

FEATURE ARTICLE

PRIORITIES IN ALCOHOL SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Robin Room
Social Research Group
School of Public Health
University of California
Berkeley

GROWTH AND SCOPE OF THE LITERATURE

Social science alcohol research far predates the modern era of alcohol studies. In each of the major social science disciplines, significant work on alcohol issues had been done by the early years of the century. But there was no precedent in earlier years for the exponential growth in the social science alcohol literature, particularly in anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, in recent years.¹ In his review of the anthropologically-oriented alcohol literature, Heath (1976) noted that output doubled between 1945-1954 and 1955-1959, and doubled again in 1960-1964; his bibliography shows another redoubling in 1965-1969, and a further increase in output in the early 1970's. A similar exponential growth has occurred in the sociological and social-psychological literature; while in earlier years it was possible to undertake a synoptic review in the compass of a single article (Bacon, 1952; Trice and Pittman, 1958; Bruun, 1961), such an approach would now be quite inadequate. Recent years have also seen a modest resurgence of economic, political science, and historical studies on alcohol issues.

The scope of the current social science alcohol literature can be illustrated by its diversity.

The diversity of populations studied: By now characterizations of drinking practices are available for nearly every industrialized country and for at least 150 non-industrialized cultures. Social scientists have described the rules and practices of the skid row bottle gang, of the middle-class party, of the teenage disco, and of the small-town community cook-out. General-population studies, which by their nature include

the whole range of variation on social differentiations, have analyzed differences in drinking practices and problems by sex, age, social class, ethnicity, religion, region, urbanization, and other bases of social differentiation. There have also been studies of drinking in particular segments of the population, including ethnic groups, the young and the old, and women.

The diversity of aspects of alcohol studied: There are studies of attitudes to drinking, of popular conceptualizations of alcohol problems, of attitudes to treatment, and of reactions to aspects of others' drinking. Studies of drinking behavior have focused on a number of different dimensions: on the frequency and patterning of drinking occasions, on the volume consumed in a given period, on the blood-alcohol attained on an occasion, on behavior and demeanor while drinking, on the contexts and associates of drinking occasions. Other studies have focused on variations in consumption level in a population as a whole. An enormous range of consequences and problems of drinking have been studied, including impairment of major social roles; accidents, crimes and other serious events; existential problems such as dependence and depression; and short-term and long-term health consequences of drinking. Besides these problems for the individual, effects at aggregate levels have been studied, including subjects as diverse as the accumulation of roadside litter from alcohol containers; loss of production due to drinking; diversion of foodstuffs to alcohol production; the effects of drinking on family and friendship ties.

The diversity of methods used: The major methodologies of social science data collection are each well represented in alcohol studies. Ethnographic methods have of course been

Prepared for presentation at the Symposium on Research Priorities, Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, New Brunswick, N.J., October 1977. (This paper benefited from discussions with a number of coworkers and collaborators in ongoing studies, and in particular with Ron Roizen).

¹ The present paper attempts to include within its scope the non-experimental social psychology literature; the psychological literature is otherwise left for coverage elsewhere.

widely used in anthropological studies of traditional cultures. But observational methods, informant interviews and linguistic analyses have also been used in a variety of settings in industrialized societies: in skid-row studies, in studies of taverns and other drinking places and occasions, in studies of the processes of interaction between the staff and clients of treatment and other social response agencies.

Survey interview studies of drinking attitudes, practices and problems have been conducted in a variety of communities and countries. The cross-sectional survey of a sample of youth or of the total adult population has been the most common design, but there have also been several studies which have followed respondents over varying lengths of time in a longitudinal analysis of change.

The compilation and analysis of alcohol-related and other social statistics (consumption levels, cirrhosis mortality, drunk driving arrests, etc.), both cross-sectionally, comparing different populations, and in time series for the same population, have perhaps the longest tradition of any social science methodology in alcohol studies. Although for many purposes the traditional straightforward comparisons of rates are still used, regression and similar analytic methods have been in use in the alcohol literature at least since 1932 to quantify relations and trends. In the postwar period, correlational methods have also been used to quantify comparisons based on ethnographic accounts of drinking and other societal traits of traditional cultures, in a series of "hologeistic" analyses of the social conditioning and functions of drinking and drunkenness.

A wide variety of documentary material has been used in the growing literature of historical and policy studies on alcohol issues. While the temperance era has attracted the most attention thus far, in significant areas our knowledge of that era is still partial. Work both on earlier and on more contemporary periods is now getting under way. Consideration of alcohol policies is now taking an important place in historical studies of the political economy of drugs, and there is increasing attention to the ideological history and social ecology and societal response mechanisms—treatment, punishment, taxation, tolerance, etc.—relevant to alcohol use and problems.

THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

But despite the diversity, depth, and frequent excellence of social research on alcohol, it has a curious lack of presence, both in alcohol studies in general and in social science in general. In college social science textbooks, alcohol issues generally appear only as a perfunctory and derivative chapter on alcoholism in the introductory social problem text. Alcohol-related articles have been notably scarce in the major general sociological, psychological, and anthropological journals. In

part this no doubt reflects the prejudices of many academic social scientists against "applied," social problems-oriented research. Drinking studies indeed seem to have a low standing even among social problems topics, perhaps because they are seen as dealing with unserious behavior and often with disreputable and unsympathetic subjects. Social scientists working in alcohol studies have failed so far to communicate to their fellow social scientists the strategic usefulness of alcohol phenomena as a focus for analysis of many social issues.²

The position of social science research in alcohol studies is more complicated. The usefulness of the research tools of social science is generally recognized; social scientists are regularly called upon as proficient survey researchers, ethnomethodologists, multivariate analysts, or evaluators. There is also a growing appreciation of social science studies as a kind of intelligence service bringing news of the distribution of drinking behavior and attitudes, quantifying the expected and occasionally revealing the unexpected. As an intelligence service and as proficient evaluators and survey analysts, social scientists are thus increasingly seen as relevant and useful to policymaking and program planning.

But perceptions by others of the nature and use of social science research tend to stop at the images of competent technician or advance scout or management consultant. Social scientists, on the other hand, tend to define the nature and worth of their work in quite other terms, in terms of the theoretical contributions it makes or reconceptualizations it suggests. A finding is thus "interesting" to the social scientist's professional colleagues not so much for its news value but for what it suggests about how things work. This extra dimension of social science thought seems often to be overlooked by others working in alcohol studies. It is often unnoticed and discarded by abstractors and cataloguers, who tend to focus on the proximate topic of the paper or book, disregarding the concepts applied to the topic. In a way, social scientists are betrayed by the very newsworthiness of their data, which distracts attention from the theoretical or conceptual implications of the analysis. From this perspective, an animal model experimenter is in a better position than social scientists, since it is readily seen that the "news" about how a laboratory rat behaves when drinking is not very interesting in its own right—that the findings are of interest primarily for what they imply about a general theory or model of behavior.

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND THE ALCOHOLISM MOVEMENT

The impact of social science research on alcohol studies has also been limited by a clash of perspectives between general social science perspectives and dominant strains of thought in the alcohol field. For forty years, American thinking about

² Some social scientists—e.g., Odegard, Lemert, Gusfield—have impressed their colleagues with alcohol-related research, but these works have tended to become exemplary as social science analysis without recognition of their alcohol focus.

alcohol problems has been dominated by the alcoholism movement, a loose amalgam of interests united by a commitment to a conceptualization of alcohol-related problems in terms of a single entity, nowadays usually identified as alcoholism or alcohol dependence. This entity has usually been seen as a disease, seated in an individual's physiology. The disease concept in itself tended to tilt attention away from social and psychological research and towards physiological research, although social and psychological factors remained relevant to an epidemiology of the disease. But the clash with social science perspectives was not so much about a disease conceptualization *per se* as about two axioms it included: that alcohol problems were best conceptualized in terms of a single entity; and that the individual's relation to alcohol, rather than the effects of that relation, was the seat of the entity.

The implications of these two axioms for the research agenda can be seen clearly set out very early in the history of the alcoholism movement in Jellinek's 1942 "Outline of Basic Policies for a Research Program on Problems of Alcohol" (Jellinek, 1943). Jellinek's paper was proposed to and adopted by the Scientific Committee of the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol—a prestigious but underfunded body which formed the nucleus of the "new scientific approach" to alcohol—"as a basis for the research policies of the Council." Jellinek proposed a classification of projects into A, B and C lists, in decreasing order of priority. In a situation of chronic underfunding, this meant that only projects on the A list had a chance for funding. Throughout the paper, Jellinek's discussion uses the term "inebriety" in much the same global sense, to include both the "alcohol addiction" and other "abnormal drinking," that he used "alcoholism" in his later writings (Jellinek, 1960). In the paper, research projects and their priorities are consistently oriented to "inebriety" as an undivided category; in general, studies are characterized as being concerned either with the causes of inebriety or with the effects of inebriety. Thus Jellinek begins his discussion of "Sociology—Anthropology" by stating that "the sociologic aspects of alcohol problems are two-fold. One may speak of (a) the influence of social factors on inebriety, and (b) the effects of inebriety on society" (p. 109). As elsewhere in the paper, he gives systematic priority to research in the first area over research in the second. This priority is evidently partly motivated by a distaste for the temperance movement's heavy emphasis on the second area, and a desire to distinguish the "new scientific approach" from the temperance movement. More importantly, however, Jellinek was motivated by the conviction that the investigation of the "origins of inebriety and addiction" was the key to the prevention and treatment of alcohol problems. In this view, studies of "the effect of alcohol on society" were important only as public-relations gestures.

