

Drowning your sorrows? Attitudes towards alcohol in UK Jews and Protestants: A thematic analysis.

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Abstract

Background: Jewish culturally-supported beliefs may discourage drinking and drunkenness as ways of socialising and coping with stress. Thus Jewish men under stress may be relatively more likely to become depressed, and less likely to use and abuse alcohol. This study is the first qualitative comparison of Jews and Protestants, men and women. It examines whether alcohol-related beliefs are consistent with the alcohol-depression hypothesis, *i.e.* that positive beliefs about alcohol use and effects are associated with high alcohol use and low depression.

Material and discussion: A thematic (interpretive phenomenological) analysis on open-ended question responses, from 70 Jews and 91 Protestants, and on semi-structured interviews with 5 Jews and 4 Protestants, identified three salient themes: the importance of retaining self-control, the pleasures of losing inhibitions, and the relations of alcohol-related behaviour to identity. Compared to Protestants, Jews described alcohol-related behaviour as threatening to self-control, loss of inhibition as unenjoyable and dangerous, and distinguished between the kinds of drinking behaviours appropriate for Jews and others. Sub-themes for Protestant men were denial that drinking threatens self-control, and appropriateness of going to the pub.

Conclusions: The themes identified are not measurable using published research instruments. Alcohol-related behaviour may be a feature of Jewish identity. The beliefs identified are consistent with the alcohol-depression hypothesis.

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Introduction

Depression is more prevalent in females than in males (Paykel, 1991; Cochrane, 1993; Davidson & Neale, 1996). However, more recent research has indicated that depression is not more common amongst women in all communities. Jewish men and women in Israel, the UK and the USA are about equally likely to suffer depression (Levav et al, 1993; Loewenthal et al, 1995; Levav et al, 1997). For example, Levav et al (1997) found that twelve-month period prevalence of depression was similar in Jewish males, Jewish females and non-Jewish females (12.5%, 12.4% and 11.6% respectively), compared to only 5.4% in non-Jewish males.

The increased prevalence of depression in Jewish males as compared to males from other groups may be the result of a number of different factors. It has been suggested that high rates of depression within Jewish men living in London may be explained in terms of their lower use of alcohol, compared to other men (Ball & Clare, 1990). Use/abuse of alcohol may mask rates of actual case depression or levels of depressive symptoms in a number of different ways. For example, drinking may temporarily relieve the symptoms of depression, reduce the likelihood of help-seeking behaviour, and mask symptoms, reducing the likelihood of a diagnosis of depression. Also, some diagnostic criteria, such as DSM-IV, exclude people whose depressive symptoms are the result of abuse of a drug, such as alcohol (American Psychological Association, 1994).

We call this explanation for the prevalence of depression, the 'alcohol-depression hypothesis'. This hypothesis suggests that Jewish people would be less likely to drink in response to depression than men from other groups, and therefore their depressive symptoms remain unmasked to a greater extent. For this UK study, we have chosen to compare Jews with

people from a Protestant background, Protestant Christianity being the dominant religious tradition in the UK.

Aspects of this hypothesis have already been well supported. Protestants are more likely to use and abuse alcohol than Jews (Snyder, 1978; Glassner & Berg, 1980; Yeung & Greenwald, 1992). Loewenthal et al (2001) found that Protestants drank more alcohol, and more frequently, than did Jews. Levav et al (1993) concluded that substantially fewer (Jewish) Israelis appear to suffer from alcohol abuse than persons in the other countries surveyed. Loewenthal et al (1995) found zero prevalence of alcohol abuse within their sample of Orthodox Jews living in London. With regard to alcohol-related attitudes, Weiss & Moore (1992) reported that Jewish teachers in Israel held less liberal attitudes towards alcohol than did Christians. They were less likely to agree that alcoholics could taper off and control their drinking again, and they were more likely to agree that alcoholics had to quit forever in order to recover. Levav et al (1997), found that rates of alcohol abuse/dependence were inversely related to rates of major depression. Jewish males had higher rates of major depression and lower rates of alcohol abuse (at a ratio of 4.5:1), whereas non-Jewish males had lower rates of major depression and higher rates of alcohol abuse (a ratio of 0.4:1). Also, rates of depression in male Jews were found to be reduced when they were living in areas of greater assimilation and had adopted local behaviours such as increased alcohol consumption. Levav et al (1997) concluded that the equal gender distribution of major depression among Jews may be associated with the lower rate of alcoholism among Jewish males.

