

RESEARCH REPORT

Situational norms for drinking and drunkenness: trends in the US adult population, 1979–1990

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Abstract

Drinking depends on time, place, situation and personal characteristics. Patterns and trends in situational drinking norms (subjective levels of acceptable consumption for various situations) for US adults are reported. Results are based on eight comparable normative questions from national household surveys conducted in 1979 (n = 1772), 1984 (n = 5221 including Hispanic and black oversamples) and 1990 (n = 2058). Across years and population subgroups, a correspondence in ordering of situations on acceptability of drinking and of drunkenness was found. There were contrasting secular trends in the acceptability of drunkenness in different situations: drinking "enough to feel the effects" became more acceptable when at home but less acceptable in several other situations, particularly for men at a bar. For a decreasing percentage of respondents of both genders, it remains more acceptable for men than women to drink in bars, but gender norms in such "wetter" situations were converging by 1990. Men remain more accepting of drinking (but not drunkenness) for "drier" situations such as when driving, but the trend is towards reduced acceptance. Multiple regression models predicting "acceptance of drinking" and "acceptance of drunkenness" scores showed fair stability in explanatory variables over time, with drinking level and conservative Protestant affiliation (drinking) or age (drunkenness) the major contributors.

Introduction

Although about two-thirds of adults in the United States are current drinkers of alcohol, drinking is a highly enclaved activity in American society (Room, 1975). The likelihood that someone will be drinking an alcoholic beverage at a particular moment depends not only on their personal characteristics or social roles, but also

on the time, place and definition of the situation. Thus American drinking has a particular rhythm by day and hour of the week, with most drinking taking place in the evening hours and on weekends (Arfken, 1988). Drinking is primarily associated with leisure time, and drinking on the job is often forbidden and is regarded as exceptional for most occupations (Hitz, 1973). Drinking or

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appearing drunk in a public place is frequently forbidden by state or local law, and many heavy drinkers do a good deal of their drinking in taverns and other places set aside for drinking (Clark, 1981, 1988). Normatively speaking, drinking combines well with many other activities—with watching a baseball game or television—but for some activities, such as piloting an airplane or taking an examination, drinking is proscribed or more or less unthinkable.

Earlier analyses of US national survey data have explored some of this variation in the time, place and manner of drinking in terms of the actual drinking behavior reported by respondents for various settings (Clark, 1985). An analysis of data from 1964 and 1984 surveys showed substantial changes over time in the proportions of respondents who reported drinking with close friends and friends from church, work and the neighborhood (Hilton, 1987), while a state-level survey in Iowa (Fitzgerald & Mulford, 1993) between 1985 and 1989 found fair stability in the relative frequency of drinking in various contexts over time. Relatively little has been reported, however, concerning views of the US national population on the *norms* governing drinking behavior in various situations, and there has been no consideration of time trends in such norms. We adopt the common sociological meaning of norms as informal (more than formal) standards or rules regulating behaviors (Jary & Jary, 1991); as applied to drinking, such norms have been found to vary according to time, social context and drinking situation (Room & Roizen, 1973). Theoretically, drinkers' definitions of situations (Gaines, 1981) affect actual drinking behaviors in varying contexts (Harford & Gaines, 1981). As Room & Roizen (1973) have argued, drinking "even at its most apparently uninhibited, obeys what MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) call the 'within-limits' clause, remaining within socially- and situationally-defined boundaries" (p. 25). In this article we use concept of relative "wetness" or "dryness" of situations descriptively. Although the terms "wet" and "dry" have been applied with several connotations in the literature, but often applying to cultures or regions (Skog, 1985b; Hilton, 1988; Room, 1991), by "wet" and "dry" situations we mean simply those more conducive to heavier drinking, such as bars (Clark, 1981) versus those less so, such as when taking care of children.

The task of classifying norms regarding a particular situational context may be viewed in Gerhardt's sociological role theory terms (see Knibbe, Drop & Muytjens, 1987), as deriving from a confluence of several role influences, but especially *situation roles*—"social expectations which facilitate social behavior in those short-term situations in which people pursue and achieve specific objectives" (p. 464). In Gerhardt's scheme, *status roles* such as gender would also influence judgements about "appropriateness" of drinking behavior and opportunities in a range of situations. In addition, *position roles*, based on positions someone occupies in particular social networks, such as parent, spouse or co-worker, create obligations structuring behavior across (but also within) situations. Like the tides, when roles involved in a given context pull in the same direction, the situation for that individual will be (and we surmise would also be rated as) "wetter" (or "drier"). As Mäkelä (1975) and others note, broad prescriptive and proscriptive norms are less useful in explaining drinking behavior than a more complex multi-dimensional framework. We therefore do not reify the relative "wetness" of a situation as specified on a survey question; it is merely a convenient uni-dimensional summary of responses to its many features.

