

## **Cross-Cultural Research in Alcohol Studies: Research Traditions and Analytical Issues<sup>1</sup>**

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Comparisons of drinking customs have long been a staple of those who have both some experience of travel and a point to make. Martin Luther complained of "the abuse of eating and drinking which gives us Germans a bad reputation in foreign lands," observing that "the Italians call us gluttonous, drunken Germans and pigs because they live decently and do not drink until they are drunk. Like the Spaniards, they have escaped this vice" (Austin 1985, p. 147). A few decades later, the Englishman Fynes Moryson offered vivid characterizations of early 17th-century European drinking habits as he observed them on his travels. He agreed with Luther about the Germans: "let the Germans pardon me to speak freely . . . to their drinking they can prescribe no meane nor end." As the gates of cities in Saxony were being shut at night, he noted, the homeward bound "reele from one side of the streete to the other. . . . For howsoever the richer sort hide this intemperance for the most part, by keeping at home, surely the vulgar yeeld this daily spectacle" (Austin 1985, p. 213). While Moryson noted that those who "offend in Drunkenness" in Switzerland could be imprisoned and forbidden to drink for a year, he found that "generally the Switzers drinke as stiffly, as

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those of the upper part of Germany" (Austin 1985, p. 215). The French, on the other hand, he saw as paragons of moderation: "Drunkenness is reprocheful among the French, and the greater parte drinke water mingled with wine." While mariners, soldiers "and many of the common sort" got drunk on perry, cider and wine, Parisian "women for the most part, and virgins alwaies . . . drink water" (Austin 1985, p. 212). English patterns, as described by Moryson, also were on the whole moderate:

the English at a Feast will drinke two or three healths in remembrance of speciall friends, or respected honourable persons, and in our time some Gentlemen and Commanders from the warres of Netherland brought in the custome of the Germans large garaussing [carousing], but this custome is in our time also in good measure left. Likewise in some private Gentlemens houses, and with some Captaines and Souldiers, and with the vulgar sort of Citizens and Artisans, large and intemperate drinking is used; but in generall the greater and better part of the English, hold all excess blameworthy, and drunkenness a reprocheful vice.

(Austin 1985, p. 211)

In Ireland, Moryson reported much drunkenness among both the common people and the Anglo-Irish, and found especially notable the heavy drinking by women:

In many families, especially at Feasts, both men and women use excess [of whiskey]. . . . Some Gentlewomen were so free in this excess, as they would kneeling upon the knee and otherwise garausse Health after Health with men; not to speak of the Wives of Irish Lords . . . who often drink till they be drunken, or at least till they void urine in full assemblies of men, I cannot (though unwilling) but note the Irish women more specially with this fault, which I have observed in no other part to be a woman's vice, but only in Bohemia.

(MacManus 1939, pp. 19-20)

Then as now, such national characterizations and implicit cross-national comparisons serve many purposes. They have a certain curiosity value. Beyond this, they remind us both of the extent of differences in the human family and of some commonalities. They are also often used as a kind of measuring stick for one's own society. Those wishing to raise the level of concern about drinking in their own society, for instance, will frequently

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appeal to the international league-table of alcohol consumption levels. National characterizations from different periods can also remind us of the fact of cultural change; Moryson's characterization of English drinking, for instance, stands in stark contrast to the picture Hogarth and others painted of drinking during the "gin epidemic" a little over a century later (Coffey 1966).

Cross-cultural data can also be used for broader analytical purposes, to increase our understanding of the nature and relative contribution of cultural and other factors to drinking patterns and problems. This paper starts from a set of thumbnail characterizations of the different traditions of such cross-national data collection and analysis and proceeds to a discussion of some issues raised by such analyses. It is not a comprehensive review of the literature, since there are by now a number of such reviews of part or all of the literature. (For instance, see Heath 1975, 1984; Leland 1980.) Rather, the intent is to offer some background and perhaps a framework for discussion, emphasizing particularly modes of analysis and conceptual issues in analysis that are not otherwise covered in this compilation.

## **Modes of Cross-Cultural Analysis**

### **Global Syntheses of Alcohol and Culture**

By this is meant discussions of drinking practices in human societies that draw examples from the whole range of such societies and that attempt to draw some general conclusions. While such discussions are usually undertaken by anthropologists or those in command of the anthropological literature on village and tribal societies, complex industrial societies are usually included within their scope. A much-reprinted example of such discussions is Mandelbaum's essay, "Alcohol and Culture" (1979), but examples in the modern literature reach back to a summative lecture by Horton (1945).

A mainstay of such discussions has been a consideration of the varied cultural and individual functions of drinking. As Heath has noted (1975), while explicitly functionalist analyses have gone out of fashion in anthropology, much of the discussion is still implicitly in terms of functions of drinking. Anthropological discussions frequently emphasize that alcoholic beverages can serve as a food and a thirst quencher, and a variety of symbolic roles, besides serving as an intoxicant.

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A commonplace in anthropological syntheses has been a contrast between complex industrial countries and tribal and village societies in the prevalence of alcoholism or of alcohol problems. Two quotations from Heath's 1975 review article epitomize this perspective:

Alcoholism—even in the general sense of problems associated with drinking—is rare in the vast majority of the societies of the world. One might even go so far as to note that it is almost unknown outside the mainstream of Western culture, although it is becoming a widespread concomitant of acculturation which often accompanies the impact of modern industrial society.

(p. 56)

There are very few primitive or other non-Western societies in which habitual drinking in indigenous ways is a major cause of family problems.