The alcohol-depression hypothesis involves the assumption that alcohol use is a function of attitudes towards alcohol, and of beliefs about group norms regarding alcohol use. These are affected by gender and cultural-religious affiliation. This aspect of the model draws quite heavily on the Theory of Reasoned Action, pioneered by Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) which acknowledges the importance of attitudes and beliefs about group norms as determinants of behavioural intentions, which in turn predict behaviour.

We carried out this study to examine qualitative aspects – culturally-carried beliefs – of the alcohol-depression hypothesis. We were particularly interested to see what Jews and Protestants – both men and women, of varying degrees of religious activity – believe about the use of alcohol, social drinking, drinking to relax, and drunkenness. The hypothesis suggests that beliefs about the use of alcohol would be more favourable in those groups with higher rates of alcohol use, and lower rates of depression (i.e. Protestants compared to Jews, men compared to women), and we were interested in the *quality* of those beliefs.

Method

Participants

Two sources of data were used, open-ended questions with written answers (source A), and semi-structured extended interviews (source B). Both sources involved quota samples *i.e.* targeting specific numbers of individuals with the required sociodemographic characteristics. Approximately equal numbers of Jews and Protestants, and males and females were sampled, across a range of different ages and religious observances.

Source A: There were 161 volunteer participants, all UK residents, 70 Jewish (35 men and 35 women; mean age = 39.03 years, SD of age = 15.30 years; 74% said they belonged to and/or attended a place of worship, 61% attending at least monthly, 39% seldom or never), and 91 Protestant (44 men and 47 women; mean age = 42.16 years, SD of age = 16.21, 64% said they belonged to and/or attended a place of worship, 65% attended at least monthly, 35% seldom or never). Affiliated participants were recruited by quasi-random sampling from church (Church of England, Baptist, charismatic, United Reformed) and synagogue (United synagogue, Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, Reform Synagogue) lists of a range of denominations. Non-affiliated, non-practising participants were targeted for inclusion, and recruited by snowball sampling, as we were interested in religious-cultural background regardless of current practice. Participants who were not currently affiliated or attending

worship were classified as Jewish or Protestant if both parents were Jewish or Protestant. 64% of the sample were in steady relationships (married, engaged or cohabiting), while 36% were not (single, divorced, separated or widowed). 75% of the sample were graduates and/or employed on a professional basis, while 25% were in other occupational groups (white- and blue-collar workers, homemakers and retired people). The two cultural-religious groups did not differ from each other in terms of marital status or occupation.

Source B: Four Protestant and five Jewish people, all volunteers, took part in depth interviews, to expand on the material obtained in the questionnaire study. The Protestants were two men (aged 29 and 55 years), and two women (aged 47 and 55 years). One man and one woman attended church regularly. Three Jewish men (aged 27, 29 and 41), and two women (aged 28 and 42 years) were interviewed. Three (two men, one woman) described themselves as orthodox.

Procedure

All participants were assured of anonymity, that they need not answer any question, and could withdraw at any time without stating a reason.

Source A: Participants were asked about four aspects of drinking: drinking to cheer oneself up; social drinking; going to the pub; and being tipsy. For each of the four different contexts, respondents were asked to indicate:

- whether they would take a drink for that reason
- if they wouldn't take a drink, why not
- whether people in general would take a drink for that reason
- what they thought of people who did take a drink for that reason.

There was space and scope to amplify responses, but this only sometimes done.

Source B: The nine participants were interviewed individually in a place of their choice.

Interviewers and interviewees were matched for cultural-religious background – a Protestant interviewed Protestants and a Jew interviewed Jews. Each interview was conducted in English

by a female interviewer. The interviews followed the same series of open ended questions as in source A, with additional probes. Thus participants were asked:

- If they would engage in that behaviour (e.g. drinking to cheer oneself up) and if not, why.
- How they saw people who engaged in that behaviour.
- What positive reasons they could think of (if any) for engaging in that behaviour – if it could be beneficial.
- If it was a normal and socially acceptable behaviour to engage in.
- What reasons (if any) they could think of against engaging in this sort of behaviour – if it could ever be an unpleasant experience.
- If it would ever be socially unacceptable to engage in that behaviour.
- If there was any influence of age or gender on the likelihood of engaging in this behaviour.
- If they felt that people from their religious cultural group would be more or less likely to drink in that context than any other cultural-religious group.