At first thought it may seem unreasonable to assign secondary importance to such subjects as the relation of inebriety to divorce, family life, pauperism, delinquency,

community life, etc. Investigations of these subjects may be of real use to the administrator, the penologist, and so forth. But as far as the Council is concerned these subjects do not contribute to the understanding of inebriety and only in a small measure to its prevention. On the other hand, such studies serve to characterize the magnitude of the problem of alcohol. In so far as it may be necessary to educate the public on the magnitude of the problem in order to obtain its support, the fostering of such studies is justified. It is also justified from the viewpoint that the Council will be performing an expected public service by supporting such projects. When these motives are absent, however, these projects can be considered only as secondary interests of the Council. (p. 111)

The clash of this perspective with general social science perspectives can be clearly observed in the contemporaneous writing of another giant of the alcohol literature, Selden Bacon, then a young assistant professor of sociology newly interested in alcohol problems. In a paper on "Sociology and the Problems of Alcohol" (1943) originally prepared as a memorandum to Jellinek,³ Bacon systematically trampled the borders implied by Jellinek's approach: it was *all* of drinking, and not just inebriety, which needed to be studied; alcohol behavior is seen as socially as well as individually seated; the social effects of social reactions to drinking are very much a part of the study.

Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts...have studied the development of the psychotic drinker and the neurotic drinker...For students of society, the individuals so described represent such a tiny and exotic portion of the whole community that the resulting generalizations have not been sociologically informative...Drinking behavior is subject to the same mode of analysis as any other form of behavior, whether it be table manners, football, marriage, or earning a living.

A factor which has delayed and discouraged an adequate analysis of drinking behavior has been the failure to recognize the relation of inebriety to all other forms of drinking...Inebriates, however, are but a minor percentage of drinkers. (pp. 406, 408, 409)

The sociologist is interested in the customs of drinking, the relationship between these customs and other customs, the way in which drinking habits are learned, the social controls of this sort of behavior, and those institutions of society through which such control issues. The sociologist wishes to know the social categories in which much or little or no drinking occurs, he seeks correlations of amount and type of drinking with occupational, marital, nationality, religious, and other statuses. More importantly, he poses the broad questions: What are the societal functions served by the drinking of alcoholic beverages? What are the social rules concerned with drinking? What are the pressures for and against this practice? How does this behavioral pattern jibe with other institutions and folkways? The sociologist is interested in changing patterns of drinking and in their relation to other changes in the society. The

³ Personal communication from Selden Bacon.

sociologist studies the effect of no drinking, some drinking, or excessive drinking on groups, attitudes, and behavior. As drunkenness may result in punitive, preventive, or therapeutic measures, the sociologist observes, classifies, analyzes, and compares these activities. (pp. 407-408)

The contrast between Jellinek's and Bacon's perspectives is prototypical of a persistent strain between social science alcohol researchers and the rest of the alcohol field. The strain tends to occur over how the dependent variable is to be defined. In the era of the alcoholism movement, it has been alcoholism, defined as a clinical entity, that is to be explained. So long as social scientists accepted this definition of the dependent variable uncritically, and investigated its social epidemiology, their efforts were welcomed and indeed heralded. Thus perhaps the most widely accepted contribution of social science research to alcohol studies has been the literature on cultural differences in rates of alcoholism. This area was the first item on Jellinek's agenda for *Sociology and Anthropology*: "to attempt an explanation of the absence of inebriety in certain societies or the various forms and degrees of inebriety in other societies in terms of cultural structure" (1943, p. 109). In a variety of studies since the 1940's, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists have pursued this agenda, in comparisons both among traditional societies and among ethnicities and cultures in industrialized nations. In popular presentations on alcohol issues, this is the one area of social science work that is sure to be mentioned (e.g., Milt, 1969, pp. 12-20; NIAAA, 1972, pp. 15-16). The proposal, derived from this research, that the alcoholism rate in the U.S. reflected a special cultural ambivalence over drinking became a government policy position (see Room, 1976).

But social scientists, and perhaps particularly sociologists, have not been willing to confine themselves to alcoholism as a dependent variable. Instead, they have not only pursued alternative dependent variables, but also have offered their services in reconceptualizing the alcoholism movement's dependent variable. This offer has often been unwelcome to or at least unheeded by others in the alcohol field. As Bacon notes, this stance of a social scientist makes him or her unreliable or even dangerous to those committed to a particular ideology of the nature of the problem (Bacon, 1976, pp. 99-100).