The present report draws on comparable responses to normative questions from three national surveys, conducted in 1979, 1984 and 1990, to examine patterns and trends in situational norms concerning drinking in the US adult population. The questions used in this analysis were first developed for a survey of the San Francisco adult population in 1971 (Room & Roizen, 1973) and versions of the series have been used in a variety of unpublished surveys inside and outside the US. Although acceptance of drinking and drunkenness in a given situation varies greatly from one culture or subculture to another, respondents in different groups tend to agree on the relative "wetness" of the different situations covered, i.e. the degree to which drinking at all or drinking enough to feel the effects, is seen as permissible (Trocki, 1988). Similarly, in the 1971 San Francisco survey, heavy drinkers and abstainers also agreed on the ordering of the situations by relative "wetness", although they differed substantially in the proportion accepting drinking in any given situation (Room & Roizen, 1973). None of the datasets

available for use in cross-country comparisons have allowed trend analyses over a substantial period, the focus of this research.

Methods

The present report is based on three probability surveys of the household population of the 48 conterminous US states. In the 1979 survey 1772 interviews were conducted for the Alcohol Research Group by the Response Analysis Corporation; the main results were reported by Clark, Midanik & Knupfer (1981). Fieldwork on the 1984 and 1990 surveys was conducted by the Institute of Survey Research of Temple University. The main results of the 1984 survey, in which 5221 interviews were conducted, can be found in a book edited by Clark & Hilton (1991). Since the 1984 study included a heavy oversampling of black and Hispanic Americans, its effective sample size, after downweighting the oversampled groups, is about the same as the 1990 sample. The primary sample in 1990, used in the present report, included 2058 adults aged 18 years and over. In a multi-stage sample design with 100 primary sampling units one adult was randomly chosen for interview in each household falling into the sample. Percentages reported here for each study are based on a weighting of the sample to attain representativeness of the national adult population according to census data for the respective survey date. For statistical tests of differences the samples were down-weighted to take account of the increases in variance stemming from use of clustered sample designs and weighting (Kish, 1965). Statistical results are calculated to be equivalent to those undertaken with simple random samples (effective *ns*) of 1748, 2166 and 2055 for the 1979, 1984 and 1990 surveys, respectively (methodological details available from the first author).

In each of the three surveys all respondents were handed a card with four answer categories: no drinking; one or two drinks (1979: but not enough to get high); enough to feel the effects but not drunk (1979: OK to be high but not drunk); getting drunk is sometimes all right. The interviewer then stated, "now I'll describe some situations that people sometimes find themselves in. For each one, please tell me how much a person in that situation should feel free to drink... How much drinking is all right..."—with a list of situations following. Fifteen situations

were listed in 1979, eleven in 1984 and nine in 1990. The present analysis is based on eight situations asked in common across the three studies. The situations which were included in the studies and which survived through the three waves were not intended to be exhaustive but rather exemplary of situations in which some or considerable drinking might be involved; while they include a few situations in which one might expect drinking to be strictly limited, the list as a whole is somewhat tilted towards "wetter" situations in an adult's usual daily or weekly rounds.

The methods were thus substantially comparable in the three surveys despite some differences in the answer cards. It is possible but seems unlikely that the variations on the answer card between 1979 and the other two surveys would result in a different distribution of responses. Since the number and order of situation items varied between surveys, it is also possible that the differences in an item's context influenced the pattern of responses. "When going to drive a car" was listed first in 1990, last in 1984 and seventh in 1979. Otherwise, the order of situations was fairly closely matched: at a party, parent with small children, husband's dinner with wife, man at bar, woman at bar, co-workers at lunch and friends at home came in the same order in 1984 and 1990 and 1979 varied only in inserting five other situations before co-workers at lunch and friends at home. There are also minor variations in the wording of the situation. The only substantive difference was that "when with friends at home" was "when friends come over to your house or you go to theirs" in 1979.