Prompts, such as ‘what do you mean by that?’, ‘why do you say that?’ or ‘can you expand on that?’ were provided by the interviewer if any point was unclear, or if the participant seemed unsure about anything. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, was tape-recorded and later transcribed.

Analysis

The interview transcripts, and written comments were subjected to a thematic qualitative analysis. This method aims to illustrate underlying themes in each respondent’s discourse by examining the transcripts and looking for common themes and differences in the language used. This facilitates the investigation of underlying structures behind attitude and belief systems. In order to achieve this, the transcripts and comments were re-read, key themes that tended to re-occur were noted and searches were made for contrasts between the attitudes of Protestant and Jewish participants. Smith (1995) offers further information about thematic

analysis. Its aim is to arrive at an interpretive phenomenological perspective on the accounts of the research participants. In common with other qualitative methods, a primary aim is to enrich the readers' understanding of the experiential perspective of research informants (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999).

Results

A number of key themes were identified and comparisons amongst the different religious-cultural groups were made. We will focus on the three most salient themes – concern about loss of control, the positive features of losing ones inhibitions, and the sense of socially normative behaviour. To illustrate the themes, we have used detailed interview and questionnaire quotes and examples, as recommended in Elliott *et al* (1999). The same themes emerged from the questionnaire and interview material, with greater amplification in the interview material. The sources of the quotes are abbreviated as follows: JM=Jewish man; JW=Jewish woman; PM=Protestant man; PW=Protestant woman. Q1-151 refers to questionnaire numbers, and Int1-9 refers to extended interview numbers.

1. Concern over loss of control

Concern over loss of control was a key theme that emerged both from interviews and the questionnaires. It was associated with the use of alcohol in a variety of contexts.

Participants were keen to talk about control as a desirable quality and to emphasise that it was personally important to them to have control over things. Loss of control could lead to regrettable consequences This was true for both Jews and Protestants.

(Would you get drunk?) 'I prefer to remain in control of myself' (JM, Q43); 'I like to be in control of myself' (JW, Q44); 'I don't like losing control of my faculties' (JW, Int9); 'I do not wish to be unable to control my thought patterns' (PM, Q11); 'I do not like not to be in control' (PM, Q60). 'I don't wish anything to have control over me' (PW, Int2); 'If you drink too much you may well end up feeling very stupid when you find out what you've been doing' (PW, Int1); '...doing things the next day that

perhaps you wouldn't do if you weren't drunk, and then the next day you think "Goodness – did I do that?" (PW, Int2).

However the Jewish participants saw remaining in control a moral imperative:

'A person should be in control of himself at all times' (JM, Q41); 'You should always be in control' (JM, Int7); 'Because of our history we are permanently on guard in a way...there's a feeling that drinking will put you off guard and who knows what might happen...there is a need to be kind of in control' (JM, Int6).

'You should be in control' (JW, Q30).

This view encapsulates a notion expressed by Glazer (1952) that historically, Jews had been in a vulnerable position, and thus it was especially important to retain self-control. Many Jewish people expressed negative attitudes to those who failed to retain control as a result of drinking, and were more specific with examples of embarrassing, unpleasant and even catastrophic scenarios coming from excessive drink:

'It is foolish to lose control' (JM, Int7); 'The Xmas party at my company just before I joined the firm, a young chap drank too much at the Xmas dinner and told the bosses exactly what he thought of them. It made everybody feel very uncomfortable' (JM, Int6); '...misbehaving socially...blokes and members of the opposite sex tend to be a lot more forward when they are drunk and quite often go over the boundaries of what would be normally acceptable' (JM, Int6); 'It can lead to immorality – getting into trouble with the police – getting into fights for no reason' (JM, Q40).