The reconceptualizations have proceeded in a number of different directions. One common theme been the bifurcation or disaggregation of the dependent variable. This theme arose early, in Straus and Bacon's discovery of a new kind of alcoholism, characterized by "social stability" and "occupational integration" (1951), markedly divergent from the "alcoholics" seen in mental hospitals and jails (Straus, 1976, pp. 46-47). In more recent years, general population studies have raised new questions along the same lines, by showing

the modest overlaps between different drinking problems in the general population (Clark, 1966; Cahalan and Room, 1974).⁴

Related themes have been nominalistic critiques by social scientists of alcoholism's status as a disease entity, and discussions placing the disease concept of alcoholism in the context of alternative conceptions of alcohol problems. Both of these themes are of course direct threats to the hegemony of alcoholism movement thought.

Another major direction of reconceptualization has been to reverse Jellinek's 1943 priority and treat the effects and consequences of drinking as the dependent variable. Inebriety or alcoholism, if they figure in the model of explanation at all, become part of the explanation rather than what is to be explained. This perspective had fueled the persistent tendency of social scientists to talk in terms of drinking problems or problem drinking rather than alcoholism (see Riley, 1949 for an early example). There are thus flourishing traditions in social science and epidemiological research which examine how much and in what form alcohol plays a part in non-alcohol-specific social and health problems: what kind of involvement alcohol has in driving casualties or in suicide or in murder or in juvenile delinquency or in liver disease; how much the phenomena of Skid Row are attributable to drinking or alcoholism; what are the economic costs and benefits of drinking. Such studies, in which alcohol measures are in an intervening or explanatory variable rather than the dependent variable, tend to be welcomed by those in the alcoholism tradition in much the same spirit as Jellinek showed in 1943: the studies are of some marginal interest in their own right, and are indeed useful for public-relations purposes of ballooning up the social importance of alcohol issues, but they are seen as beside the point of the major task of an alcohol literature, which is to understand the nature and etiology of alcoholism.

A further major divergence of social science thought from conventional alcoholism thought is the insistence on the relevance of studying normal behavior, even the apparently trivial, to an understanding of "abnormal drinking." This is a theme which the first American "alcohol sociologist," Selden Bacon, has stressed throughout his long career of writing in the field. In accordance with the theme, there has been a wealth of social science research on the phenomenology and distribution of drinking behavior in the population at large, particularly in the last twenty years. Increasingly, studies of this kind have moved from the simple description of drinking patterns and customs to a concern with their relation to problematic aspects of drinking. Against this, the disease concept of alcoholism has stressed the differentiation between normal drinking and alcoholic drinking, with alcoholic drinking seen as confined to persons with a special psychological or physiological predisposition to alcoholism. From the perspec-

⁴ These social science studies have indeed had some impact on the alcohol field, but not exactly in the terms they intended. The studies became instruments of the public relations effort to inflate the numbers of and enhance the respectability of alcoholism: Straus and Bacon's research is the source of the often-repeated statement that only a tiny minority of alcoholics live on skid row, and the work of Cahalan and associates became the basis of estimates that there were 9 or 10 million alcoholics in the U.S., roughly doubling earlier estimates.

tive of the disease concept "normal" drinking should be seen as irrelevant to the etiology of alcoholism, and studies of normal drinking as ornamental scholarship irrelevant to the main tasks of alcohol research.

A final major divergence of social science thought from conventional alcoholism thought is a view of social problems with alcohol as properties of an interaction between drinking behaviors and the social reaction to those behaviors, rather than as properties simply of the drinking individual. In this view, the social response to drinking, formal and informal, becomes an important dependent variable. This perspective often leads social scientists to view treatment and assistance agencies in quite unclinical terms: as part of the overall system of social control of drinking behavior; as filling latent functions as well as the manifest purposes; as having a diversity of goals besides the official ones. Such research interests tend to make alcoholism treatment, characteristics at a minimum uneasy. Kettil Bruun has succinctly formulated both a common social science position in this area and the unease it creates:

It would be a mistake, I believe, to assert that the results of epidemiological studies [of characteristics of individuals] as such are applicable to policy. ... Studies on the activities of control agencies are... important complements of epidemiological studies. Such a combination, however, is not common, partly because control agencies do not like to accept the role of research object. And to go further and question the reliability of the information which they give seems almost insulting... In view of this reluctance to be investigated it is no surprise that policy recommendations are more likely to be produced and accepted when they relate to the behavior of individuals rather than to the actions of control agencies. Yet the behavior of the latter is often easier to change than that of the former. (Bruun, 1973).

FUNDING OF ALCOHOL SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Whatever the reasons for its existence, the gap in understanding between social science research and other thought on alcohol seems to have reflected back on the scope and nature of social science research on alcohol. Collating data on federal expenditures for alcohol grants research (NIMH Research Task Force No. 6, n.d., pp. 4-7; *Alcoholism Report*, 1975, pp. 6-8), the ratio of funding for "psychosocial" versus "behavioral studies" dropped substantially in the

period 1967-1974. Although a rough classification of research grants active in November, 1974, based on the NIMH Alcoholism Research Task Force classification, shows 38% of research monies still falling in the "psychosocial" area, over half of this money went into treatment studies.⁶

The lack of understanding of and appreciation for social science perspectives has tended to shunt government-funded social science research into the role of technologically competent intelligence gathering, while "basic research" is seen as being "biological" and "behavioral." Indicative of this is the fact that none of the four U.S. state-funded alcohol research centers are headed by a social scientist.⁸ Social scientists working with government funding find themselves working on two levels—the overt level of descriptive work, for which they are funded, and the hidden level of the research questions which they really care about, which are unfundable but where possible "bootlegged" in.