In earlier studies, factor analyses have suggested a differentiation of attitudes to drinking from attitudes to drunkenness, and the two sets of attitudes have proven to have different correlates (Allardt, 1957; Dight, 1976), supporting the distinction in the sociological literature between "permissive" and "prescriptive" drinking norms (see Room, 1975). For the present analysis, two scores were constructed: an "acceptance of drinking" score, which summed for how many of the eight situations the respondent accepted any drinking at all, and an "acceptance of drunkenness" score, which assigned one point for each situation in which the respondent felt it was all right to drink "enough to feel the effects", and two points for each situation in which it was felt that "getting drunk is sometimes all right". No score was computed for the small proportion of

respondents with missing data on any item.

Three measures of current drinking behavior and problems are also used in this analysis. Two of these, measures of current dependence symptoms and of current tangible consequences of drinking, have previously been used for comparisons of the 1979 and 1984 studies (see Fig. 9.1 in Clark & Hilton, 1991). The current dependence symptoms score counts the number of positive responses concerning the last 12 months to a list of nine items, while the current tangible consequences score sums positive responses for the last 12 months to 12 items. (In 1979, 6% of respondents reported two or more current dependence symptoms, and in 1984 and 1990 7% did. In all three years, 4% reported two or more current tangible consequences.) A four-level current (12-month) frequency–maximum drinking measure was constructed so as to be maximally comparable between the three surveys, each of which differed somewhat in their questions on amount of drinking. “Frequent drinking” was defined as drinking any one of three beverage types—beer, wine or liquor—at least once a week, and “high maximum drinking” was defined as having consumed five or more drinks on an occasion at least once in the past 12 months. (For 1990 this was defined from the largest number of drinks of any alcohol beverage the respondent consumed in a single day. For 1979 it was defined by the largest amount reported when the respondent was asked for wine, beer and liquor separately about the occasion in the last year when the respondent drank the most, with a follow-up prompt for those originally answering that they didn’t remember. For 1984 it was defined by respondents answering that at least “once in a while” they drank “as many as five or six” drinks of wine, beer or liquor.) For the regression analysis in this report, frequent, high maximum drinkers—those passing both these criteria—were assigned a score of 3, other frequent drinkers a score of 2, other current drinkers a score of 1, and current abstainers a score of zero. In 1979 and 1984, 22% of the sample were frequent high maximum drinkers, while in 1990 18% were. The proportion of current abstainers fell from 33% in 1979 to 31% in 1984, and then rose to 35% in 1990.

Nine dichotomous or quasicontinuous demographic variables were also used in the analysis. In the dichotomous variables, respondents were

coded 0 unless they fell in the following categories, coded 1: males for gender, wet region for US region (New England, Mid-Atlantic, East North Central, West North Central, Pacific—see chapter 17 in Clark & Hilton, 1991); married for marital status; conservative Protestant for religion (Baptist, Fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Mormon, Seventh-Day Adventist, Jehovah’s Witness); black American for black ethnicity (including black Hispanics); and Hispanic American for Hispanic ethnicity (including black Hispanics). Year of age was used as the age variable, the full range of income categories for income (10 categories in 1984 and 1990, 11 in 1979), and the full range of education categories for education (eight categories in 1979 and 1984, 17 in 1990).

Analysis of differences over time in the tables (or between genders, when noted in the text) in rates of acceptance of any drinking and of drinking enough to feel the effects or more used the Pearson χ^2 -square test; tests of linear trends across time given in the text as relevant used the Mantel–Haenszel χ^2 -square test (Fleiss, 1981). Analyses took account of the reduction in effective sample size due to multi-stage sampling as described earlier. The procedure is conservative for the gender-specific analyses and for determining significance of regression coefficients in models predicting acceptance of drinking and acceptance of drunkenness.

Results

Table 1 compares the responses on situational norms concerning any drinking at all in the 1979, 1984 and 1990 surveys. In all three years, a strong majority of Americans agreed that some drinking is all right for each of the first five situations listed, while only one-third or less agreed to any drinking for the last three situations. What Americans largely agree on as desirable drinking behavior is thus considerably more restrictive than the legal rules concerning drinking. For example, “one or two drinks” would generally be legally acceptable anywhere in the US for someone over the age of 21 years who was going to drive a car.

