

Where's that wine? A pre-registered study assessing the utility of visual search to measure alcohol-related attentional bias

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Background & Aims: Experimental research consistently shows that individuals who regularly consume alcohol prioritise their attention towards alcohol-related cues. Many tasks that measure *alcohol-related attentional bias (AB)*, however, are limited by their low internal reliability and the artificial manner in which stimuli are shown. In a bid to overcome these limitations, the current study employed a visual search paradigm to examine whether heavy social drinkers exhibit AB towards alcoholic relative to non-alcoholic stimuli. It also assessed whether self-reported alcohol consumption, drinking motives or subjective craving predicted alcohol-related AB. **Method:** Ninety-nine participants ($M^{\text{age}} = 20.77$, $M^{\text{AUDIT}} = 12.89$) completed a Visual Conjunction Search Task in which they were instructed to identify alcoholic (wine, beer) or non-alcoholic (lemonade, cola) targets in an array of matching and mismatching distractors. They also completed questionnaires probing their alcohol consumption behaviours. **Findings:** Participants were significantly faster to detect alcoholic relative to non-alcoholic targets, which was predicted by self-reported alcohol consumption and related behaviours (AUDIT scores). Subjective craving and drinking motives did not significantly account for additional explained variance. **Conclusions:** Alcohol-related stimuli capture heavy social drinker's attention, which may present as a risk factor for continued (mis)use. Visual search paradigms appear to offer a highly reliable assessment of alcohol-related AB over other experimental paradigms in alcohol research.

Key words: alcohol; visual search; attentional bias; drinking motives; subjective cravings