




December 1990

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Recommended Citation

Harms, John B. and Wolk, James L. (1990) "Differential Perception And Adolescent Drinking In The United States: Preliminary Considerations," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol17/iss4/3>

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Differential Perception And Adolescent Drinking In The United States: Preliminary Considerations

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This paper addresses adolescent drinking from a perspective very similar to Sutherland's differential association theory. Drinking occurs when positive perceptions of drinking outweigh or outnumber negative ones. Our research focuses on images of drinking communicated by rationalized sources organized specifically to shape perceptions of drinking. We call these organizations "agencies" and assess their impact on perceptions of drinking. It is our contention that the political economic context of the United States in which these agencies function is such that positive images of drinking outnumber and outweigh negative ones, and that this is an important factor contributing to adolescent drinking.

Adolescent drinking, and the problems associated with it, have been a source of public concern for many years. Although alcohol consumption in the U.S. is declining, adolescent drinking patterns have remained remarkably stable (Ray and Ksir, 1987, p. 10) despite numerous prevention efforts, and this is causing justifiable concern. The question is, why are adolescents drinking the same when everyone else is drinking less?

Some fifty years ago, Edwin H. Sutherland developed the differential association theory and revolutionized thinking about criminal and deviant behavior. The novel aspect of his theory was that criminal and deviant behavior was learned in a process of association just like any normal behavior. Thus Sutherland shifted the focus of analysis away from the individual to the social structure of association or social context. This was unique in that most previous explanations viewed deviant behavior as pathological and located the causes within the person. Sutherland's approach, in contrast, focused on the social context as the crucial variable, not the constitution of the

individual. It was a truly sociological approach that stimulated criminologists to broaden their analysis and examine the nature of society.

We suggest that a similar change in focus is appropriate for understanding adolescent drinking in the United States. Informed by Sutherland's theory, the basic hypothesis of this paper is: drinking occurs when positive perceptions of drinking outweigh or outnumber negative ones. Certainly adolescent drinking is more complicated than this hypothesis suggests, and we are aware that factors other than those of the agencies discussed here influence decisions to drink. Let us make clear from the start that we are not suggesting that communications generated by either agencies of promotion or agencies of prevention directly and immediately cause or determine behavior. Decisions about drinking are much more complex than this and we hope to illuminate some of this complexity.

This paper examines the social context of adolescent drinking which we believe has not been adequately understood. It is a preliminary consideration which aims to bring the social context more sharply into focus. We have utilized Sutherland's theory because it facilitates framing adolescent drinking within the larger societal context and serves as a point of departure for examining the political economy of drinking. We suggest that an understanding of this structural context will provide a foundation to (a) explain why current prevention efforts have apparently had little impact on adolescent drinking, and (b) assess current public policy efforts, especially the goals and models that frame prevention efforts, and the financial resources for these efforts.

Adolescents, like other people, have numerous associations which shape their perceptions and definition of reality. Peer groups, family, and schools, for example, are all crucial associations that influence a given adolescent's definition of reality and drinking. Increasingly, however, perceptions of drinking are generated from more rationalized sources that are organized specifically to shape perceptions of drinking. We call these organizations "agencies," and in this essay assess their impact on perceptions of drinking. Specifically, we analyze how "agencies of promotion" and "agencies of prevention" communicate

their respective messages about drinking. The theoretical focus inspired by Sutherland calls attention to the fact that definitions of drinking represent a contested terrain where agencies of promotion and prevention compete for acceptance of their definitions of drinking.

For purposes here we consider alcohol advertising (liquor, wine, and beer) as an agency of promotion, and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) as an agency of prevention. Although these agencies may not associate directly or face-to-face with their clients (e.g., advertisers employ the mass media to communicate their messages, NIAAA contracts with states for prevention services), they are legitimately considered associations because they influence perceptions of reality. We turn now to a consideration of what and how these agencies communicate about drinking.