(pp. 40-41)

The notion that alcoholism might be especially prevalent in complex societies is not a new one. The idea of a kind of reverse evolutionary trend for mental disorders in general, and alcoholism in particular, dates back at least to the heyday of social Darwinism (Bynum 1984), though the policy conclusions drawn then differ from those that would be drawn now. Selden Bacon's influential 1945 essay, "Alcohol and Complex Society," had developed the idea in some detail. Recently, in line with trends in the current literature, Heath has somewhat modified his position. Noting that the "widespread belief that aboriginal cultures are characterized by low rates of 'social pathology,' and that such acts increase markedly as acculturation progresses" was supported by little evidence, he has suggested it might be, "at least in part, a vestige of the romantic idealized image of 'the noble savage'" (Heath 1983, p. 369). More specifically, concerning the literature on alcohol and North American Indians, he noted that

although my work—like that of some other ethnographers—has tended to emphasize some of the ways in which drinking fits well with other aspects of local cultures and reinforces social solidarity, it is obvious that alcohol-related problems are important and threatening to many groups as well as individuals, and that the

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deleterious effects of drinking seem to outweigh the benefits in a number of American Indian populations.

(Heath 1983, p. 363)

Perhaps the most influential synthetic global statements in recent years have focused attention not so much on why and how people drink, but rather on the control of drunken behavior. MacAndrew and Edgerton's book, *Drunken Comportment* (1969), it is true, pays substantial attention to variations in behavior while drinking, ranging widely in the ethnographic and historical literature to construct an argument that drunken behavior is not pharmacologically determined. But the authors view drunken behavior as a product of cultural definitions and controls; the lesson of the book is epitomized in its last sentence: "Since societies, like individuals, get the sorts of drunken comportment that they allow, they deserve what they get." The wide influence of MacAndrew and Edgerton's analysis can be seen in the papers in a recent NIAAA monograph (Room and Collins 1983).

Even more explicitly focused on the societal control of drinking is Lemert's 1962 essay on alcohol and social control. Ranging widely in its examples across different societies, the paper offers a typology of five societal methods of social control over alcohol use: laissez-faire, prohibition, education, alcohol controls, and promotion of functional equivalents. (See also Lemert 1958.) Commenting on this paper, Bruun (1971) suggested an alternative typology of societal efforts to control alcohol-related harm: that efforts could be directed "towards the phase of choice" to use alcohol at all, toward manipulating the circumstances of use, or toward minimizing "the consequences of use." The tradition initiated by Lemert of analyzing control strategies at a societal level has been picked up in alcohol policy discussions; Bruun's typology found its way, for instance, into the 1981 National Academy of Sciences report on alcohol policy (Moore and Gerstein 1981).

### **Bounded Syntheses of Alcohol and Culture**

A somewhat separate tradition of general theoretical analyses of alcohol and culture, more or less limited in its comparisons to industrialized societies, has been rooted primarily in the sociological literature. In a paper deriving from his 1944 dissertation, Bales (1959) proposed three kinds of drinking differentiated by their functions—ritual drinking, convivial drinking, and utilitarian drinking—along with a fourth cultural pattern of religiously inspired abstinence. While ritual drinking is seen as functional for the culture or group as whole, in utilitarian drinking, as Bales presents it,

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the functionality is individualistic: "the purpose is personal and self-interested rather than social and expressive" (p. 267). "Convivial drinking is a mixed type, tending toward the ritual in its symbolism of solidarity, and toward the utilitarian in the 'good feeling' expected" (p. 273).

Bales applied his theoretical frame to an analysis of Irish and Jewish drinking; these, along with a few other ideal-type cultural patterns—Italian, Chinese, and "ascetic Protestant"—came to figure heavily in a small tradition of cultural theories of drinking in the American sociological literature of the late 1950s and 1960s. Contrasting the "integrated drinking customs" of Italians, Chinese, and Orthodox Jews with the "unintegrated drinking customs" of Irish-Americans and of the "United States American of the Northeast quarter of the nation—Protestant, middle-class, urban, white, from Anglo-Saxon background of three or more generations in this country," Ullman (1958) proposed that

in any group or society in which the drinking customs, values, and sanctions—together with the attitudes of all segments of the group or society—are well established, known to and agreed upon by all, and are consistent with the rest of the culture, the rate of alcoholism will be low.

"Ullman's hypothesis" was related to and drew upon the "ambivalence" explanation of presumptively high U.S. alcoholism rates. The idea that the United States was a society uniquely ambivalent about its drinking, and that alcoholism rates would be reduced by integrating drinking more into everyday life, became the main intellectual underpinning for what became known as the "sociocultural model" of alcohol problems prevention in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the mid-1970s, the tradition came under both methodological (Mäkelä 1975) and conceptual (Room 1976) critique. Meanwhile, Whitehead and his colleagues (Whitehead and Harvey 1974; Frankel and Whitehead 1981) adapted the Ullman hypothesis to reflect the new focus in the literature on level of consumption as a determinant of alcohol problems, synthesizing the two traditions in a restated (and complex) hypothesis. (For the contrast between the sociocultural and single-distribution traditions, see Harford et al. 1980.)