Although the differences are often not great, males are consistently more accepting of drinking in a given situation than females (gender tests not shown). With survey years pooled, gender differences were all significant

Table 1. Situational norms on drinking at all, total samples and by gender, in three US national surveys (weighted data)

	Total			Male			Female		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
A person should feel free to drink 1 or 2 drinks (or more)	(1748) ^a	(2166)	(2055)	(753)	(1019)	(868)	(995)	(1147)	(1187)
At a party at someone else's home	84	83	84	88	86	86	81	81	83
For a man out at a bar with friends	85	83	85	88	86	87	82	80	84
For a woman out at a bar with friends	76	75	80**	80	79	82	72	77	82*
When with friends at home	76	81	84 ⁺	82	84	86	72	77	82 ⁺⁺
For a husband having dinner out with his wife	83	82	83	86	83	84	81	80	82
For a couple of co-workers out to lunch	35	22	32 ⁺	40	25	37 ⁺⁺	31	19	27 ⁺⁺
When going to drive a car	32	18	22 ⁺⁺	41	24	27 ⁺⁺	23	12	17 ⁺⁺
As a parent spending time with small children	28	21	18 ⁺⁺	31	27	23*	25	16	13 ⁺⁺

Nos given in parentheses are unweighted except for 1984 which weights for ethnicity (see text); statistical comparisons using χ^2 are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.0001$; + $p < 0.0001$; ++ $p < 0.00001$.

($p < 0.01$ – $p < 0.00001$), although comparisons by year indicated that the differences became non-significant for four of five of the wet situations by 1990, with a gender difference remaining only for at home with friends ($p < 0.05$). In the aggregate, however, men and women agree fairly closely on the normative ordering of the situations. Among both men and women, in each year, fewer see it as appropriate for women to drink with friends at a bar than for a man; for a small percentage of both males and females—a fraction which is slowly decreasing over time—it is still more acceptable for a man than for a woman to be drinking in a bar at all.

For the first two situations and the fifth in the table, there is no discernible trend between 1979 and 1990 in acceptance of any drinking. Having at least a drink or two in these situations remains acceptable behavior for 80–88% of American adults. For the third and fourth situations there is some shift in the 1980s towards greater acceptance of drinking, with the shift particularly marked among women. Whereas women had been noticeably less accepting of drinking in 1979 for a woman out at a bar with friends (and when with friends at home) than for a man at a bar with friends, there is considerable convergence in the distributions by 1990.

A substantial (and statistically significant) difference between the genders remains, however, for the three situations where only a minority approve of drinking. For two of the three—coworkers out to lunch, and when going to drive a car—there has been a sharp shift towards less acceptability between 1979 and 1984, with something of a rebound toward greater acceptability since; for both genders, as indicated by the Mantel–Haenszel test, despite the rebound, the linear secular trend during the 1980s is significant for driving but not lunch with coworkers. The early 1980s in the US were the heyday of media attention to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and other grassroots campaigns against drinking-driving, and while this focus may have attenuated it has not entirely abated. It is possible that the significant dip in acceptance of drinking at lunch with coworkers is a delayed response to the political discussion in the late 1970s of whether the “three-martini lunch” was a legitimate tax-deductible business expense, which did not receive much subsequent attention in the 1980s.

Although there has been rather little media attention to or discussion of drinking by parents spending time with small children, acceptance of drinking in this situation has steadily and significantly dropped in the 1980s for both genders so that this is now the most unacceptable situation for any drinking. The age distributions of drinking patterns and of parents of small children, and the time-cycles of parenthood and of drinking, make it likely that this norm is often breached in practice, especially by men.

Table 2 shows the proportions of respondents accepting that it is all right to feel the effects or to be drunk in each situation (only a small minority of respondents accept that it is all right to be drunk in any of the situations). In all three years, hardly anyone, male or female, accepts that it is all right to drink enough to feel the effects in the three “driest” situations.

For four of the five “wetter” situations, the proportion accepting drinking at least enough to feel the effects has declined between 1979 and 1990. While acceptance of drinking at all has been stable or has even slightly increased for these situations, there has been a substantial and significant decline in the acceptability of having more than one or two drinks (all Mantel–Haenszel test $ps \leq 0.001$). The exception to this trend is “when with friends at home”. Here the trend has actually been in the opposite direction: for both genders, acceptance of feeling the effects of drinking has steadily grown for this situation during the 1980s (both Mantel–Haenszel test $ps \leq 0.0001$). By 1990, “at home with friends” is the most accepted situation for drinking enough to feel the effects, overall and for each sex, while a decade earlier, heavier drinking was most acceptable in bars (men) or others’ parties (women). On the face of it, one’s own home is differentiated from the other “wetter” situations in two ways: the drinking is more clearly in a private location, and there is less likely to be a need to travel after the drinking occasion—hence lower actual and perceived risk to self (the host) from drunk driving.

