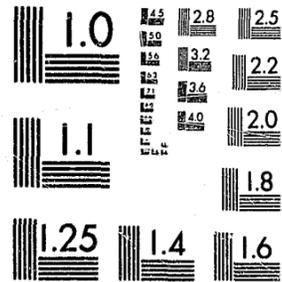


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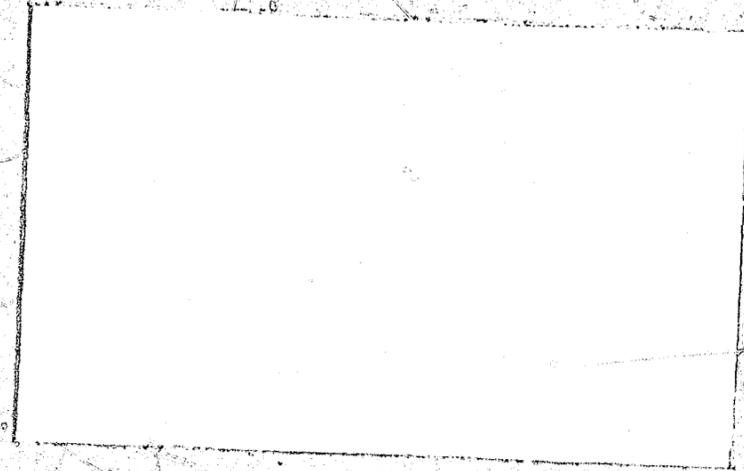
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Situational Factors in the Relationship
Between Alcohol and Crime*

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I. Introduction

Despite the considerable literature on the relationship between the consumption of alcohol and the occurrence of criminal behavior reviewed throughout this volume, there are essentially no studies which provide empirical evidence about the situational settings most conducive to the dual presence of drinking and crime. This may be seen as a challenge to research within the paradigm of social epidemiology: the agency of alcohol and the human actor as host who commits criminal acts are specified, but the environment wherein agent and host become linked has neither been specified nor studied. Put somewhat differently, the overwhelming number of events in which both alcohol and criminal behavior are present would lead to the compelling surmise that alcohol is the causal factor through its "disinhibiting" effects on the actor. But equally if not more significant is the datum that criminal behavior does not occur in the overwhelming number of events in which alcohol is present.

This chapter is an overview of a number of hypotheses stemming from several bodies of published literature, prepared in order to determine the "state of the art" linking situational factors to drinking and criminal behavior. Since there is an absence of literature bearing directly on the topic, it might be concluded there is no basis for a review; on the other hand, given a broader goal of extending research on

alcohol and crime, there is justification for establishing frames of reference within which such essential research could be conducted.

This overview begins with a definition of the parameters of "situational factors linking alcohol and crime." I then proceed to examine two interrelated frameworks within which these situational linkages can be conceptualized: anomie and cultural norms. The methodological and contextual perspective labeled situational ecology is then outlined together with potentially relevant structural features of settings in which alcohol use and criminal behavior are concomitant events, followed by a concluding statement.

II. Delimiting the Parameters of the Research Problem

An immediate difficulty in any analysis of the relationship between alcohol use and criminal behavior lies in the definitional ambiguity attending both concepts. Thus I suggest conceptual parameters for "alcohol use" and "criminal behavior" which may facilitate the generation of research hypotheses as well as guiding empirical measurement.

It is an empirical fact that the number of drinking events known to be concomitant with criminal behavior is miniscule relative to the total number of drinking events. Although not quantified empirically, a considerable number and range of acts of deviant behavior accompany drinking events,

ranging from improper sexual advances to homicide. Deviance in this instance is defined as those behaviors likely to elicit social sanctions by members of the group in a non-drinking situation but less likely to elicit such reactions in a drinking situation. This highlights the implicit definition of most drinking situations as partial "time-outs" from normative proscriptions.