Much of the explosive growth in alcohol social science research in recent years has thus not been specifically government-funded as alcohol research. Very often some governmental agency is in fact funding the research, but without approval or indeed knowledge of the specific project. Much of the research is produced by social scientists in teaching positions in colleges, and a majority of these teaching positions are funded by one or another level of government. Some significant research has resulted from grants for other purposes; thus, for instance, both Wiseman's *Stations of the Lost* and Cavan's *Liquor License* were products of a NIMH training grant.

But this catch-as-catch-can material basis for the social science alcohol literature gives it an often elusive and non-cumulative flavor. Social scientists pass into and out of alcohol studies in the course of a year or two, contributing their individual offerings as to a wayside shrine. As Bacon notes, "the results are all too clear: although professionals in their special disciplines, these persons are frequently amateurs in relation to alcohol studies." As amateurs, such researchers usually take the safe course of avoiding any questioning of alcohol orthodoxies. More fundamental reconceptualizations are likely to come from those who continue in alcohol studies (Bacon, 1976, pp. 74-76). But at least until the present, long-term funding for alcohol social science researchers has been almost unknown in the U.S.⁷ Where it has occurred, it has often been an accidental by-product, e.g., as a result of the longitudinal design of a study.

⁶ The Task Force's enumeration of what it meant by "psychosocial" studies is itself revealing of the orientation of this category away from the formulation of research questions in social science terms: "epidemiology; etiology; diagnosis; natural history; social consequences; treatment and rehabilitation; prevention."

⁸ Rutgers is excluded as not being a state-funded research center. California is currently in the process of funding a social science-oriented alcohol research center.

⁷ This situation is in contrast to other countries important in alcohol research, such as Canada, Finland, Norway, and England.

CURRENT AGENDAS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

If we were to sum up the progress of social science alcohol studies in recent years, then, we would have to say on the one hand that it has burgeoned and is flourishing, and on the other hand that support for it has been fitful, that the literature is often noncumulative, and that at least until recently the social science literature has not had much conceptual impact on alcohol studies in general.

So?
That's
different?

But there are signs of change. We seem to be entering a "post-addiction" era (Levine, 1976) in alcohol studies, where no one paradigm dominates thought and research. Accompanying this change is an increased salience for social science research in alcohol studies and alcohol policy. There are a number of general topical domains of social science research that we can point to as deserving some priority in the development of alcohol studies in the next few years.

(a) *studies of the normative and ecological structure of drinking behaviors and problems*

Surveys of drinking practices and problems in the general population have given us a clear description of the demography of drinking, and of a variety of personal characteristics associated with heavy drinking and drinking problems. Ethnographic studies of skid row have given us a sense of the norms and ecology of drinking in this very special subculture, and studies of taverns have given us some knowledge of the structure of social interaction surrounding tavern drinking. Nevertheless, we still know very little of the details of the normative and ecological structure of drinking. (1) We know little of the social worlds of heavy drinking—of the norms and values which support heavy drinking, and of the internal constraints acting to keep drunken behavior within limits. This knowledge has practical as well as theoretical use. If we wish to persuade "serious drinkers" to change their behavior, we must know how to speak to them in terms that are not an immediate turn-off. Another use might be the redesign of physical locations of heavy drinking to reinforce the internal subcultural constraints. (2) We need to pay close and detailed attention to the social and physical contexts in which drinking-related problems occur. We have almost no quantitative information on the configurations of circumstances and the scenarios which result in problematic events, or of the alternative circumstances and scenarios where the event does not occur. Such knowledge will contribute to theoretical perspectives on the place of alcohol in everyday life and on the operation of social and personal controls. It is also of immediate practical relevance in the design and promotion of cultural, temporal and physical barriers to protect drinkers from harm. (3) Researchers following the lead of Ledermann have noted an important empirical regularity in the distribution of alcohol consumption in a variety of populations: the distribution is systematically skewed to the left and takes the approximate shape of a lognormal or gamma distribution. This regularity in populations at very different overall levels of consumption suggests the operation of order-

ly processes of mutual influence of drinking patterns among and between all classes of drinkers. Recent work by Skog and others on the construction of statistical models of possible processes needs to be extended and subjected to empirical testing. (4) Little is known of the reactions of various classes of drinkers to changes in the price or control structures affecting alcohol's availability. Such microeconomic studies, particularly concerning heavy and habituated drinkers, have become important in the wake of evidence that consumption level in a population is linked to cirrhosis and other physiological effects of drinking, and that consumption level is to some extent influenced by price and control measures. The crucial point for testing is the extent to which and conditions under which price and control measures have an impact on heavy and habituated drinkers.