Trends in the sample as a whole are replicated within each gender. Consistently, however, whether in 1979, 1984 or 1990, males are considerably more accepting than females of drinking enough to feel the effects in the four wettest situations (all $ps \leq 0.0001$ except 1979 party at someone else’s home, $p = 0.0002$). Gender differences in drinking norms are thus

Table 2. Situational norms on drinking enough to feel the effects or more, total samples and by gender, in three US national surveys (weighted data)

	Total			Male			Female		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
A person should feel free to drink enough to feel the effects (or more)	(1748) ^a	(2166)	(2055)	(753)	(1019)	(868)	(995)	(1147)	(1187)
At a party at someone else's home	32	28	26**	38	37	33	27	21	19**
For a man out at a bar with friends	38	34	30***	45	40	38*	31	29	23**
For a woman out at a bar with friends	25	22	23	32	27	30	19	17	16
When with friends at home	20	24	31 ⁺⁺	26	32	38 ⁺	14	18	24***
For a husband having dinner out with his wife	12	9	7 ⁺	15	11	8**	10	7	6*
For a couple of co-workers out to lunch	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	0	0
When going to drive a car	2	2	1	4	3	2	1	1	1
As a parent spending time with small children	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	1

Nos given in parentheses are unweighted except for 1984 which weights for ethnicity (see text); statistical comparisons using χ^2 are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; ⁺ $p < 0.0001$; ⁺⁺ $p < 0.00001$.

Table 3. Situational norms on drinking at all, for current abstainers and frequent high maximum drinkers, in three US national surveys (weighted data)

	Total			Abstainers			Frequent high max.		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
A person should feel free to drink one or two drinks (or more) at a party at someone else's home	(1748) ^a	(2166)	(2055)	(592)	(661)	(730)	(361)	(479)	(338)
For a man out at a bar with friends	84	83	84	56	53	64 ^{**}	100	99	98
For a woman out at a bar with friends	85	83	85	59	53	66 ^{**}	99	100	99
When with friends at home	76	75	80 ^{**}	45	42	58 ⁺	95	95	95
For a husband having dinner out with his wife	76	81	84 ⁺	41	49	61 ⁺⁺	97	98	99
For a couple of co-workers out to lunch	83	82	83	57	51	60 [*]	97	98	97
When going to drive a car	35	22	32 ⁺	19	10	21 ^{***}	53	35	49 ^{**}
As a parent spending time with small children	32	18	22 ⁺⁺	10	4	10 [*]	67	42	46 ⁺⁺
Acceptance of drinking score	28	21	18 ⁺⁺	10	7	8	51	42	37 [*]
8 (high)	10	5	5 ⁺⁺	2	1	2 ⁺⁺	27	12	15 ⁺⁺
5-7	62	68	70	34	36	48	69	85	80
1-4	15	15	14	25	26	23	3	3	6
0 (low)	13	12	10	39	38	28	0	0	0

Nos given in parentheses are unweighted except for 1984 which weights for ethnicity (see text); statistical comparisons using χ^2 are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text).
^{*} $p < 0.05$; ^{**} $p < 0.01$; ^{***} $p < 0.001$; ⁺ $p < 0.0001$; ⁺⁺ $p < 0.00001$.

stronger at the level of drinking to feel the effects than at the level of drinking at all.

In Table 3 we turn to differences by drinking patterns in situational norms for drinking. Respondents were asked the questions in terms of how much a generalized “person should feel free to drink” in each situation, so that in principle the answers are *not* about the respondent’s rules for his or her *own* drinking. However, Table 3 shows that there are nevertheless big differences between two groups at opposite ends of the drinking spectrum—current abstainers and frequent high-maximum drinkers (i.e. those who drink at least weekly and sometimes five or more drinks)—in their general acceptance of drinking. Almost all heavier drinkers in all three surveys accept drinking in each of the five “wetter” situations, while only between 41% and 66% of abstainers do. Abstainers are somewhat more likely than the population as a whole to discriminate between a man’s and a woman’s drinking at a bar, while few heavier drinkers make such a distinction.

Broadly speaking, abstainers became significantly more accepting between 1979 and 1990 of some drinking in wetter situations. Thus the distributions on the acceptance of drinking score (bottom of Table 3) show that the proportion of abstainers insisting on no drinking in any situation fell between 1979 and 1990 by more than 10%. Over the whole decade, however, abstainers showed little net change in acceptance of drinking in the “dryer” situations.