A psychological element relevant to this formulation is that the effects of ethanol consumption are in most instances some form of disinhibition, with the accompanying proposition that disinhibition increases with increases in ethanol levels in the body. It then follows that the likelihood of deviance increases with increasing ethanol consumption. An alternative conceptualization of disinhibition is aggression, which is a social-psychological rather than a psychological construct. The widely accepted and partially established notion that alcohol consumption produces disinhibition again points to a normative quality of drinking occasions wherein "different" behavior is expected and to some degree tolerated. I suggest that aggressive acts can be placed on a lengthy continuum, and that this continuum includes most of the "different" behavior occurring concomitantly with alcohol consumption. At one end of the continuum we find persons who talk more frequently and more loudly after

consuming alcohol. Such behavior may be seen as invasions, however mild, of others' social space. Further, alcohol consumption in bars or at cocktail parties accompanies conversations with persons whom one would not likely converse without the presence of alcohol; again, this may be seen as a very mild form of aggression.

Moving along the continuum to interaction between persons of the opposite sex, drinking is frequently accompanied by what might be viewed as verbal negotiations which may lead to physical contact and perhaps ultimately to sexual intercourse. Here the aggression concept is more clearly illustrated, although the analysis of such interaction vis-a-vis alcohol consumption is usually clouded by use of the narrow concept of disinhibition.

Finally, the more potent examples of aggression concomitant with alcohol consumption are well known and are discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume. These of course include forcible rape, assault, and homicide.

It is suggested therefore that an understanding of the role of situational factors in linking alcohol and crime would be facilitated by extending the frame of reference to include those events which are usually not viewed as problematic, but which may be morphologically similar to those problematic events which include both alcohol consumption and felonious crimes.

"Crime" constitutes a set of definitional constructs that may be imposed upon deviant acts at some point following their occurrence. This imposition may be attempted by laymen who observe the deviance or by "imputational specialists" (Lofland, 1969) such as police who either directly or indirectly obtain information about the event, with the ultimate decision about the appropriate labeling of the event resting with judicial authority. "Crime" is a relative definition that is not bound to social time or space. Returning to the continuum of aggressive behaviors, it is significant to specify the conditions under which acts of aggression concomitant with alcohol consumption become socially translated into "crimes." In other words, when does the invasion of social space become "assault," the verbal aggression become "slander," and the sexual advances become attempted or forcible "rape"?

Thus it is proposed that ethanol consumption is disinhibiting and usually occurs in normative circumstances in which controls are relaxed in anticipation of the disinhibition; that a range of forms of aggression is likely to accompany drinking events and increase in frequency with the blood alcohol concentration obtained; and that through a series of systematic social reactions, some proportion of these deviant acts subsequently come to be defined as criminal behaviors.

It is further important to look at drinking within conceptual limits. My delimitation focuses on alcohol consumption per se, without attempting to specify excessive drinking, deviant drinking, alcohol abuse, drunkenness, or alcoholism. The reasoning here is that all of the latter definitions are inclusive of deviant acts, i.e. drunkenness usually connotes aggression or other socially offensive behavior. The delimitation to consumption alone avoids psychological conditions and personality traits as intervening variables between drinking and deviance; this is to maintain the focus within a sociological perspective. The delimitation attempts to avoid causal imputation and alternatively views drinking as a risk factor in the commission of criminal acts. The delimitation leaves the parameters of the definition of criminal behavior open, although published literature would lead us to assume that this behavior is principally aggression against persons and property.

It might be possible but seemingly less feasible to specify application of this frame of reference to the occurrence of deviant and criminal acts among problem drinkers and alcoholics. Bacon (1963) for example, suggests that criminal acts frequently accompany the progression of alcoholism and the "desocialization" of the alcoholic. The evident difficulties here are the immediate contaminations of

definition, with deviant and sometimes criminal acts included in the definitions of alcoholics and problem drinkers. In the latter instance particularly (Cahalan, 1970; Cahalan and Room, 1974), trouble with the police can be a defining characteristic of a problem drinker. Furthermore, the definition of alcoholism is practically impossible for research within the framework of social epidemiology, other than limiting the definition to those cases formally defined as alcoholics by physicians, with this definition again likely contaminated by a record of notably aggressive and/or criminal behavior.

Thus the delimitation offered is both broad and narrow, broad in the sense of encompassing a continuum of aggressive behavior and all drinking events but narrow through avoiding intervening variables of a psychological nature and avoiding differentiation of drinkers. The delimitation anticipates the direction of the subsequent discussion, which first focuses on the structure of norms as it may affect the linkage between alcohol consumption and criminal behavior, and then turns to actual normative content. This sets the stage for a discussion of situational ecology.