(b) *studies of drinking careers and the natural history of drinking problems*

Modern studies of the drinking history of alcoholics date back to Jellinek's seminal work of 1946, and of course this topic was a major concern of the temperance movement. While the technology for analysis has improved with the advent of the computer, designs and analytical models for statistical studies of drinking careers have not advanced commensurately. Studies still concentrate on "when first" and "ever" questions and assume a single progressive and cumulative path of alcoholism. Studies of drinking careers and of the natural history of drinking problems in the general population, using retrospective or longitudinal designs, are a more recent and tentative phenomenon. The contrasts between findings in these studies and those in clinical populations, however, point to some important areas for research. (1) The ages of clinical samples of alcoholics typically cluster at 35-55. Yet general-population data consistently show the peak of reported alcohol problems among males at ages 18-24. What are the processes of remission of heavy youthful drinking? Are those who end up in clinics drawn from the population of youthful drinkers? Do clinical populations merely maintain youthful patterns while others cut down, or do their patterns get progressively more serious? What are the contextual supports and constraints on heavy drinking in middle age? (2) Recent follow-up studies of clinical samples and control groups suggest the possibility of a great deal of sporadic improvement and worsening of patterns in the course of a drinking career. This possibility needs to be systematically explored, and the context and conditions of "spontaneous" changes in the course of a drinking career need to be measured and mapped. (3) Very little is known of the processes by which problematic behaviors and events come to be seen as alcohol problems rather than in terms of alternative explanations, or of the difference which this makes in terms of others' reactions to and attempts to control the behavior and events. (4) More needs to be known about the sequencing and clustering of drinking-related problems and events, and of the conditions of occurrence of particular patterns, in both general and clinical populations. Such studies will contribute

information on possible targets and strategies of intervention in and prevention of alcohol problems.

(c) studies of the community response to alcohol problems and of formal and informal treatment processes

Recent follow-up studies of treatment populations, and comparisons of treated and general populations, have posed substantial questions about the nature and social position and functions of alcohol treatment agencies. (1) Treated populations in the U.S., except for those treated after a DWI conviction, show considerably more extreme drinking behaviors than even the most extreme three percent of the general population. Entry into treatment may thus be seen as the endpoint of a lengthy process of selection or extrusion from the general population. The operation of these processes, which is to some extent the obverse of the study of drinking histories, needs to be examined. Particular attention needs to be given to the structure of popular beliefs about and informed social responses to alcohol problems, and how and under what conditions these bring into play formal societal responses including treatment agencies. (2) Followup studies of treatment populations show very little differential effectiveness between formal categorizations of treatment—group, individual, inpatient, outpatient, etc. Do these formal categorizations miss the characteristics which make a difference in treatment, or is effectiveness of treatment a property rather of factors external to the official treatment program? While there have been a few observational studies of treatment milieu, considerable attention needs still to be given to the actual operation of treatment and other formal social responses to alcohol problems, and what parts of the process under what conditions are directly helpful. Such studies will also help to define and refine in practical terms the objectives of alcoholism treatment. (3) Substantial attention has been paid in recent years to the history, management, and social positioning of treatment and other response agencies for opiate addiction. Commensurate attention has not been paid to the rich history of treatment institutions and methods for alcoholism. This ignorance of history often produces unwitting recapitulations: for instance, hypnosis as a treatment for alcoholism seems to be rediscovered about every twenty years. The present federally-funded alcoholism treatment system was set up in almost total ignorance of the nature and history of earlier treatment systems, such as the inebriates' asylums of the late nineteenth century. Historical studies of the nature and functions of treatment agencies will contribute to our conceptual understanding of alcohol problems and of limits and structural tendencies in the operation of a treatment system.

(d) studies of the formation and effects of alcohol controls and alcohol policies

The neglect of the history of alcohol treatment is a part of the general neglect in recent decades of history and policy studies on alcohol issues. Although the distinction between symbolic and pragmatic issues in drug policy was originally made by Gusfield concerning alcohol issues and the temperance movement, further such studies have concentrated on policies for other drugs. Recently, there has been renewed interest in control policies and agencies as in-

struments of alcohol policy, and in the formation and effects of alcohol policies. (1) There is a new interest in the processes of formation of alcohol policies, focusing on the interplay of popular sentiment and organized interests—temperance agencies, beverage industry groups, the treatment constituency, etc.—in the making of policy. Allied to this are theoretical concerns with the general functions of alcohol for the state and for major societal constituencies: as an instrument for control, as a symbol of subversion as a source of revenue, as a hazardous substance, as a pacifier. These concerns might well be linked to considerations of the functions of alcohol for the individual—as a foodstuff, as a beverage, etc. (2) There is also renewed interest in the organization of production and distribution of alcoholic beverages, and in the effects of changes in this area. Particular attention needs to be focused on the considerable concentration of production in recent years in four separate directions—by combinations and closings within the beer, wine, and liquor industries, by integration across these industries, by conglomeration with other industries, e.g. tobacco, and by multinational expansion. Both the causes and consequences of concentration and other shifts in production and distribution need to be studied.