Heavier drinkers, on the other hand, showed a significant shift towards less acceptance of any drinking in “dryer” situations, particularly when going to drive (Mantel–Haenszel test $p < 0.0001$) and parents spending time with small children (Mantel–Haenszel test $p < 0.01$), but no change for “wetter” situations where the acceptance was near total throughout. The fall-off in the proportion of heavier drinkers accepting any drinking at co-worker lunches was fairly dramatic between 1979 and 1984, but by 1990 had all but attained its former level of acceptance (Mantel–Haenszel test $p = 0.44$, NS). The proportion of heavier drinkers who thought some drinking was all right in all eight situations fell by almost one-half.

The U-shaped trend for lunchtime drinkers and for drinking-driving found in the total sample, with acceptance of drinking at a nadir in 1984, held also both for abstainers and for heav-

ier drinkers. Despite some reversal in levels of acceptance of drinking when going to drive, the time trend toward reduced acceptance overall remained substantial (a 10% decline) and highly significant (Mantel–Haenszel test $p < 0.00001$).

Overall, the direction of changes in normative responses for abstainers and for heavier drinkers is towards a greater normative consensus, with abstainers and heavier drinkers closer to agreement on situational norms on drinking at all in 1990 than in 1979. Their normative positions, however, remain quite far apart. Overall, the changes tend to increase the differentiation of situations in terms of the acceptability of drinking: abstainers are moving towards accepting drinking in “wetter” situations, while heavier drinkers are moving towards proscribing drinking in “dryer” situations.

Abstainers show no changes on acceptance of feeling the effects of drinking (Table 4), except that even among them, as in the rest of the population, there has been increasing acceptance of feeling the effects when drinking with friends at home (Mantel–Haenszel test $p < 0.0001$). Heavier drinkers show a sharper rise (from 49% to 73%) than the whole population (20–31%) in the proportion accepting feeling the effects of drinking when with friends at home. Among heavier drinkers, this is now the social situation where heavier drinking is most acceptable. Even among heavier drinkers, by 1990 only a tiny proportion accept feeling the effects when going to drive a car.

Adding across all situations, the acceptance of drunkenness (bottom of Table 4) among heavier drinkers shows some signs of increase between 1979 and 1990. Abstainers also show a slight movement in the same direction, although there is very little (and not a significant) net change in the population as a whole. The situation-specific shifts in norms we have outlined leave little net effect on this global measure of acceptance of drunkenness.

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of multiple regressions on acceptance of drinking score (Table 5) and the acceptance of drunkenness score (Table 6). With these analyses, we can examine the demographic predictors of acceptance of drinking and drunkenness, and whether these changed in the course of the 1980s. The multiple R s in Table 5 imply that the proportion of the variance (or R^2) in acceptance of drinking which can be accounted for by demographic

Table 4. Situational norms on drinking enough to feel the effects, for current abstainers and frequent high maximum drinkers, in three US national surveys (weighted data)

	Total			Abstainers			Frequent high max.		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
A person should feel free to drink enough to feel the effects (or more)	(1748) ^a	(2166)	(2055)	(592)	(661)	(730)	(361)	(479)	(338)
At a party at someone else's home	32	28	26 ^{**}	10	7	11	68	63	65
For a man out at a bar with friends	38	34	30 ^{***}	13	13	14	73	68	68
For a woman out at a bar with friends	25	22	23	6	6	8	55	49	58 ⁺⁺
When with friends at home	20	24	31 ⁺⁺⁺	5	6	13 ^{***}	49	58	73 ⁺⁺⁺
For a husband having dinner out with his wife	12	9	7 ⁺	4	2	3	28	22	19
For a couple of co-workers out to lunch	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	4
When going to drive a car	2	2	1	0	0	1	8	5	4
As a parent spending time with small children	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	3	2
Acceptance of drunkenness score									
5-16 (high)	10	9	9	2	1	2 [*]	27	26	32 ⁺⁺
3-4	16	16	15	3	4	6	35	33	32
1-2	20	19	19	12	13	14	22	20	22
0 (low)	54	57	57	83	82	78	17	21	14

Nos given in parentheses are unweighted except for 1984 which weights for ethnicity (see text); statistical comparisons using χ^2 are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text).
^{*} $p < 0.05$; ^{**} $p < 0.01$; ^{***} $p < 0.001$; ⁺ $p < 0.0001$; ⁺⁺ $p < 0.00001$; ⁺⁺⁺ $p < 0.00001$.