III. The Structure and Strength of Norms: Degrees of Anomie

The concept of anomie has long been central to sociological analysis of deviant behavior. It can refer to the absence of normative structure, the disintegration of pre-existing normative structure, or the absence of meta-norms

to guide selection between conflicting normative prescriptions. It is the latter usage which is most appropriate to the present concern. The penetration of the term anomie into the popular culture has diluted this subtle sociological distinction: while knowledge of a variety of normative orientations abounds in most situations, anomie marks the absence of meta-norms to determine the resolution of contradictory prescriptions. Regardless of how the notion of anomie is operationalized, its basic assumption is essentially negative, i.e. deviant behavior results from an absence of norms and social controls. For present purposes, anomie is specified as the absence of structures to elicit sanctions toward aggressive acts and excessive drinking.

An anomic explanation is implicit in much of the published literature on alcohol and crime. The use of this approach in framing issues relative to situational factors in the alcohol and crime relationship might include a dual focus on the effects of weak(ened) social controls on patterns of drinking behavior and the effects of such controls on criminal behavior. Further, one could examine the effects of such weak(ened) structures on the escalation of deviant acts and the decision-making transactions which ultimately produce labeled criminal behaviors.

There is empirical and theoretical literature on the relationships between anomie and drinking (Snyder, 1964) and

between anomie and crime (e.g. Gibbons, 1976), but empirical studies which approach a concern about the relationship between alcohol consumption and crime are rare, with the exception of the comprehensive study reported by Jessor et al. (1968), and in this instance the research did not extend to felonious acts. It is predicted that research would reveal anomie to facilitate the occurrence of aggression concomitant with alcohol consumption. To this end, the measurement of anomie would be most significant at the group rather than the societal level. For example, normative conflict and the relative absence of meta-norms would be expected under conditions of rapid social change, migration, and interactions characterized by the presence of individuals or groups from variant backgrounds of socialization. The neighborhood could be the unit of analysis within which the degree of anomie could be specified. The presumed mechanisms of consequence are that both aggressive behavior and alcohol consumption would occur relatively unchecked in anomic settings.

IV. The Content of Cultural and Subcultural Norms

In the determination of the relationship between alcohol and crime, the content of normative structures vis-a-vis aggressive behavior and alcohol consumption is of considerable importance. Normative content interacts with the degree of anomie, with the effects of normative content either muted

or accentuated by the degree of normative structure in particular situations. MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) have argued that cultural norms define the typical behaviors that accompany drinking situations; they bring substantial anthropological evidence together which demonstrates the cross-cultural diversity in behavioral reactions to ethanol consumption, and are especially concerned with rejecting the stereotype that aggressive and anti-social behaviors are inevitable consequences of heavy drinking in human groups. This general proposition points toward the possibility of subcultural variations in drinking norms within American society. Such variations in behavioral expectations may account for variations in the association between alcohol and crime across different subcultural and ethnic groups. In other words, aggressive behavior which follows alcohol consumption and which comes to be defined as criminal may be a function of normative traditions which may act as self-fulfilling prophecies. Such a surmise is based on the assumption of substantial subcultural diversity across American society, encompassing social class and regional differences as well as those based on ethnicity.

Levine (1977) has documented the changes in American attitudes toward the relationship between drinking and crime and violence, implying that normative variations in behavior may have been a consequence of different belief systems which

were altered over time. Levy and Kunitz (1974) consider differences in drinking norms and patterns within various American Indian tribes, and an extensive review of empirical evidence confirming the presence of various symptomatic drinking-related behaviors among American Indians has been reported by Leland (1976). In a classic study, Snyder (1958) considers the origins and social supports for Jewish drinking practices wherein routine and ritualized alcohol consumption has minimal social consequences, especially in terms of expected aggressive behavior. Fallding (1974) attempts to derive the drinking norms governing behavior in a middle class New Jersey community. Stivers (1976) has traced the transformation of drinking customs in rural Ireland where maximal consumption with minimal aggressive consequences was normative to the case of Irish-Americans and their at least partial acceptance of a "drunkard" subcultural stereotype, with consequent changes in expected behavior.

It is likely that normative structures act to reduce risks and insulate group members against aggressive behavior associated with drinking occasions, which in turn may be translated into definitions of such behavior as criminal. There is no doubt that expectations and tolerance of aggressive behavior likewise vary by age, social class, and ethnicity. Such variations in the content of norms regarding both alcohol consumption and aggressive behaviors point

toward the research possibilities of examining co-variation. This could provide for developing a matrix of hypothesized interrelations among these two categories of variation in normative content, further including consideration of the possible effects of degrees of normative structure or anomie, as discussed in the previous section.