Alcoholic Beverage Advertising as an Agency of Promotion

In this section we consider alcoholic beverage advertising as an agency promoting consumption of alcoholic beverages and examine the communication strategies and economic resources used to promote drinking. In speaking of alcoholic beverages advertising as an agency of promotion what we are referring to is the intersecting interests of the mass media, alcoholic beverage advertisers/producers, and advertising agencies that converge to function as a formal agency. Although there are many factors that influence an individual's decision to drink or not to drink, we contend that messages communicated by the mass media play a significant role in promoting consumption of alcoholic beverages — especially among adolescents. Our task in this section is to explain how alcoholic beverage advertising communicates messages that promote drinking and then examine the economic resources that support these messages.

From the economic standpoint of alcoholic beverage producers they compete with one another for market shares for their respective products or brands. Their success or failure is often measured by this and they spend considerable amounts of time and money hiring advertising agencies to communicate messages that create "product identities" that differentiate one

brand from another and motivate consumers not to just ask for a "light," but a "Bud Light." Thus there is very serious competition in the alcoholic beverage industry; competition between producers of wine, beer and liquor, and competition between specific brands of beer, wine and liquor. Indeed, advertising is one of the major weapons of market competition between producers of alcoholic beverages.

Although these various producers of alcoholic beverages compete with each other, it is essential to recognize that they all have one thing in common — an interest in communicating favorable images of alcohol consumption. Thus to assess adequately the cultural impact of alcoholic beverage advertising we must examine the aggregate effect of all alcohol advertising. We must see beyond the immediately apparent diversity of images and winnow out the common features. Only then can we adequately assess their impact. In short, although advertisers justifiably focus on market share and brand identity, those concerned with cultural effects and public policy must take a broader view and look at alcoholic beverage advertising messages as a totality.

A substantial literature exists that explains in detail the strategies and techniques of modern advertising (e.g., see Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1986; Schudson, 1984; Dyer, 1982). Content analysis (e.g., Andren, Ericsson, Ohlsson, and Tannsjo, 1978), semiotics (e.g., Williamson, 1978; Barthes, 1972), and immanent critique (e.g., Harms, 1987) have all been employed successfully to reveal the intricacies of advertising communications. Space considerations do not permit a prolonged excursion into this vast literature. Instead we summarized from this literature and present a brief sketch of the basic strategies and techniques of alcohol beverage advertising.

The common denominator of alcohol beverage advertising is *image*; successful advertisements must communicate a favorable image of the product. To communicate these images advertisers use "persuasive" communication techniques. Since alcohol beverage advertising is dominated by the persuasive form of mass communication, an explanation of this form will reveal the strategies and techniques of agencies of promotion.

A central feature of persuasive (alcohol) advertising is that it addresses irrational, emotional cognitive faculties and communicates images that spontaneously evoke feelings from consumers that are then linked to and associated with the product (Harms, 1985, pp. 64–103). Persuasive forms of communication address the nonvolitional capability of the human mind to make associations between things in the environment. In an important sense then, this type of “emotionally conditioning advertising” is very similar to behaviorist conditioning (Reed and Coalson, 1977).

Perhaps the most crucial task in creating a persuasive advertisement is the selection of a symbol which can evoke feelings from the targeted audience. Such symbols can be people, places, songs, almost anything providing they resonate with the targeted groups’ experiences and evoke the desired feelings that will become associated with the product. The great majority of advertisements for beer, wine, and liquor attempt to communicate images that link persons, products and feelings of well-being.

In this type of advertisement very little objective product information is communicated to consumers. Instead, carefully constructed happy images are communicated that serve as stimuli to evoke favorable, subjective responses from audiences. There is no logical or rational foundation for the associations generated by this type of communication. Such communications and associations cannot be assessed against claims of truth and falsity. Truth and accuracy — criteria of federal regulations — are not relevant to persuasive advertisements that work via psychological associations made by the consumers. Advertisers using persuasive communication techniques are not attempting to make objective statements about their products, but rather to promote subjective associations by the targeted audience.