Table 5. Multiple regressions on acceptance of drinking by demographics alone and demographics and drinking measures in three US national surveys (weighted data)^a

	Demographics alone			Demographics plus Frequent high max.			Demographics plus 3 drinking measures		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
Multiple R	0.51	0.48	0.41	0.64	0.62	0.54	0.64	0.62	0.54
Beta weights									
Gender: male	0.11 ⁺	0.12 ⁺	0.07**	0.01	-0.00	0.02	0.01	-0.00	-0.01
Age (full)	-0.17 ⁺	-0.18 ⁺	-0.12 ⁺	-0.07	-0.10***	-0.07	-0.07	-0.10***	-0.07
Education (full)	0.12***	0.07	0.09**	0.10**	0.06	0.07	0.10**	0.06	0.07
Wet region	0.29 ⁺	0.13 ⁺	0.08**	0.21 ⁺	0.08***	0.07**	0.21 ⁺	0.08***	0.07**
Income (full)	0.11**	0.12***	0.14 ⁺	0.04	0.08**	0.10***	0.04	0.08**	0.10***
Married	-0.04	-0.11***	-0.09**	0.01	-0.08**	-0.04	0.01	-0.08**	-0.04
Conservative Protestant	-0.12***	-0.25 ⁺	-0.25 ⁺	-0.07	-0.14 ⁺	-0.17 ⁺	-0.07	-0.14 ⁺	-0.17 ⁺
Black	0.10**	0.04	0.02	0.08**	0.03	0.02	0.08**	0.03	0.02
Hispanic	-0.01	-0.08**	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06	-0.03	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03
Current frequent high max.				0.45 ⁺	0.46 ⁺	0.38 ⁺	0.45 ⁺	0.46 ⁺	0.38 ⁺
Current dependence summary							0.01	-0.00	-0.01
Current consequences summary							0.01	0.00	0.01

^aSignificance tests are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text).
 * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; ⁺ $p < 0.0001$; ⁺ $p < 0.00001$.

Table 6. Multiple regressions on acceptance of drunkenness, by demographics and drinking measures in three US national surveys (weighted data)^a

	Demographics alone			Demographics plus Frequent high max.			Demographics plus 3 drinking measures		
	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990	1979	1984	1990
Multiple R	0.45	0.41	0.37	0.54	0.54	0.52	0.57	0.58	0.56
Beta weights									
Gender: male	0.17 ⁺	0.18 ⁺	0.19 ⁺	0.09**	0.07**	0.09**	0.07	0.06	0.08**
Age (full)	-0.31 ⁺	-0.27 ⁺	-0.24 ⁺	-0.24 ⁺	-0.20 ⁺	-0.19 ⁺	-0.20 ⁺	-0.16 ⁺	-0.14 ⁺
Education (full)	0.05	0.01	-0.05	0.04	-0.00	-0.07	0.04	0.02	-0.05
Wet region	0.11**	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.00	0.03	0.09	0.01	0.03
Income (full)	-0.01	0.00	-0.00	-0.06	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
Married	-0.14 ⁺	-0.15 ⁺	-0.12***	-0.10**	-0.12 ⁺	-0.07***	-0.09**	-0.09***	-0.05
Conservative Protestant	-0.06	-0.13 ⁺	-0.14 ⁺	-0.02	-0.03	-0.06	-0.04	-0.04	-0.06
Black	-0.01	-0.05	-0.02	-0.03	-0.06	-0.03	-0.01	-0.06	-0.02
Hispanic	0.02	-0.08**	-0.04	0.01	-0.05	-0.03	-0.01	-0.04	0.03
Current frequent high max.				0.35 ⁺	0.41 ⁺	0.39 ⁺	0.25 ⁺	0.31 ⁺	0.28 ⁺
Current dependence summary							0.24 ⁺	0.15 ⁺	0.26 ⁺
Current consequences summary							-0.01	0.13 ⁺	-0.02

^aSignificance tests are based on an $N_{\text{effective}}$ downweighted to account for sampling inefficiencies (see text). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; + $p < 0.0001$; ++ $p < 0.00001$.

variables has tended to drop. Not being a conservative Protestant has become the strongest predictor of acceptance of drinking in 1990, while living in a wet region appears to be of declining importance. Other demographics tend to stay at about the same relative strength as predictors of acceptance of drinking, with higher income and lower age as the next strongest predictors after conservative Protestant in 1990. Adding the frequency–maximum drinking measure to the equation allows us to examine how well demographic variables predict acceptance of drinking, roughly controlling for drinking pattern. While the drinking measure is strongly related to acceptance of drinking and somewhat increases the multiple R , the main change to the beta weights for the demographics is a slight dampening of their predictive power. Adding dependence symptoms and tangible consequences to the equation has essentially no further effect.