V. Situational Ecology

The foregoing conceptual frameworks could provide the basis for hypothesis construction within a methodological and contextual approach that I summarily label as situational ecology. Such exploration could build upon research on deviant behavior that has proceeded within the somewhat ambiguous approach known as ethnomethodology, social psychological experimentation focused on the genesis and escalation of deviance, and studies which specifically examine the physical ecology of settings in order to predict the behavior likely to occur in those settings.

One of the oldest and influential hypotheses regarding the linkage between alcohol and crime is within the framework of situational ecology, namely that the 19th century saloon in America was a setting which both permitted and promoted excessive alcohol consumption and attendant aggressive acts. Clark (1976), among other historical scholars, argues that the saloon per se was the primary object of concern in the

Temperance movement rather than alcohol. While Prohibition succeeded in eliminating most "saloons," there has been minimal subsequent attention to the relationship between drinking environments and crime, aside from descriptions of behavior of isolated examples of contemporary "saloons" included in the chapter by Roizen.

Lofland (1969) provides a conceptual framework within which hypotheses about situational factors linking drinking and crime might be fruitfully organized and reviewed. Lofland proposes that deviant acts are of two general types: defensive deviance and adventurous deviance. Most of his attention is devoted to the former category, and he postulates a series of events labeled threat, encapsulation and closure which lead to the defensive deviant act. Of significance to the situational ecology framework is his postulation of intervening factors involving the actor and his socialization, others present in the situation, and available "hardware" as differentially facilitating the commission of a defensive deviant act. He proceeds further to consider the possible role of these facilitating factors in the escalation of deviant behavior, which in the terms of the present framework include focus on the social transformation of aggressive acts into criminal acts. These factors may affect the likelihood of excessive drinking, of aggression, and of the labeling of aggressive behavior as crime.

This approach provides focus for considering several substantive aspects of drinking environments relative to the potential for aggressive behavior which is subsequently translated into criminal behavior, of which the following are examples:

1. Other actors in the drinking environment
 - a. Drinking alone
 - b. Drinking with relatives
 - c. Drinking with acquaintances
 - d. Drinking with unknown others
2. Other drinkers in drinking environment
 - a. Drinking in presence of other drinkers
 - b. Drinking in presence of non-drinkers
3. Role relationships vis-a-vis expected aggressive behavior
 - a. Dominant relationships in which aggression is expected from drinker
 - b. Submissive relationships in which aggression is not expected from drinker
 - c. Equal power relationships in which aggression may be directed or received
4. Mobility
 - a. Drinker remaining in drinking environment
 - b. Drinker moving from drinking environment to new environment
5. Definition of drinking situation
 - a. Drinking for escape/drug effects
 - b. Recreational/"time-out" drinking events
 - c. Ceremonial drinking events

6. Drinking environment
 - a. Drinking in home
 - b. Drinking in private non-home setting
 - c. Drinking in tavern/bar
 - d. Drinking in open space
7. Facilitating hardware
 - a. Absence of aggression-related hardware
 - b. Drinker or other's possession of aggression-related hardware
 - c. Co-presence of aggression-related hardware
8. Labeling agents
 - a. Absence of labeling/social control agents
 - b. Presence of labeling/social control agents

The procedure in utilizing such a framework would be to develop situation-based hypotheses within multivariate matrices. These in turn could be embedded in matrices from the guiding theoretical constructs of the structure and content of norms prevailing in these situational contexts.

VI. Conclusion

This overview offers the observation that there is a minimum of specific literature describing the empirical relationships between situational contexts of drinking and occurrence of criminal behavior. The fundamental importance of this issue in considering the alcohol and crime relationship does however provide justification for developing hypotheses that might be subject to eventual empirical test. I have delimited the problem as centered upon the occurrence

of aggressive acts in drinking situations and the escalation of such acts to criminal behavior through processes of social definition. The perspectives of the structure and content of norms are offered as sources of concepts to guide consideration of possible empirical relationships. Situational ecology is offered as a contextual perspective within which several sets of hypotheses could be organized as a step toward developing a research agenda for the study of situational effects.

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