(3) Both at the individual and at aggregate levels, recent work has pointed to the importance of studying the interrelations between attitudes on drinking, the availability of alcohol, drinking behavior, and the consequences of drinking. Opinions differ on the relation of amount of drinking to various consequences of drinking, and these differences need to be clarified and empirically tested. These relations are in turn influenced by the control system and by popular attitudes on drinking. Comparisons across societies, comparisons of subgroups within a society, and comparisons at the individual level seem often to show quite different patternings, and the logical relationship of these findings at different levels needs to be explicated. In the wake of the attention given to the relation of control policies and consumption to cirrhosis mortality, it is of obvious practical importance to pursue these issues for other consequences of drinking.

A listing such as the above must of course reflect the special interests and knowledge of its compiler. It implies not that substantial work has not already been done in some of the areas, but rather that considerable more work is needed. For many social scientists, the listing is probably tilted uncomfortably toward pragmatic policy questions at the expense of conceptual issues of general social science interest. The list is offered, in fact, simply as a basis for discussion.

TRENDS IN DESIGN AND METHODS

With a suitable mixture of hope and confidence, a number of desirable trends in the design and methodology of alcohol social science studies can be discerned.

(a) *disaggregation*: As noted above, decomposing the "dependent variable," and indeed shifting its locus from one analysis to the next, are old habits in alcohol social science studies. As a conceptual approach to alcohol problems, disaggregation has begun to move out from social science into

policy thought. In social science studies, the disaggregative trend is increasing: there are now tendencies to focus on very specific kinds of drinking behaviors or consequences; to redefine social problems of drinking in interactional terms rather than as properties of the drinking individual; and indeed on occasion to use as a dependent variable the ratio of behavior to the social reactions to it. A significant empirical question for disaggregative analyses, of course, is the extent of overlap between the various disaggregated elements of behavior or consequences.

(b) *convergent methodologies*: In current alcohol studies, as we may hope in social science in general, there seems to be a welcome tendency to subordinate methodology to content, rather than to organize studies and research traditions around methodological positions. In line with this trend, many current and projected studies are using a variety of methodologies—survey data, observational data, records studies, etc.—as appropriate in the analysis. Often the different methodologies provide convergent validation. Some studies in fact depend on the combined use of data collected by different methods.

(c) *time and history*: In a number of ways, time has become of increasing importance in alcohol social science. As already mentioned, increasing attention is being paid to the historical dimension of alcohol studies. Shorter-term temporal changes and time-series analyses of trends are also assuming added importance, reflecting a reversal of the tendency in the 1960's to think of alcohol problems in the aggregate as relatively changeless. At a more microcosmic level, too, time is increasingly being seen as of the essence, for instance, in longitudinal analyses of the ordering and bunching of life events and conditions, and in the study of the processes of alcohol's role in life-threatening events. Of course, the statistical complexities and problems involved in adding a temporal dimension to analysis should not be underestimated.

(d) *change and natural experiments*: In concert with the increased emphasis on time has been a new emphasis on the study of substantial changes as the most telling and suggestive evidence of patterns and directions of causation. This has included a growing number of case studies of particular "natural experiments," where legislation was changed, a liquor strike occurred, or there was some kind of discontinuity in conditions. Such studies have so far mostly been carried out in countries like Canada and the Scandinavian nations, where the existence of ongoing alcohol social science research institutes has allowed research energies to be diverted on a crash basis to take advantage of opportunities for study. The long lead-time and specific-project orientation of U.S. grant and contract research has effectively prevented such studies in the U.S. There is a need for developing new research mechanisms to allow for this important kind of research.

(e) *policy relevance*: As noted, social science research has become more relevant to policy consideration in recent years. This trend is viewed with mixed feelings by many social sci-

tists: the extra attention and funding are gratifying, but a greater policy relevance may imply ideological constraints and certainly does not necessarily imply agreement with social science definitions of the research. Discussions by social scientists suggest also that the effects of social science knowledge on policy are often marginal at best (Bruun, 1973; Gusfield, 1975). Research which appears entirely pragmatic and policy-oriented may in fact be commissioned and used by the political process for quite extraneous reasons: as a delaying tactic, as an ornament, or as a justification for decisions already made.