The multiple R s in Table 6 for the demographic prediction of acceptance of drunkenness are slightly lower than for acceptance of drinking and also tend to decline over time. The strongest predictors of positive attitudes to drunkenness are being male and young, with being unmarried and being conservative Protestant playing a secondary, diminished role. Controlling for drinking patterns again mutes the beta-weights for demographics, leaving youth as the main demographic characteristic adding much to the prediction of attitudes to drunkenness from drinking patterns. For attitudes to drunkenness, current dependence symptoms do make a modest additional contribution to the explained variance, to some extent at the expense of drinking patterns. Other than a slight tendency for youth's predictive power to decline over time, there is little evidence of a secular change in the pattern of demographic contributors.

Discussion

The overall impression from the trends in situational norms on drinking and drunkenness is of a considerable stability in the normative structure of American drinking. The patterns support the idea that drinking is a highly enclaved activity in social life: there are times and occasions when drinking and perhaps even drunkenness is appropriate, and times when they are not, and there is a good deal of normative consensus on the rela-

tive "wetness" of situations, even though absolute rates of acceptance vary in population subgroups. An important divergence from stability, however, is some evidence of a limited convergence between abstainers and heavier drinkers in the 1980s in norms on the acceptability of drinking, with more heavier drinkers proscribing drinking in "drier" situations, and more abstainers accepting drinking in "wetter" situations. The fact that the amount of variance explained by demographic variables in predicting acceptance of drinking and of drunkenness has been dropping also supports the idea of a drift towards somewhat greater homogeneity between different population subgroups in attitudes to drinking and drunkenness, an exception being conservative Protestants, whose lack of acceptance of drinking in most situations increasingly stands out.

A striking feature of the present cross-sectional trend data, as of previous cross-national studies, is the close correspondence from one ranking to another in the ordering of situations on acceptability of drinking and of drunkenness (in other words, whether examined across years or across population subgroups). This result parallels the finding of Fitzgerald & Mulford (1993) in the State of Iowa over a shorter period (1985–89) of consistencies in the rank order of drinking frequencies in various drinking places over time. In this respect, the main secular trend in the US is the move of drinking "when with friends at home" up in the rankings, in particular for acceptance of drunkenness, but also to some extent for acceptance of drinking. This shift reflects some changes in the absolute rates of acceptance of drinking and drunkenness.

On the evidence of Tables 1 and 2, the particular form which normative change on drinking has taken in the 1980s is a diminished acceptability of any drinking in "drier" but not in "wetter" situations, and of heavier drinking in public situations or in situations which will require travel afterwards. Reductions of the range of situations in which drinking anything at all is accepted parallels the continued downturn of alcohol consumption that began in the early 1980s and has been continuing through 1990 in the US (Midanik & Clark, 1994). Acceptance of heavier drinking, even in "wetter" situations, is diminished except in the case of drinking when with friends at home, which is more accepted overall and by all subgroups.

These associational results, based on a short series of cross-sectional surveys, cannot answer questions regarding causal direction. However, the results suggest an important attitudinal dimension of drinking pattern that must be viewed as context specific. Since drinking environments affect risks of problems such as drunk driving, temporal changes in national norm structures relating drinking to situations may mediate changes in the population's aggregate risk for specific problems. Situational norms deserve further study in stronger, longitudinal designs.

The pattern of reduced normative acceptance of heavier drinking in "wetter" situations and greater acceptance at home pushes the drinking more firmly into enclaved, "time-out" situations, hidden from the public, without the responsibility of subsequent driving or other travel; but although "drinking with friends at home" is out of the public eye and somewhat insulated from the risk of traffic casualties (for the host at least), it is of course easily observed by family and friends. This shift in the normative framing of heavy drinking towards drinking in the home is concurrent with, and may be related to, the rise reported by respondents in rates of pressures from family members to reduce drinking (Room, Greenfield & Weisner, 1991). These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that in an era of declining per-capita consumption with renewed talk of temperance, relatively more alcohol is purchased for home consumption, while various social forces including heightened awareness of negative consequences and family interactions exert a press toward reduced drinking in higher-risk and higher-cost situations. Since we know that the "outcome" is a reduction in per capita consumption, observed across almost all demographic subgroups (a possible exception being Hispanic individuals, see Midanik & Clark, 1994), the more "restrictive" situational norms may well provide an accessible index of the type of influences envisioned in Skog's (1985a) theory of the collectivity of drinking cultures.

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