In the years after Ullman's paper, a related tradition of sociological literature differentiated between drinking cultures in terms of whether they had "proscriptive," "prescriptive," or "permissive" or "nonscriptive" norms on drinking (Mizruchi and Perrucci 1962; Larsen and Abu-Laban 1968; see Room 1975). While this literature drew its cases and comparisons primarily

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from North American ethnoreligious groups, Pittman (1967) drew on it and on the ambivalence tradition to propose that "it is possible to range all cultures on a continuum in reference to their attitudes about drinking." In this global synthesis, Pittman offered four such "cultural positions": the abstinent culture, the ambivalent culture, the permissive culture, and the overpermissive culture—the last of which, in his view, "is a polar type of cultural attitude which exists only in part, never in entirety." Pittman acknowledges that the general cultural position on drinking does not always determine behavior; while the "extensiveness of beverage use correlates with cultural type, it is not a perfect correlation."

Although these discussions frequently drew on international materials for their cross-cultural perspectives, the research questions and formulations tended to be strongly oriented to North America and for the most part were founded on a rather small base of empirical data. A wider perspective came into the modern English-language literature in the wake of Jellinek's international experience as a consultant to the World Health Organization in the early 1950s (Room 1984b). In a paper originally prepared in 1954, Jellinek (1962) pointed to the strong "cultural differences in the meaning of alcoholism" from one country to another. Beneath the differences in professional conceptions of alcoholism in different countries, Jellinek argued, lay cultural differences in the characteristic profile of alcohol problems. This distinction between different meanings of alcoholism in different countries became the underpinning of Jellinek's later Greek-letter typology of "the alcoholisms" (Jellinek 1960); Jellinek's beta, epsilon, and gamma types map fairly directly onto, respectively, the "inveterate drinker" of France, the explosive spree drinker of Finland, and the "Anglo-Saxon" pattern of the U.S. literature.

Sociological researchers have also paid attention to cultural variations in the profile of drinking problems, relating these differences to cultural differences in the social control of drinking. Comparing Finland and Denmark as the extremes of variation in the Nordic countries, Christie (1965) showed that "visible problems"—alcohol-related crime statistics—were higher in Finland, though the per-capita consumption of alcohol was lower and the temperance movement had traditionally been stronger there than in Denmark. Christie saw the causal arrow as pointing in both directions between social control and social disruption:

The causal chain probably goes like this: A drinking culture with a large degree of highly visible, non-beneficial effects of alcohol consumption leads to a strict system of control which somewhat

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reduces total consumption, which again influences and most often reduces the visible problems. But also, the system of control influences visible problems—sometimes probably in the direction of increasing them.

Later discussions have pointed out that cirrhosis mortality was higher in Denmark, on the other hand, so that one might talk in terms of "problems of dryness" as against "problems of wetness." While a tradition of comparisons among Nordic countries has continued, similar analyses of regional variations within the U.S., between the "drier" Southern and prairie states and the "wetter" remainder of the country, have shown substantially different profiles of problems in the two areas (Cahalan and Room 1974; Room 1982). More generally, it has been suggested that in seeking to control harmful consequences of drinking, cultures must make a strategic choice along a continuum between the integration of drinking into everyday life, on the one hand, and its enclaving and marginalization, on the other. In terms of the consumer availability of alcohol, the choice "is whether it is to be regarded as a consumer commodity like any other, or whether it is to be singled out from ordinary commerce for special treatment" (Mäkelä et al. 1981, pp. 95-96). In a broader European framework, it is clear that in the wine cultures of Southern Europe, where drinking is more integrated with meals and other aspects of daily life (Ahlström-Laakso 1976), health problems of heavy drinking are more prominent than problems of social disruption.

Another kind of cross-cultural study within a bounded frame is the explicitly comparative study undertaken by an ethnographer to compare the drinking practices and problems of two or three strategically chosen cultural groups. Although such studies are not common, they have often been especially illuminating. Examples would include Lemert's comparison (1979) of forms and pathology of drinking in three Polynesian societies, Levy and Kunitz' comparisons (1974) of Hopi and Navajo patterns, and the comparison by Graves and his colleagues (1982) of the social context of drinking and violence for Maoris, Pacific Islanders, and those of European ancestry in New Zealand pubs.

### **Hologeistic or Holocultural Studies**

The pattern for alcohol studies in this tradition was set by Horton's pioneering analysis (1943). The units of analysis for Horton's and other studies in this tradition are tribal or village societies, and the raw material for the analysis is ethnographic material collected in the Human Relations Area



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Files (New Haven, CN) or other archives. The actual analysis, however, is carried out in quantitative terms, using summary codes derived from the ethnographies of the society's position on the various dimensions used in the analysis.

Following the precedent set by Horton, studies in this tradition have used correlational techniques to test hypotheses about the predictors of a high rate of heavy drinking or drinking problems in a culture. Although the cultures included have usually been limited to tribal or village societies (McClelland et al.'s *The Drinking Man* [1972] is an exception), the results are often presumed to be applicable to industrial urban societies; in fact, Mäkelä (1979, p. 12) remarks, "from the viewpoint of intellectual history, the rival theories are all attempts to explain American alcoholism."

In recent years, the tradition has been critiqued from a number of perspectives. An obvious problem has been posed by the conflicting conclusions from analyses of essentially the same materials. By its analytical methods, the tradition takes little account of intracultural variation—a general problem with holocultural studies that becomes especially significant when deviant behaviors are being considered (Stull 1975). As Mäkelä notes, the tradition has tended to apply theories developed in terms of individual psychology at a whole-cultural level. The tradition thus poses in a particularly acute form the issue of appropriate levels of analysis, to which we shall return below.

