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Energy Drinks: The Scourge of Studying?

Paul A. Djupe

January 31, 2023

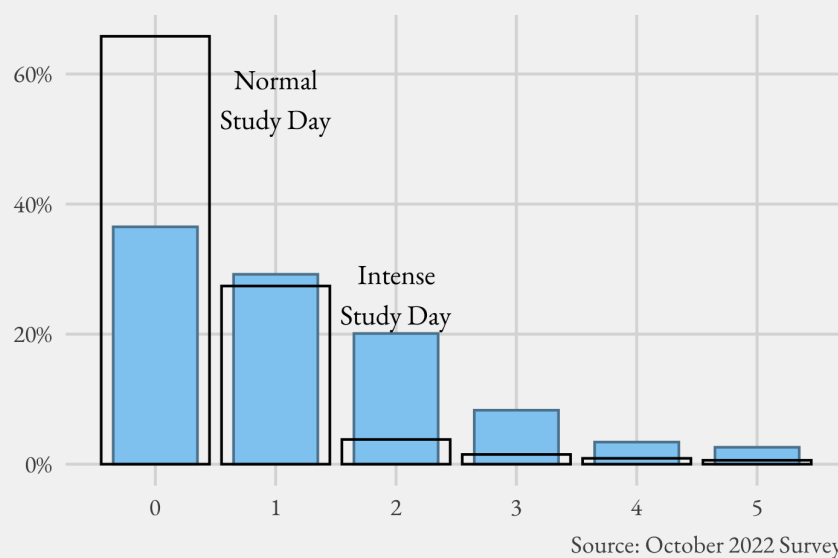
By Paul A. Djupe

Those slender cans seem to be everywhere. The euphemistically titled energy drinks are this generation's study hero in the way that pop (esp mountain dew) and coffee were to others. We at 127 wanted to get a handle on just how extensive consumption of energy drinks is.

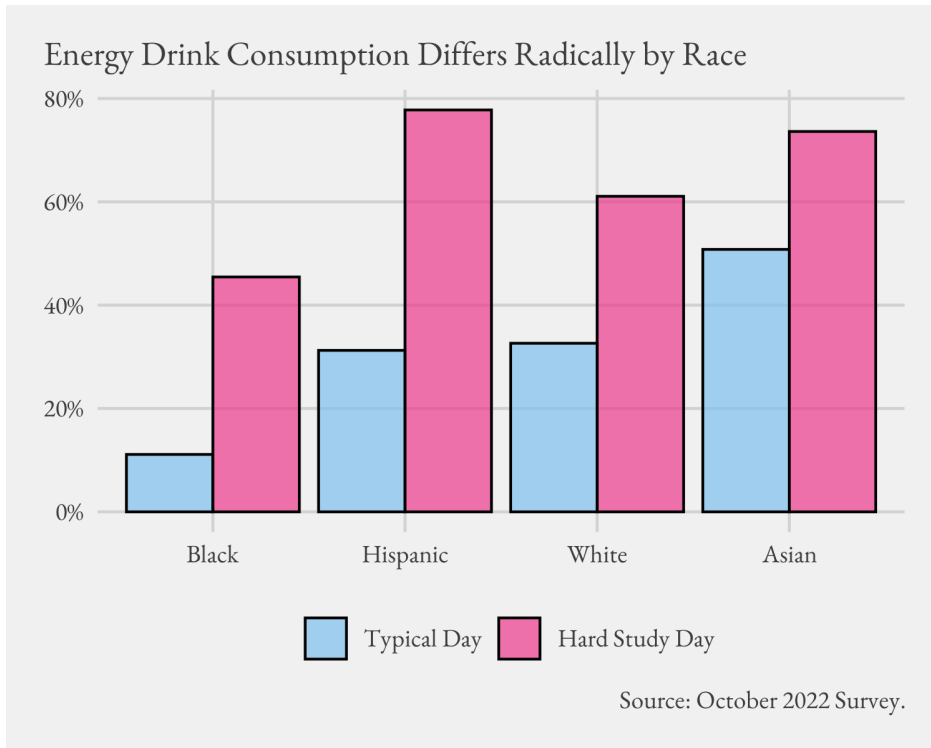
It wouldn't matter if there weren't potentially serious risks. Caffeine use is widespread and safe in moderation. But those Monsters have more than half the daily recommended jolt for adults in just one serving on top of a mountain of sugar and other substances, like guarana, without a solid research base on humans. Serious caffeine use is associated with anxiety and insomnia, according to the CDC, and students don't need any more of either. Despite these potential effects, the energy drink market is booming, projected to hit 85 billion worldwide by the time sophomores are graduating in 2025.