Another important key to persuasive alcoholic beverage advertising is that the advertisements are not designed to be taken seriously or examined logically/critically. Advertisements are designed to address consumers’ emotional, subconscious ability to make psychological associations between persons, products and images of well-being. They are designed to work without

the conscious participation or awareness of audiences. This explains why such advertisements are repeated so often. Because consumers are not consciously paying attention repetition is necessary for the associations to "sink in."

To fully comprehend the impact of alcoholic beverage advertising we must view it in the aggregate and as a form of social experience that is designed to affect consumers' tacit cultural knowledge. In short, exposure to persuasive alcoholic beverage communications must be viewed as a social experience on which the cultural meaning of alcohol consumption is based. This cultural meaning takes us right back to images that are the core of alcoholic beverage advertising; images that link alcoholic beverages with favorable attributes such as masculinity, purity, health, excitement, bonhomie, etc.

It is clear that persuasive alcohol beverage advertising is designed to affect consumers' subconscious, tacit cultural "knowledge" about the meaning of drinking. Furthermore, although advertisers are at pains to differentiate their products, they all communicate favorable images and meanings of alcohol consumption. They are, after all attempting to promote their products. The result of these efforts, however, is a one-sided portrayal of drinking. Absent from the images communicated are negative aspects of drinking and the social environment in which it takes place.

Although the images and scenes communicated by alcoholic beverage advertising make no explicit claims to truth or accuracy, the associations between persons, products and images of well-being are enhanced by the ever increasing sophistication of image creating technology and techniques which make the images appear real, i.e., as accurate representations of social experiences.

We suggest that alcoholic beverage advertising communicates images that function as "social experiences" on which the cultural assumptions about the meaning of drinking are based, and that motives for drinking involve these favorable feelings and assumptions. The overall impact of alcoholic beverage advertising in the aggregate is to create or contribute to a favorable disposition toward drinking alcohol. In this way alcoholic beverage advertising fits very neatly within Sutherland's theory.

Of course alcohol beverage advertising is only one "social experience" on which knowledge and assumptions about drinking are based. Many other factors are involved; personal experience, peers, educational and religious learning, family patterns of use, etc. Without denying these other sources of knowledge, we need to consider the magnitude of these mass communicated images and social experiences. In short, we need to assess what resources alcoholic beverage advertisers have to promote favorable images of drinking.

Resources for Alcoholic Beverage Advertising

One way to assess the resources for promoting alcohol consumption is to examine the dollars spent by beer, wine, and liquor advertisers. The Broadcast Advertisers Report and Leading National Advertisers (BAR/LNA) Multi-Media Service monitors the spending of national advertisers in seven major media (magazines, newspaper supplements, outdoor billboards, network TV, spot TV, network radio, and cable TV networks) and provides a very conservative estimate of dollars spent advertising alcoholic beverages. This is a conservative estimate because not all media are monitored, and because production costs are not included. Production costs involve payments for filming crews, actors, props, etc., and is no small amount. According to *Advertising Age*, in 1988 the average production cost for a national TV spot was \$178,000. At any rate, BAR/LNA figures represent only that amount spent buying space/time for advertisements and is a very conservative estimate of total advertising spending.

BAR/LNA Multi-Media Service Class/Brand Year-to-Date Publication for Jan.-Dec. 1987 reports that beer advertisers spent \$684,500,100, while wine advertisers spent \$211,588,500, and liquor advertisers \$224,053,600. Altogether, these advertisers spent \$1,120,142,200 to promote their products.

Thus, in 1987, agencies of promotion spent over one billion dollars to communicate favorable images of alcohol consumption. In terms of spending for particular brands, we can examine media spending for major brands of beer, wine and liquor, Budweiser spent \$99,994,400, Bartles & James Premium Wine Coolers \$33,508,100, and Dewars Blended Scotch Whisky \$8,360,000.

As the above figures reveal, beer advertising is the major type of alcohol beverage advertising. It is also noteworthy that beer advertisers rely predominately on the medium of television — the most “persuasive” medium of mass communication — to communicate their favorable images of alcohol consumption. Budweiser, for example, spent 86% of its total media budget on Network, Spot, and Cable TV. Clearly, alcoholic beverage advertisers have considerable resources for communicating favorable images of drinking, and a significant number of these images are communicated via television, a medium attended to by adolescents.