Nevertheless, studies in the tradition have continued to appear (Frankel and Whitehead 1981; Naroll 1983). Whereas most earlier hologetic studies had emphasized the relation of inebriety to generalized human needs—relief of anxiety, dependency conflict, need for power, etc.—Frankel and Whitehead's study, drawing on earlier work by Whitehead and Harvey (1974), turned the hologetic material to the service of a debate in the literature over the relation between normative drinking patterns and rates of drinking-related problems. The correlations they found among drinking-related variables were generally higher than correlations in the earlier hologetic analyses involving non-alcohol-specific variables. This result should be viewed, however, with some methodological caution about the meaningfulness of correlations in hologetic analyses between variables within a single conceptual domain. While at the level of the recoded variables "approval of drunkenness" and "extent of alcohol-related damage" may appear quite conceptually separate, the underlying ethnographic description may not have made such clear distinctions. Further, differing generational biases in ethnographic attitudes toward drunkenness may have tended to

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inflate the correlations between drinking-related dimensions (Room, 1984a).

At a general level, the hologeistic analyses pose in an acute form the issue of causal inference from cross-sectional data. This is, of course, a general issue in social science research; analyses of cross-sectional data, however multivariately sophisticated, are now seen as rather weak evidence of causality. A strong cross-sectional relationship between two characteristics does not necessarily predict how a change in one will have an impact on the other; the best evidence for making such predictions comes from studies of change. Couched in the "ethnographic present," the hologeistic tradition assumes a timelessness in cultural arrangements, leaving no place for the substantial variations over time that have often occurred in the placement of a given culture on alcohol variables.

### **Cross-Cultural Diagnostic Studies**

The aim of psychiatric nosologists, whether working within a U.S. frame of reference with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association or on the global scale with the International Classification of Diseases, has been to provide a matrix that would encompass all human psychopathology, and thus that would apply across all cultural boundaries. Such classifications operate within the general medical frame of viewing diseases as discrete Platonic entities. As a practical matter, existing classifications reflect the particular cultural matrix of their derivation—roughly speaking, hospital psychiatry in Germany, Britain and North America—and do not map easily onto the conditions and cultures of developing countries (Wig et al. 1985). As apparently new manifestations of psychopathology have been identified in non-European cultures, there has been considerable discussion of whether these "culture-bound syndromes" should be given new diagnostic categories of their own or whether they should be fitted into existing schemas (Simons and Hughes 1985). The term "culture-bound syndrome" has commonly been used to refer only to syndromes lying outside usual European cultural experience. But lately the issue has begun to be raised of whether some European disorders should not also be seen as "culture bound"; in particular, it has been proposed that elements of alcohol dependence as it is usually described might be viewed as culture bound (Room 1985a).

In the field of alcohol studies, there is a long tradition of regarding "alcoholism" or "dipsomania" or "inebriety" as a transculturally universal

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psychopathological entity. A major carrier of such understandings in the modern era has been Alcoholics Anonymous and the U.S. alcoholism movement, which have stressed a view of alcoholism as a disease that may strike anyone, irrespective of category or culture. The assumption that "alcoholism" meant the same thing anywhere is also widespread in the scholarly literature. Certainly Jellinek subscribed to this assumption in the earlier stages of his work; Jellinek's famous discussion (1952) of "phases of alcohol addiction," although originally printed as an annex to a WHO report, did not recognize any cross-cultural variation in alcohol addiction. As we have noted, however, Jellinek's later work (1960) recognized that different national traditions meant very different things by the common term "alcoholism". His classification of "the alcoholisms" into a series of Greek-letter "species," based in part on predominant symptomatology in different European and North American countries, can be seen as a nosological reclassification in terms of a series of culture-bound syndromes.

Against this, the WHO publication on the alcohol dependence syndrome (Edwards et al. 1977, p. 10), while recognizing that the scope and shape of the broader sweep of "alcohol-related disabilities" would be culturally determined, specifically rejected the idea that alcohol dependence was culturally specific or inherently culturally differentiated: "observed differences" from one culture to another "could be better interpreted as culturally, environmentally or personally patterned manifestations of the fundamental alcohol-dependence syndrome." This proposition has set the agenda for a nascent tradition of studies aiming to define a common cross-cultural core to alcohol dependence.

Approaches to this question so far have been diverse and the results mixed. As Ritson and his colleagues found in an earlier cross-cultural comparison of drinking-history symptoms (briefly described in Anonymous 1972), the symptomatology manifested in a particular clinical population reflects not only the cultural patterning of heavy drinking and dependence but also the societal arrangements for responding to drinking problems. In a given culture, the symptomatology in a detoxification center sample may look rather different from the symptomatology among those attending a primary mental health care clinic. In this circumstance, it is difficult to gauge the cross-cultural commonality of behavioral and mental symptoms.

It is clear by now that off-the-shelf diagnostic tests designed for general use in the United States or a European country do not fare well when used in very different cultural circumstances—a finding that will not surprise anthropologists (e.g., Levy and Kunitz 1974; Leland 1976). Researchers

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found themselves unwelcome in an Alaskan Eskimo village after they reported to the U.S. mass media that three-quarters of the village's adult population had tested as "probable alcoholics" (Klausner and Foulks 1982). Applying the Munich Alcoholism Test in Germany, Spain, and Ecuador, Gorenc et al. (1984) found 5 out of 31 criteria that were "relatively free of cultural differences" by their criteria—but added that none of these items had passed all five of the filters used to screen out items on the original German study. The recent WHO project to develop a cross-culturally suitable screening instrument for alcohol dependence was similarly able to drastically reduce the items from the initial instrument after examining the items' clustering, relation to heavy drinking, and manifestations in samples of identified alcoholics in samples from six nations (Saunders and Aasland 1987). On the other hand, comparing clinical samples from a narrower cultural range—the United States and France—Babor et al. (unpublished) came to the conclusion that "a reasonably convincing case could be made for the universality of a cluster of symptoms and behaviors engendered by repeated alcohol ingestion."