We asked 502 students in October 2022 about their energy drink consumption. On any given day, energy drink consumption is not exactly rare, but is not a majoritarian practice – about a third (34%) say they have one on the daily. That stat puts Denison right in line with research about young people more generally. However, when the workload piles up, so do the empty cans of the nasty. In that case, more like two-thirds of Denisonians have one (64%), and about 10 percent will go on to have 3 or more that day. With numbers like that, it is highly likely to plague most of campus, but it's worth finding out what groups are more hooked on the can than others.

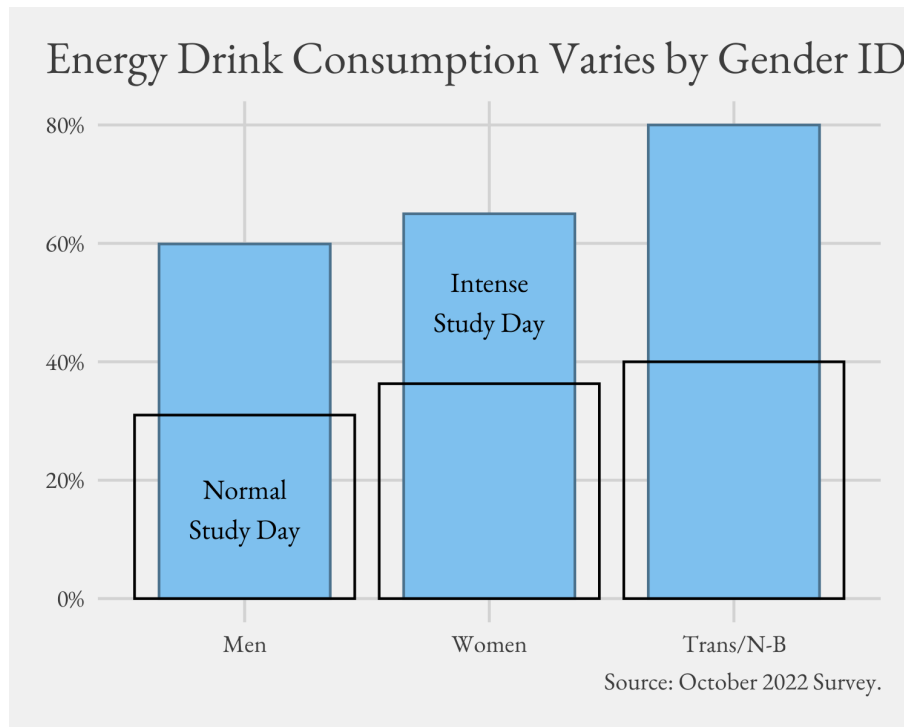
Energy Drink Consumption Goes up Radically on Intense Study Days



We have found before that substance consumption varies by race, perhaps because of the disparate legal consequences of non-whites getting caught misbehaving while intoxicated. Or perhaps it is engrained in the cultures of different racial groups. But whatever the story, it applies also to energy drinks. Here though, whites are not the dominant consumers. Instead, Asian students are the top consumers of energy drinks – about 50 percent drink one on the daily while three-quarters do on tough study days. Fifteen percent fewer whites use energy drinks daily or on tough days, about on par with Hispanic students. Black students stand out as the least heavy users of these drinks.



I know I was surprised to find that women on campus were higher consumers of energy drinks than men. Not by much, though 5 percent is real. But Denison’s trans/non-binary community outpaces the rest with 40 percent drinking one daily and double that (80%) drinking at least one on an intense study day. There are widespread reports that women more often use (sugar free) energy drinks as a weight loss strategy and we have evidence for that here. Those who say they restrict calories in anticipation of drinking are more likely to use energy drinks (though we didn’t ask about sugar-free choices) – 13 percent more on intense study days.



The most robust predictor of energy drink consumption is race – Asians use them more and Black students use them less often. There is a bit of social class that factors in, though, with students from upper-class background less likely to hit the Red Bull. And energy drink use is not linked to a lower GPA or more or less effective study habits. That tells me that energy drinks, like coffee or alcohol, are socially-constructed options having more to do with what is fashionable in the moment in particular communities. I wonder if the next gen is going to be back to coffee and I hope mountain dew never makes a comeback.

Paul A. Djupe is a local cyclist who runs the Data for Political Research minor. He started onetwentyseven.blog a few years ago in a bid to subsidize collective action. He's on Twitter and you should be too, along with your president.