Agencies Of Prevention

In this section we consider the goals and types of prevention programs funded under the auspices of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) which was created in 1971 to coordinate and provide funding for treatment and prevention programs. Under the NIAAA’s first director, Morris Chafetz, M.D., the philosophy was that many of the problems with alcoholic beverages in the U.S. resulted from a lack of “normative guidance on acceptable drinking patterns and customs” (O’Gorman, 1988, p. 299). Chafetz’s primary concern was America’s young people. He believed that “teenagers [should] be introduced to alcohol under adult guidance, by their parents and teachers, to remove the ‘forbidden fruit’ attraction of alcohol” (O’Gorman, 1988, p. 299). However, the support for the NIAAA’s initial “responsible drinking” theme eventually eroded because of the experiences of people whose lives had been seriously harmed through alcohol consumption. As a result, today there is consensus at the federal level that the best way to combat negative alcohol use is to encourage abstinence. Consequently, the primary objective of agencies of prevention is the elimination of alcohol use by people under the age of twenty one, i.e., they promote an abstinence model.

There are two methods used to prevent adolescent drinking. The first method utilizes mass media campaigns to educate youths on the social and health risks involved in drinking and alternative means for coping with those risks. These mass media campaigns employ many of the techniques used by agencies of

promotion and have had positive results related to increasing awareness, knowledge and attitudes when the message have been specifically targeted to specific problems such as drinking and driving while pregnant. Sponsored by such organizations as the National Safety Council, NIAAA and other concerned groups, these type of messages appear sporadically on television, radio, and in magazines. More often than not, these campaigns use negative or scare tactics to combat the positive images communicated by agencies of promotion. Current research indicates that these mass communication campaigns are limited in their ability to change behavior (McGuire, 1985).

The "hands-on" approach is the second and most frequently used method by agencies to prevent alcohol consumption by adolescents. Most often, the "hands-on" method occurs within community based prevention programs that are funded by federal agencies such as the NIAAA, but planned and carried out within the context of the school. There are three types of school prevention programs that are intended to eliminate or reduce alcohol consumption: cognitive, decision making, and values clarification. Cognitive programs communicate information to adolescents about the quantity of alcohol in various types of beverages, the effects of alcohol on physical and emotional functioning, the amount of time necessary for the body to metabolize alcohol, and other "facts" about alcohol. Decision making programs communicate ways or methods for making responsible life choices such as knowing how to say no to alcohol, how to respond to peer pressure, how to deal with stress in the family and cope with changes in adolescence itself. Values clarification programs provide adolescents with the means for self-examination of value systems, role expectations, and life priorities.

These locally based programs are prevention initiatives that use a defined community or school as the setting for alcohol prevention communications. In general, these community based programs are very labor intensive and require the ongoing participation of many people to obtain the desired impact. Many times they necessitate the successful coordination and endorsement of numerous diverse groups in the community who often have other conflicting priorities. These groups consistently include politicians from city councils, county commissions, and

school boards, as well as representatives from the business community. Teachers, administrators, students and their parents are also involved. Finally, citizen groups such as Parents for a Drug Free Youth, Mother Against Drunk Driving, and Removing Intoxicated Drivers are regular participants in these locally based programs. Given the diversity of these participants it is not surprising that locally based programs consistently have problems achieving consensus on program content, finding acceptable meeting times, and maintaining motivation. Despite the high cost in energy and expenditure relative to the number of adolescents involved, many communities around the country have implemented locally based, "hands-on" prevention programs.

Assessment of prevention programs consistently reveals that success is directly related to the base of participation. The broader the base of participation from members of the community the more impact these programs have on adolescents. As already noted, this requires intensive efforts on the part of trained personnel to bring these disparate groups together on a consistent basis. In the last ten years significant strides have been made by community groups to implement broad-based local programs of prevention.