After a detailed analysis of alcohol dependence symptoms in general population samples from the WHO Study of Community Response to Alcohol-Related Problems carried out in Mexico, Zambia, Scotland, and the United States, Roizen (unpublished) could come to no clear conclusion on whether the "data suggest a 'universal' alcohol dependence syndrome": the answer depended on what one took as the criterion for answering that question. He went on to suggest that perhaps the

symptoms do not reflect an underlying dependence phenomenon but, rather more simply, *the consequences of intoxication*. They stand in relation to the phenomenon they indicate not so much as the symptoms of diabetes stand to it but rather as the symptoms of, say, starvation stand to it. Starvation certainly brings with it "symptoms" and these may show a great deal of consistency both from person to person and over time. But they tell us relatively little about the origin of the condition: we cannot tell from the symptoms alone, for example, whether a person starves because of famine in his homeland or because he is on a political hunger strike.

Unlike the other research traditions we have considered so far, the tradition of cross-cultural diagnostic studies seeks to eliminate rather than to study cross-cultural variation. This aim poses difficult questions, both conceptu-

ally and methodologically, which the literature has not yet fully addressed and solved.

### **Within-Country Ethnic Comparisons in Population Surveys**

It has long been recognized that multiethnic societies contain within them enormous diversities in cultural patterns of drinking (for the United States, see references in Room 1968). General-population surveys of drinking practices and problems in the United States have long paid attention to differences among white ethnic groups as well by racial groups. In general, studies using simple self-definitions of ethnicity (such as "what country did most of your ancestors come from?") have found systematic differences in patterns of drinking and in rates of drinking problems among U.S. ethnicities, with drinking problem rates generally lower among those of southern European and of Asian ancestry than among those of northern or eastern European ancestry, among Irish Americans, and among blacks and Latin Americans. (For instance, see Knupfer 1967 and Cahalan and Room 1974, pp. 101, 203.)

More recently, it has been recognized that there may be considerable change over time in the patterns of drinking of an ethnicity within a multiethnic society. Herd's work (1985), for instance, has documented a substantial shift during the 20th century from relatively low to relatively high rates of alcohol-related problems in the American black population. Furthermore, it is increasingly recognized that ethnicity in multiethnic societies is often a matter of choice as well as of assignment, particularly for those with multiple ancestries. An ethnic identity may be sought as a mark of distinction, and adopting a particular drinking pattern may be a symbol of ethnic identification. In this perspective, differences in drinking patterns often help to define cultural boundaries within a society; indeed, ethnic drinking patterns may be in part a performance staged for an audience of other ethnicities (Lurie 1971; Stivers 1976). In this reconceptualization of the meaning of ethnicity in a multicultural society, ethnic identity and culture are no longer seen simply as a reflection of premigration culture that fades gradually with acculturation, but rather as constructed and reconstructed from old and new cultural materials in a changing cultural situation. In these new perspectives, the relation of alcohol and culture is seen

in terms of flux and fluidity as well as stasis and inertia, in terms of intercultural conflict, accommodation, and antithesis, as well as of

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the immanent unfolding of a culture, and in terms of self-conscious symbolization and ideology, as well as of an unconscious cultural reproduction or reactions to material circumstances.

(Room 1985b)

This new perspective informs much new ethnographic work on alcohol and ethnicity in North America (Bennett and Ames 1985) and is increasingly entering into the analysis of drinking surveys in the general U.S. population, as will be apparent from other contributions in this monograph.

Surveys of a multiethnic population as a whole will of course yield representative samples of the ethnic groups that compose the population, but cross-ethnic analysis of such data is often limited by the small sizes of the subsamples. Researchers have coped with this problem in various ways: by abandoning strict probability principles (Knupfer and Room 1967; Greeley et al. 1980), by aggregating data from different samples together (Caetano 1984), or, as in other material in this monograph, by oversampling or collecting special samples of the ethnicities to be studied (see also Jessor et al. 1968). While occasional tables differentiating drinking patterns by ethno-religious groups can be found in drinking survey reports from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries with some ethnic diversity, there are only a few reports from outside the United States with relatively full data on ethnic differences. (For Switzerland, see Wüthrich and Hausheer 1977 and Müller 1981; for South Africa, see Venter 1964, 1965; Miles 1964; and Venter and Goosen 1966; for Australia, see Sargent 1973.)

### **Cross-National Surveys**

The studies reported in this monograph make up a substantial proportion of the cross-national surveys on drinking that have so far been conducted. Previous cross-national comparisons have often resulted from accretion, where a questionnaire used in one country has been adopted for use in another. (See, for example, Encel et al. 1972.) The broadest series of cross-nationally comparable surveys are undoubtedly those carried out by ANSVAR, a Swedish-based insurance company, which has asked about abstention, frequency of drinking, and some lifestyle items in a number of countries (Lindgren 1973; Armyr, unpublished). The most intensive tradition of cross-national collaborative surveys is among the Nordic countries. Under the auspices of a continuing joint research body, comparative studies of youth and adult populations, concentrating on drinking patterns and

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attitudes, have been carried out for over 20 years. (See, for example, Bruun and Hauge 1963; Mäkelä 1984).