ORGANIZATION

Social scientists in alcohol studies have had very little group consciousness. To my knowledge, the only existing U.S. organization which is specifically oriented to social science research in alcohol and drugs is the Drinking and Drugs Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, a group primarily of sociologists. As the Committee on Drinking Behavior in the 1960's, this group had an active committee structure and saw itself as having some responsibility for the overall shape of sociological alcohol research. But in the expanded and disorganized field of the 1970's, the Division's primary activities have been the organization of sessions at annual sociological meetings.

An indication of the lack of organization in the field arose when the State of California sought advice from California social scientists on the organization of a social science alcohol research center. Although they were generally aware of each others' work, the social scientists brought together for this purpose from within a single state were in most cases meeting each other for the first time.

To some extent, social science alcohol studies are better organized on an international level, through a variety of mechanisms. Within Scandinavia there has long been a cooperative committee on alcohol social science research. The core group of the Epidemiology Section of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions is in fact alcohol social scientists. Alcohol social scientists from a number of English-speaking and Scandinavian countries have also been organized in several ad-hoc international research projects and activities, sometimes under W.H.O. auspices. But only a small number of U.S. social scientists have participated in any of these international activities.

The lack of organization and group consciousness among alcohol social scientists has meant that this paper had to be written in a relative vacuum: there is very little written or other background material specifically relevant to social science positions on alcohol studies that could be drawn on to gauge consensus or the relative strength of positions among social scientists. It is perhaps time to raise the question of moving towards a greater coherence in the literature and a more organized constituency of its creators.

REFERENCES

Alcoholism Report

1975 "NIAAA Research Grants Active as of November 1, 1974," 3:6 (January 10), pp.6-8.

Bacon, Selden D.

1943 "Sociology and the Problems of Alcohol: Foundations for a Sociologic Study of Drinking Behavior." *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 4:3 (December) pp. 402-445.

1952 "Alcoholism, 1941-1951: A Survey of Activities in Research, Education and Therapy; IV. Social Science Research." *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 13:3 (September) pp. 452-460.

1976 "Concepts," pp. 57-134 in: William J. Filstead, Jean J. Rossi and Mark Keller, eds., *Alcohol and Alcohol Problems: New Thinking and New Directions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co.

Bruun, Kjetil

1961 "Alcohol Studies in Scandinavia." *Sociological Inquiry* 31:1 (Winter) pp. 78-92

1973 "Social Research, Social Policy and Action," pp. 115-119 in: *The Epidemiology of Drug Dependence: Report on a Conference: London, 25-29 September 1972*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, EURO 5436 IV.

Cahalan, Don and Robin Room

1974 *Problem Drinking Among American Men*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, Monograph No. 7.

Clark, Walter

1966 "Operational Definitions of Drinking Problems and Associated Prevalence Rates." *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 27:4 (December) pp. 648-668.

Gusfield, Joseph

1975 "The (F)Utility of Knowledge?: The Relation of Social Science to Public Policy toward Drugs." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 417 (January) pp. 1-15.

Heath, Dwight B.

1976 "Anthropological Perspectives on Alcohol: An Historical Review," pp. 41-101 in: Michael W. Everett, Jack O. Waddell, and Dwight B. Heath, eds., *Cross-Cultural Approaches to the Study of Alcohol*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton Publishers.

Jellinek, E.M.

1943 "An Outline of Basic Policies for a Research Program on Problems of Alcohol." *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 3:4 (March) pp. 103-124.

1960 *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism*. Highland Park, N.J.: Hillhouse Press.

Levine, Harry Gene

1976 "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in American History," presented at the annual meetings of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, New York City, August 28.

Milt, Harry

1969 *Basic Handbook on Alcoholism*. Maplewood, N.J.: Scientific Aids Publications.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

1972 *Alcohol and Alcoholism: Problems, Programs and Progress*. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., DHEW Publication No. (HSM) 72-9127, revised 1972.

NIMH Research Task Force No. 6

n.d. *Research on Alcoholism* (c. 1973). Xeroxed typescript. National Clearinghouse for Alcohol Information document NCA1008277.

Riley, John W.

1949 "The Social Implications of Problem Drinking." *Social Forces* 27, pp. 301-305.

Room, Robin

1976 "Ambivalence as a Sociological Explanation: The Case of Cultural Explanations of Alcohol Problems." *American Sociological Review* 41:6 (December) pp. 1047-1065.

Straus, Robert

1976 "Problem Drinking in the Perspective of Social Change, 1940-1973," pp. 29-56 in: William J. Filstead, Jean J. Rossi and Mark Keller, eds., *Alcohol and Alcohol Problems: New Thinking and New Directions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co.

Trice, Harrison M., and David J. Pittman

1958 "Social Organization and Alcoholism: A Review of Significant Research since 1940." *Social Problems* 5:4 (Spring) pp. 294-307.