An example of this "hands-on" approach is the Missouri Institute for Prevention Services (MIPS), which is typical of the school and community based prevention models previously described. It is administered and implemented throughout the state by dedicated and hard working professionals, community volunteers, and students. Nevertheless, as is true of many prevention efforts, the resources to mount the programming to personally reach large number of adolescents in an ongoing consistent fashion have been insufficient. In 1987, MIPS trained 462 students, compared with 45 in 1980, to return to their communities and implement prevention projects. While this number is impressive, it still represents only a tiny sample of the population-at-risk.

Resources for Alcohol Prevention Efforts

Virtually all states and localities around the country have begun prevention and education programs that parallel the types of prevention efforts already described. As noted, these

programs require a labor intensive orientation and well integrated plans to accomplish the stated goals. Unfortunately, the financial resources supporting these programs is suspect. For example, in 1985, the federal government committed \$1.2 billion for alcohol and drug abuse services. However, only \$158 million (12%) was earmarked for prevention and education projects. Most of the funds were allocated to treatment and rehabilitation programs. Many states have followed this pattern and allocated the majority of their resources for treatment and little or none to education and prevention.

Another factor complicating the allocation of resources for agencies of prevention is the tendency to combine alcohol with all other drug or substance abuse programs. While there is certainly logic in combining efforts, drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, crack, PCP, and heroin are generally highlighted as the greater menace to adolescents and thus diminish the focus on adolescent drinking. Recent federal initiatives and the "war on drugs" are clearly indicative of this trend.

There is no question that drugs other than alcohol present a serious danger to the youth of America. But the fact remains that they pale in comparison to the problems alcohol creates. The current organization of agencies of prevention then is such that prevention efforts are not consistently focused, nor persistently pursued.

Evaluation of the Agencies of Promotion and Prevention

The debate regarding the effect of alcohol advertising on overall consumption has persisted for years. An excellent summary of that debate was recently compiled by Smart (1988). In his article Smart reviewed four empirical areas of concern: (a) the effect of banning advertising on consumption; (b) the econometric factors related to sales of alcohol; (c) the experimental manipulation of advertising and observed consumption; and (d) the exposure to advertising as it related to reported consumption. For purposes of this paper only the last two are considered.

In the experimental manipulation of advertising and observed consumption, most of the study designs follow a similar model. They create an artificial, usually party atmosphere, present a differential number of commercials to experimental

control groups, and then measure alcohol consumption. According to Smart (1988, p. 321), the best controlled of these studies (Sobel et al., 1986; Kohn and Smart, 1987) "show no overall effect of alcohol advertising on alcohol consumption." He also noted that "none of these studies is ideal methodologically" (1988, p. 321). Clearly, the research does not support the notion that there is a direct causal relationship between viewing a commercial or series of commercials and increased alcohol consumption.

On the other hand, the research on the exposure to advertising as it relates to alcohol consumption is much more volatile, political, and polarized. The debate on this controversy was fueled in 1978 when four federal agencies solicited competitive bids to perform a large scale scientific analysis of this issue. Ultimately, a team of researchers from Michigan State University headed by Charles Atkin and Martin Block was selected. Atkin and Block (1984, p. 165) concluded that the survey evidence demonstrated that exposure to alcohol advertising is significantly associated with drinking behavior and intentions. Not surprisingly, this conclusion was challenged. Specifically, Donald Strickland (1984, p. 87) rejected the findings primarily on the basis of methodological flaws.

The purpose of the present article is to evaluate the methodological framework of Atkin's and Block's study, a framework which in many respects, is inadequate to support the findings, interpretations and conclusions contained in the document and increasingly reified through public dissemination of the more alarmist findings. The adequacy of the research seems a more sensible criterion of evaluation than does the agreement between the findings of the report and the moral biases of those who popularize its more sensationalistic conclusions.

Atkin and Block (1984, p. 99) responded to Strickland's criticisms the same issue and illustrate the emotionalism of this debate.