A substantial obstacle to cross-national comparability has been the evolution of different national traditions of asking about drinking patterns, problems, and attitudes. While the advantages of adopting comparable measures have often been noted (Brun-Gulbrandsen 1973), attaining comparability has proved difficult. To measure trends in their national population, researchers may be impelled to repeat the form of questions used in previous surveys. Furthermore, where typical drinking patterns vary widely, the same questions or summary measures may not adequately describe the different national patterns. Thus the WHO study of Community Response to Alcohol-Related Problems found that collecting a record of the last week's drinking—the standard procedure for measuring drinking patterns in Scotland—failed to capture a common drinking pattern in Mexico, where many who drink quite large amounts at a time drink only a few times a year.

Despite these difficulties, there is by now a substantial amount of cross-nationally comparable data available. Although national research funding tends to constrain researchers to analyses within their own society, much could be gained from more intensive analyses of existing cross-national data sets.

A relatively new departure in cross-national studies, well represented in the papers in this volume, is the combined cross-national/cross-ethnic study, including an ethnic migrant group, the "old country," and if possible also a comparison group from the "new" country. While earlier examples of such studies can be found (see Lolli et al. 1958 on Italians and Italian-Americans), the importance of such studies was underlined by Stivers' finding (1976) that drinking among Irish-Americans differed substantially from drinking among the Irish. O'Connor's study (1978) of drinking among Irish, Anglo-Irish, and English youth, which found more heavy drinking among children of Irish immigrants in England than among either English or Irish youths, is a well-developed example of a combined cross-national/cross-ethnic design.

### **Cross-National Trend Comparisons**

International compilations of alcohol statistics have a lengthy tradition, and a number of such compendia are currently available. Analyses that aim to make sense of such data are not rare; we cited above, for instance, a paper

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by Christie (1965) that makes use of Scandinavian alcohol statistics. In recent years, however, researchers from a number of perspectives have grown impatient with cross-sectional comparisons of culturally relevant statistics; analyses "of cross-sectional comparisons or correlations . . . though often thought-provoking, can hardly be regarded as solid evidence for the existence of causal relationships" (Mäkelä et al. 1981, p. 93). To understand change, researchers have concluded, we must study change.

As Hill (1984) noted, to track change in a single culture to some extent "holds culture constant," allowing us to examine the effect of other factors.

Tracking the changes in a given institution or activity through time in a single society offers an excellent test for any synchronic analysis made of that institution or activity. As the situation and variables change through time, do the hypothesized relationships hold? Because the researcher is dealing with a single society, more variables are held constant than would be the case if he compared the "same" institution in two different societies.

By the same token, tracking changes in parallel in different societies further opens up the analytical opportunities, allowing us to study the interplay between cultural and other factors in societal changes. It was on this premise that the researchers collaborating on the International Study of Alcohol Control Experiences (ISACE) set out to examine trends in alcohol control, consumption, and consequences, and their interplay, in seven countries over the period 1950 to 1980 (Mäkelä et al. 1981). We may use some findings of this study to exemplify what is possible with such a cross-national trend comparison study. The ISACE study found that the interplay of factors was not simple. While all the countries studied had experienced a rise in alcohol consumption, and in at least some alcohol-related problem statistics, cultural differences in the expression of problems remained strong. On the other hand, in the societal responses to alcohol problems—specifically, in the growth of alcohol treatment as a response—the societies seemed to have much in common, leading the authors to remark that "common solutions were adopted for very different problems" (p. 64). The authors suggested that there had been a diffusion among professionals of the idea of treatment for alcoholism, but that the societies had each found the idea attractive as a "kind of cultural alibi for the normalization of drinking and relaxation of controls" that was occurring in each society (p. 65).



## **Some Issues in Cross-Cultural Analysis**

### **Units and Levels of Analysis**

There are of course a number of difficulties of definition involved in calling a study or analysis "cross-cultural." In the abstract, the meaning of the terms seems clear: it means a study that compares two or more cultures. For what constitutes a "culture," we can draw on the lengthy tradition of anthropological definition and exegesis. But in actual application in the modern world, identifying and setting the boundaries of cultural entities is not so clear. Even in the traditional anthropological territory of tribal and village cultures, what constitutes a cultural entity is often a thorny problem. In the modern world of the nation-state and of multicultural societies, the answer is yet more complicated.

In untangling an answer, it is useful to consider that most of us live in a set of overlapping and nested cultural entities. There is the nation-state, which commonly has defined as part of its task the creation, even if out of whole cloth, of a common national discourse and culture. There is our primary language affiliation, which may be to a cultural community stretching well beyond the nation-state (e.g., French), or may be entirely enclosed within it (e.g., Croatian). In multicultural nations, most citizens also feel some affiliation with one or more ethnoreligious groups, defined primarily through their ancestry. This by no means exhausts the list of significant cultural entities with which each of us may be affiliated; when some anthropologists talk of "family culture," for instance, they are thinking of the aspects of family life that form a microcultural entity.

We also commonly are a part of a number of other aggregations, which may or may not constitute cultural entities: for instance, in the United States, a State, a census tract, a health insurance plan group. One of the common difficulties in a cultural analysis of drinking practices and problems is that variables in the analysis belong to differing levels of aggregation. In the WHO study of Community Response to Alcohol-Related Problems, for instance, participants spent a great deal of time discussing what constituted a "community," with respect both to informal community responses and to the idea of community-level social and health agencies. For some aspects of the study, the appropriate answer would be a hospital district, for others one or two blocks in a neighborhood, for still others a town or city. To make matters worse, there was often variation between one national site and another in the level of aggregation appropriate for a particular

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aspect—variation that was also inextricably part of the data of the study. For instance, a mental hospital's clientele in Scotland was drawn from a much more limited and homogeneous population than a mental hospital's clientele in Zambia.

