohol misuse and his/her partner to generate dyadic perspectives on the experiences of relational turbulence.

Conclusion

This study describes the relational impact of problematic alcohol use. It illustrated the subjective experiences of relational turbulence, characterized by uncertainty and partner interdependence, as individuals with alcohol use disorders commit to modifying their drinking. The current findings have implications for both theoretical development and clinical practice. Romantic relationships play a significant role in the lives of adults and hence identifying the relational processes affected by alcohol misuse constitute a research priority for future investigation.
Reference


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10.1177/0265407507077227

10.1080/10410236.2011.639293

10.1080/10510979909388499


Appendix N.1. The Framework for Coding Participants’ Stages of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-contemplation</td>
<td>Individuals have no intention to modify their drinking.</td>
<td>The lack of intention to change may be due to poor awareness of the problem or demoralization from previous unsuccessful attempts to change. Pre-contemplators may wish to change, but have no intention of putting conscious effort to achieve change (usually in the next 6 months).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplation</td>
<td>Individuals acknowledge the existence of a problem but not committed to take actions.</td>
<td>The individuals may begin to see the pros and cons of their drinking behaviour. They are considering making changes to their drinking and are considering the benefits and costs of behavioral change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Individuals express intention to make significant changes in their drinking.</td>
<td>Individuals may have set goals and plans for behaviour change in the near future (usually in the next month). The individuals may start to implement some strategies to make small changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Individuals make a committee to behavioral change by taking overt actions.</td>
<td>Actions include making changes in the behaviour or environment to overcome their drinking. These actions require time and energy. As a result of their actions, individuals in this stage have made successful modification of their drinking behaviour for 1 day to 6 months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Individuals continue to maintain the successful changes in their drinking behaviour.</td>
<td>The maintenance of change can occur via the prevention of relapse and consolidation of behavioral change. These individuals are stable in their new behaviour and have sustained changes for 6 months to an indeterminable period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse</td>
<td>Individuals return to earlier stages.</td>
<td>Relapse occurs when individuals are unable to sustain behavioral changes and return to problematic alcohol use. They re-enter the cycle at the earlier stages of change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix N.2. The Framework for Coding Themes of Uncertainty and Interdependence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td>The individual believed he/she could make sense of behaviour and situations.</td>
<td>The individual expressed confidence in being able to describe, explain and predict behaviour, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>The individual is unable to make sense of behaviour and situations.</td>
<td>The individual lacked confidence in describing, explaining and predicting behaviour, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Partner had positive influence on the participant</td>
<td>The partner’s action promotes positive outcome for the participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interference</td>
<td>Partner had negative influence on the participant</td>
<td>The partner’s action contributes to negative outcome for the participant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>