In our study, we conducted dozens of substudies reported in scores of tables described in hundreds of pages of texts. There are minor technical flaws as in any exploratory investigation examining complex and subtle phenomena, and there are occasional interpretive ambiguities inherent in social science methodology. Our methodological approach was judged by the sponsors to be the strongest in intense competition with proposals from other researchers from a variety of disciplines. We believe that we competently executed the research to provide a comprehensive, sophisticated and innovative analysis of the problem, and that our research meets the standards of methods for assessing the content and effects of the mass media. We hope that this reply will help dispose of the argument that the methodological framework is inadequate to support the findings and implications of our project.

Apparently, the American Medical Association believed the research by Atkin and Block was sufficiently valid to cite their findings in a 1986 Board of Trustees Report published in *JAMA*. While the Board was "aware of the inconclusive nature of the evidence for a causal link between advertising and alcohol abuse" (p. 1487), they nevertheless recommended that producers and distributors of alcoholic beverages discontinue advertising directed toward youth, such as promotions on high school and college campuses.

The only plausible conclusion from this discussion is that there is no compelling research that unarguably answers the question regarding alcohol advertising's overall effect on consumption. The most reliable conclusion that can be stated is that the research is equivocal and no definitive statement can be supported between the role of advertising and the short term effects on teenage drinking.

We do not contend, however, that one alcohol advertisement increases consumption. Rather, we suggest that alcohol advertising, in combination with other social observations and experiences of children and adolescents, are a pervasive part of the cultural landscape and that considered in the long range these factors have a cumulative effect that promotes utilitarian

drinking. Smart (1988, p. 315) supports this hypothesis and states, "advertising may have cumulative effects that are difficult to detect. While the influence of a single advertisement is likely to be insignificant, how can we assess the impact of thousands of advertisers over decades on the drinking of individuals, or society as a whole."

The evaluation of school and community based prevention programs operates under the same burden as the evaluation of alcohol advertising. The methodologies utilized to assess the success of prevention efforts are rudimentary and any results obtained are suspect and open to challenge. In a recent critical review of the research literature by Moskowitz (1989), an extensive list of studies conducted on the evaluation of prevention and education programs was cited. Moskowitz's conclusions are revealing.

In sum, the educational approaches to prevention have a limited empirical basis. Although knowledge/attitudes models have been researched considerably, the evidence for causal links in these models is inconsistent. Furthermore, there is little support for the validity of these models as applied to alcohol or drug use. The values/decision-making and social competency models have not generated much research. Thus, the assumption that individuals misuse alcohol or other drugs because of their deficient values, their inept decision-making or their inadequate social skills is largely unfounded (1989, p. 69).

Viewed as a whole, the evaluation of the impact of alcohol advertising on adolescent consumption and the evaluation of the impact of prevention and education programs on adolescent consumption is inconclusive at best. There is consensus among researchers that existing methodologies are inadequate, and that more research is necessary to inform public policy. We concur with these assessments. However, we contend that given the equivocal research findings, other explanations must be attempted and articulated. Towards that end we suggest that when agencies of promotion outspend agencies of prevention by

a ten to one margin, associations created by the better funded agency will prevail. In this case, the happy images of drinking dominate.

Cultural and Political Economic Considerations

Social scientists studying drinking patterns have identified four cultural orientations to alcohol consumption that provide norms and guidelines for drinking (Kinney and Leaton, 1987, pp. 84–7). The first of these orientations is total abstinence. Drinking is negatively evaluated and forbidden altogether. A second orientation involves ritual use where drinking is confined to religious practices, ceremonies, and special occasions. The third cultural orientation is called convivial drinking. Here alcohol consumption is linked with social solidarity and camaraderie. Within this orientation drinking for personal reasons or to become intoxicated is frowned upon. Finally, the fourth orientation is utilitarian. In this perspective there are few normative constraints on an individual's drinking choices. The person is free to drink to relax, to forget, to eliminate hangovers, or simply to have fun. There are few restrictions regarding quantity, time of day, or type of occasion. In short, the norm regarding drinking is the individual is free to choose, a norm that resonates well with American ideals of individualism and freedom.