An explicit consideration of the levels of aggregation of the variables involved is an important first step in cross-cultural research. Data in the study need to be drawn from levels of aggregation appropriate to the issues that are to be explored or tested in the study. As noted above, much of the criticism of the hologeistic tradition has centered on the lack of fit between the levels of aggregation implied by the hypotheses put forward and the levels of the data used to test them—in that the studies did not allow for individual variation within a culture, and in that many of the hypotheses concerned concepts that had been developed in the context of the individual's mental states, but which were now applied to characterizations of cultural groups.

Where it is possible, cross-cultural analyses will often benefit from using variables from two or more levels of aggregation. A cultural analysis that takes account of individual variation already, of course, includes variables from two levels—the individual level and the cultural level. "Intuitively, at least," Allardt has remarked, such "structural and contextual analysis" appears to be "more fruitful" than either group or individual analysis taken alone (Allardt 1969; see Room 1980).

### **The Limits of Universalism and Relativism**

In an interesting paper, Schweder and Bourne (1984, p. 98) lay out three "deeply entrenched models of anthropological interpretation: *universalism*, *evolutionism*, and *relativism*."

Universalists are committed to the view that intellectual diversity is more apparent than real, that exotic idea systems, alien at first blush, are really more like our own than they initially appear.

Evolutionists are committed to the view that alien idea systems not only are truly different from our own, but are different in a special way; viz., other people's systems of ideas are really incipient and less adequate stages in the development of our own understandings.

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Relativists, in contrast, are committed to the view that alien idea systems, while fundamentally different from our own, display an internal coherency which, on the one hand, can be understood but, on the other hand, cannot be judged.

Let us set aside for the moment the evolutionist model and focus on relativism and universalism. These themes are certainly prominent in global syntheses on alcohol, often presented in an "on the one hand . . . on the other hand" format. Mandelbaum's paper, "Alcohol and Culture," for instance, first notes the diversity of cultural perspectives on drinking and then proceeds to emphasize the existence of commonalities in alcohol use—apparently without exceptions—across cultures. The latter point is made in part by negation:

If we should find a people in which women must drink more than men, in which drinking must be done alone or in the company of one's mentors or dependents, or in which the upholders of scripture (whether theological or political) are expected to drink more heavily than do others, we should know that we have encountered a society basically different from others so far known.

(Mandelbaum 1979, p. 27)

Heath's most comprehensive discussion of theoretical perspectives in the anthropological literature notes that "among professional anthropologists . . . —with occasional important exceptions—general propositions are rarely offered and perhaps even more rarely tested, except in the casual manner of mentioning the fact when an individual case does not conform to a widely known hypothesis" (Heath 1975, p. 50). Heath himself tends to emphasize diversities more than commonalities. His list of cross-cultural commonalities is relatively short and general: that drinking "is normally a social act," and that drinking, the effects of drinking, and drunken behavior are all shaped by "cultural values, attitudes, and conceptions of reality" (p. 56). Beyond this, Heath's own cross-cultural use of data has tended to be in the relativist style—as he characterizes it, "providing a critical test for conceptions of reality" by showing that ethnocentric assumptions about "human nature" do not apply in other cultures (p. 20).

In the concluding chapter of his edited reader, *Beliefs, Behaviors, and Alcoholic Beverages*, Marshall (1979) offers a series of 16 cross-cultural generalizations about drinking. The list is primarily in the universalistic mode; three-quarters of the generalizations propose cultural universals or near-universals. Thus, "beverage alcohol is used for festive, ceremonial, or ritual

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celebrations the world over"; "alcoholic beverages are the drug of choice for a majority of persons in any society, even if alternative drug substances are available"; permissible drunken behavior, however it may be defined, is always "within limits"; "socially disruptive drinking occurs only in secular settings"; "peoples who lacked alcoholic beverages aboriginally borrowed styles of drunken comportment" from those who introduced the alcoholic beverages; and "once alcoholic beverages have become available in a society, attempts to establish legal prohibition have never proven completely successful." Other propositions concern near-universals at the cultural level, though in some cases delineating intracultural variation: "beverage alcohol is usually not a problem in society unless and until it is defined as such"; "beverage alcohol usually is defined as a social facilitator . . . and this belief may persist despite considerable evidence to the contrary"; "typically, alcoholic beverages are used more by males than by females and more by young adults than by preadolescents or older persons"; and "males' drunken comportment usually is more exaggerated and potentially more explosive than that of females, regardless of relative ethanol consumption."

Just four of Marshall's propositions are "if-then" statements, concerned with the interplay between one dimension of variation in cultures and another:

When members of a society have had sufficient time to develop a widely shared set of beliefs and values pertaining to drinking and drunkenness, the consequences of alcohol consumption are usually not disruptive for most persons in that society. On the other hand, where beverage alcohol has been introduced within the past century and such a set of beliefs and values has not developed completely, social—and sometimes physiological—problems with ethanol commonly result.

Where opportunities for group or community recreation are few and alcoholic beverages are available, alcohol consumption will become a major form of recreational activity in a community ("the boredom rule").

The drinking of alcoholic beverages occurs usually with friends of relatives and not among strangers. Where drinking among strangers does take place, violence is much more likely to erupt.