Not surprisingly, agencies of promotion have an economic interest in perpetuating a utilitarian cultural orientation because it is most conducive to maximizing consumption. Thus, the great majority of images communicated in alcohol advertising are those of utilitarian use. Advertisements present images that link (often irrationally) alcohol with excitement, romance, naturalness and vitality, masculinity, camaraderie and other desirable conditions. Considered in the aggregate, alcoholic beverage advertising suggests that alcohol can be utilized for numerous reasons in a wide variety of contexts — all with happy outcomes.

In contrast, agencies of prevention attempt to rationally refute the happy, utilitarian orientations to drinking by communicating the dark side of alcohol consumption. Generally, agencies of prevention promote the abstinence orientation and associate alcohol consumption with deleterious social effects such as auto

fatalities, loss of personal control and achievement, domestic violence, alcoholism and other health problems. We will consider the impact of these competing images on adolescents shortly. What concerns us now is why favorable images dominate negative ones.

In order to answer this question we must first locate agencies of promotion and prevention within the total political-economic structure of society and its dynamics. Here we see that there are major differences in the organization and resources of agencies of promotion and prevention.

Consider alcoholic beverage advertising as an agency of promotion. Its structural location is in the "private sector" where selling and advertising alcoholic beverages is a commercial enterprise organized around profits. As such it is a self-supported enterprise. Because selling alcoholic beverages is a profitable enterprise, there are ample resources for reinvestment into advertising. In fact, it is standard practice in national consumer product industries to systematically include large advertising expenditures in a company's overall budget. Advertising is viewed as a regular facet of the overall business enterprise and advertising budgets are often calculated on the basis of percentage of sales revenues. What this means is that agencies of promotion have a fairly steady and reliable base to support their communications.

Moreover, because advertising is a significant aspect of capitalist commercial enterprise, a whole industry has developed and refined techniques and technologies of mass communication and promotion (persuasive forms of communication are one of the products of this developmental process of rationalization). Advertising agencies are experts at planning and implementing national mass communication campaigns.

Finally, advertising costs are subsidized in two ways. First, the cost of advertising, like other costs incurred in the course of producing and distributing a product, are embedded in the shelf price of the commodity. In short, the cost of advertising alcoholic beverages is passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices. Second, advertising as one of many business expenses is tax deductible and thus indirectly subsidized by taxpayers and the public.

We can see that agencies of promotion occupy a position in the total institutional structure of society that virtually guarantees a steady stream of communications promoting drinking. Moreover, even though agencies of promotion are supported by consumers and the public, it is not apparent to most Americans that they pay for these promotional messages. The location of agencies of promotion in the political economic institutional structure of society is such that ads appear to be free to the public.

In contrast, consider the structural location of agencies of prevention. They operate in the "public sector" funded directly by taxes, and function on a nonprofit basis. Unlike agencies of promotion, these agencies of prevention, even when successful, are not assured of a steady source of resources. Agencies of prevention compete with other social programs for public funds, and these funds are of course dependent on tax revenues that fluctuate with the ups and downs of the local, state, and national economy and are vulnerable to shifting political agendas. Add to this that agencies of alcohol prevention also compete with drug prevention programs, and it becomes clear just how precarious funding for alcohol prevention is. Compared with agencies of promotion, agencies of prevention are at a structural disadvantage in terms of resources. Moreover, the costs of maintaining agencies of prevention are more visible to the public who know that these programs are funded with their dollars, and who are often reluctant to pay taxes for "social" causes and problems that do not directly affect them.

Given this structural situation it is not surprising that favorable images of drinking outnumber negative ones, and one can expect this situation to persist. Using the figures presented earlier, we can offer a rough comparison that reflects the disparity in resources between agencies of promotion and prevention. In 1987, agencies of promotion spent \$1.1 billion, while agencies of prevention spent only \$158 million. Translated into actual communications, Postman, Nystrom, Strate, and Weingartner (1987, p. 1) claim that, "between the ages of two and eighteen, the period in which social learning is most intense, American children see something like 100,000 television commercials for

beer." The volume of these exposures to advertising can be contrasted with a model prevention program implemented in the state of Washington (Hopkins, Mauss, Kearney, and Weisheit, 1988, pp. 38-50). In this ideal "hands-on" program there was total support from parents, teachers, and school administrators, as well as enriched funding. Nevertheless, over a three year period children received ten one-hour sessions per year focusing on alcohol prevention. Although these are rough comparisons, they do illustrate the tremendous disparity in resources and communications between agencies of promotion and agencies of prevention.

Conclusion

It is now necessary to consider the differential impact of these competing images of drinking on adolescents. As Schudson has explained (1984, pp. 90-128) the power of advertising and the mass media is directly related to one's "information environment," and some groups who lack other sources of information are especially vulnerable to mass mediated messages. This notion of an "information environment" can be applied to the situation of adolescents facing the decision to drink or not and their relation to agencies of promotion and prevention. Consider the adolescent's information environment concerning alcoholic beverages.

Compared to adults, adolescents lack an experiential base (or at least have a less developed one) for evaluating drinking and its meaning. Meaning here refers to what George Herbert Mead called "the imaginative completion of an act," i.e., what one expects to happen as a result of drinking. Clearly, motivations for drinking entail some conception of what will happen as a result of drinking. We suggest that because adolescents lack direct experiences with alcohol, or at least have limited experiences, they are more susceptible to messages communicated by formal agencies of promotion and prevention. The impact of these formal agencies is enhanced further by the erosion and decline of traditional sources of information. As more women enter the workforce, for example, and "latchkey kids" emerge, the family is a less potent source of information, offers fewer constraints on adolescent drinking, and enhances other

sources of information — in this case agencies of promotion and prevention.

We have explained how agencies of promotion dominate agencies of prevention and have greater resources to communicate their happy images of drinking. We now must consider the nature of the messages communicated by agencies of promotion and prevention to fully understand their differential impact. Alcoholic beverage advertising is predominantly persuasive in its form. As explained earlier, these advertisements communicate images that irrationally and subconsciously associate drinking with numerous desirable states and attributes. Furthermore, these associations are absorbed cognitively in a process of "low involvement learning" (Krugman, 1972) very similar to behavioral conditioning. They are not "learned" in a discursive or rational way but rather in a natural, subconscious, nondiscursive manner. The associations communicated by persuasive advertising are learned in a subconscious, non-volitional way (Harms, 1987) and become a part of our "natural attitude," a taken for granted view of the world where social regularities and associations are reified and assumed to be natural and immutable. The power of alcoholic beverage advertising, then, stems from the fact that these happy images of drinking are learned early, before rational explanations. Alcohol beverage advertising functions as an agency of promotion by making happy images of drinking a pervasive, ubiquitous feature of our cultural landscape.

In contrast, the messages communicated by agencies of prevention are overwhelmingly rational in their form, and thus learned later, after the positive images of drinking have been incorporated into the natural attitude. This means that current attempts of agencies of prevention are working against subconscious, irrational associations created by agencies of promotion. When it is recognized that agencies of promotion operate with considerable resources on a consistent, national basis, and agencies of prevention operate with fewer resources on a less consistent, more sporadic local basis, the full impact of the differential perception thesis becomes evident.

The analysis presented here raises serious questions about the following: (a) the philosophies and models guiding alcohol

prevention programs; Is an abstinence model or goal realistic in the U.S. at this time? (b) adequate funding for alcohol prevention efforts; Do we have efficient and effective levels and mechanisms for funding alcohol prevention programs? (c) the role of government in regulating alcohol beverage advertising; Should the government regulate or ban advertising? (d) the responsibility of alcohol beverage producers, advertising agencies, and the mass media vis a vis adolescent drinking and development; Are "agencies of promotion" acting responsibly in exercising their first amendment rights to freedom of speech and expression?

These preliminary considerations are offered to emphasize the sociocultural context in which drinking decisions are made. It is our contention that the majority of prevention efforts do not sufficiently take this context into account and that their efforts are compromised as a result. We acknowledge that other factors play a role in drinking decisions, but contend that successful prevention efforts must take these sociocultural factors into account.

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