When alcohol beverages are defined culturally as a food and/or a medicine, drunkenness seldom is disruptive or antisocial.

In general, it seems to me that the path forward in cross-cultural studies is not by searching for further universals, but rather by developing and testing

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such if-then statements. By definition, a cross-cultural universal cannot explain cultural differences, and neither can it explain cultural change. For such explanations, if-then statements are needed.

### **Setting Boundaries of Comparability**

Behind Schweder and Bourne's distinction between universalists and relativists lies a deep unity: the relativist position, while concerned to emphasize differences in social arrangements, nevertheless assumes that the internal logic of alien idea systems "can be understood" across cultural boundaries. This necessarily involves an assumption of some substratum of mental processes held in common between those being described and those who are to understand across a cultural gap. The relativist and universalist positions therefore can be seen as different points along an assumptive continuum concerning what understandings and mental processes humans hold in common.

Most cross-cultural analyses involve unexamined assumptions concerning this continuum. Non-economists tend to be uncomfortably aware of the assumptions concerning "homo economicus" involved in most economic analysis. As we have noted, the inclination of many psychiatric nosologists is toward assuming a kind of psychopathological unity of humankind. Hologeistic alcohol studies can and have been critiqued for the degree to which they assume a unity of mental processes and functions across all cultures—for instance, in Horton's assertion that drinking is primarily for the relief of anxiety. More fundamentally, by analyzing data from tribal and village societies with the aim of contributing to an understanding of cultural processes in large and complex societies, hologeistic studies commit themselves to the idea that processes and interactions are the same in one kind of society as in the other.

In my view, cross-cultural analysts should routinely examine and specify the level of assumption of human unity that their analysis requires. Such a reexamination may identify boundaries within which the analysis can be seen as applicable and beyond which it does not apply. Let us consider an example. MacAndrew and Edgerton's analysis (1969) argues that Horton's assumption that drunkenness always brings a threat of violence, as a commonality across humankind, should be abandoned. There are cultures in which drinking has a strong cultural association with violence, and others in which it does not. In this circumstance, it would be wise to limit the scope of

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a theory that focuses on the social control of violence as a main aim of controls on alcohol availability to cultures where violence and drinking are linked.

The idea that there are boundaries or discontinuities across which commonalities do not apply bears some relation to Schweder and Bourne's third model of interpretation, evolutionism. But to think in terms of bounded levels or categories in which different relations apply does not necessarily invoke the added assumptions of an evolutionist perspective—that passage between levels or categories is in only one direction, or that movement in such a direction must be construed as progress.

We can identify a number of dimensions relevant to the issue of the generalizability of cross-cultural analyses in alcohol studies. The dimension of violence associated with drunkenness has already been mentioned. So has the boundary between relatively isolated village and tribal societies and large-scale complex societies. Matters of definition complicate this issue, but there are clear differences between large-scale and small-scale societies, for instance in terms of means of social control and the handling of problems.

Recently, the importance of material conditions of alcohol production and distribution in societal drinking patterns has been reemphasized. The routine availability of alcohol in a market-oriented cash economy, tied in to world transportation networks, creates a very different cultural situation from that in an isolated village where the women prepare the beer from any surplus grain, while the men drink it. What we know about the distribution of consumption of alcohol in the population is largely confined to experience with cash economies in which alcohol is a commodity and there is ready transportation.

The question of whether aspects of alcohol addiction should be regarded as a culture-bound syndrome reflects Foucault's analysis of the shift in consciousness in Europe at the beginning of the 18th century, and Levine's analysis (1978) of the related shift in perceptions and beliefs about alcohol, at least in the United States. The existence of a cultural imperative for an internalized individual control of behavior may thus form a horizon for discussions of the correlates of addiction.

Last, whether a culture has an active history of temperance agitation and concern may set a boundary in terms of cultural perceptions and attributions about alcohol. The residual legatee of such historic concerns in the

modern era is often a substantial research program, while cultures without such historic concerns often support little research. Since most research is therefore done in and on cultures with a temperance history, much of what we think we know in alcohol studies may only be applicable to such cultures.

## **The Promise of Cross-Cultural Research in Alcohol**

In suggesting horizons of comparability for some lines of research, we have identified a few of the potentially fruitful paths for future work in cross-cultural research in alcohol studies. Cross-cultural work is needed to establish the generalizability of such clinical constructs as the alcohol dependence syndrome. Comparative studies of attributions and expectations concerning alcohol would add a new dimension of depth to a social psychological literature too often based on samples of U.S. college students. Comparisons of time-series analyses of alcohol consumption and alcohol problems in different national populations will yield clues about different causal connections between drinking and social and health problems in different cultural circumstances. Collaborative analysis of longitudinal data sets in different societies will help disentangle the relative contributions of maturation, cohort, and historical factors in the patterning of drinking in the life course. Comparative analysis of survey data on drinking patterns, problems and attitudes by gender, age, and status can tell us much about the implications for a society of variations in the social locations of drinking. Cross-cultural ethnographic studies can yield new insights on the links between drinking and violence, both in the family and in the streets.

These are but a few of the agendas that are now open for analysis in cross-cultural research. Too often, in alcohol studies as in other fields, "cultural differences" have been regarded as outside the frame of explanation. They are invoked as a fall-back interpretation after the analysis is finished, rather than being included in the hypotheses to be subjected to testing. We are now in a position to include cultural variables in the explanatory scheme. A fuller understanding of cross-cultural variation in drinking practices and problems will give us new tools in the prevention and treatment of alcohol problems.

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