'I disapprove of those who do (have diminished control from drinking)' (JW, Q75); 'I find it demeaning and undignified to be out of control' (JW, Q27); 'It can lead to abuse or to violence...it can cause husbands hitting wives...destroying furniture, things like this...attacking wives and children' (JW, Int9); 'If you do go to the pub, you expect that there will be a lot of drunk people around and beer flying' (JW, Int8).

Historically, it has been suggested that prescribed drinking and drunkenness, in the context of religious ritual and celebration in Jewish life, has led to a greater control over the use of alcohol (Glassner & Berg, 1980). This argument was advanced by some Jewish participants.

'When you have it on a particular day for a specific reason, it's a good thing to sort of head towards and it prevents you perhaps from...um...doing it at other times.' (JM, Int5)

By contrast, a sub-theme for Protestant men was that alcohol use did not lead to any (reprehensible) loss of control:

'(Getting drunk) wouldn't as a general thing lead to loss of control' (PM, Int4). 'It's OK as long as it's only slightly...' (PM, Int3). 'There are other types of addiction that I personally think are weaknesses (not alcohol, but) drugs for example' (PM, Int4). 'Drinking could occur without loss of control' (PM, Q11).

This first theme saw all participants pointing to control as desirable or essential, with drink being a threat to this. But for some Protestant men, a sub-theme was the denial of this threat.

2. The positive features of loss of inhibition

Loss of inhibitions, like loss of control, was a recurring theme within the interviews and questionnaire data alike. Particularly among the Protestants, drinking decreases inhibition, increases ease of communication and puts down barriers that are normally up, makes people feel happier and less worried and stressed.

(Would you drink when low? Stressed? On social occasions? Would you go to the pub?) 'In small doses...it gives you a buzz, it makes you mingle more' (PM, Int3); 'It helps in social situations...I am more verbally articulate' (PM, Int4); 'May help that problem go away altogether' (PM, Int3). 'If it's at family occasions where everyone is a bit on edge...once they've had a few drinks, everyone is talking...so it does bring down some of the barriers' (PM, Int3); 'People want to enjoy themselves and perhaps put problems to the side' (PM, Q11).

'If it makes you feel a little less inhibited and it makes you have some fun then that's OK' (PW, Int1); 'I find it much easier to talk to people that I don't know if I've had a

drink' (PW, Q35); *'I find a drink might relax me'* (PW, Int1); *'It drowns your problems'* (PW, Int2); *'You lose your inhibitions so you might be able to socialise more'* (PW, Int1).

There were no noticeable further sub-themes identifiable among the Protestant men or women. As we have seen both were eloquent about the virtues of drinking to enhance social occasions and to make people happier and more relaxed.

The Jews, by contrast, even when agreeing that that drinking helped to reduce inhibitions, reduce stress, and increase fun, did not think of these features of drinking as really desirable, or helpful for them personally:

'Men aren't particularly good at opening up and talking about things, so when they drink they tend to get overly emotional...it comes out like a fountain' (JM, Int5); *'People feel that they can't enjoy themselves without a glass in their hand...I think that's a pity'* (JM, Int6); *'I find that there are better ways to unstress myself, I do not drink when I am low. When I am low, I seek insight. Alcohol does not guarantee insight or even elevated mood'* (JM, Int7); *'It's not my cure'* (JM, Int6); *'I have no desire to get intoxicated'* (JM, Q42).

'I don't take a drink because I'm low or stressed. I'm not tempted.' (JW, Int9); *'I don't think it would help me to feel any better'* (JW, Int8); *'It would not work'* (JW, Q38); *'I do not see alcohol as a problem solver'* (JW); *'I'm not mad on drink – I don't need a drink to be happy'* (JW, Q20); *'I don't feel that it is my preferred mode of socialising'* (JW, Q26); *'I don't like it'* (JW, Q24); *'I'd prefer other options'* (JW, Q30); *'I'm not used to going to the pub'* (JW, Q31); *'I don't like drink'* (JW, Q9); *'I don't like to'* (JW, Q75); *'I don't want to'* (JW, Int8).

This material indicates a sharp contrast between the participants of Protestant background – who saw drinking and using the pub as pleasant ways of relaxing, unwinding and socialising – and those of Jewish background – who even when agreeing that alcohol was seen as an aid to relaxing, socialising and becoming uninhibited, felt that this was dangerous and unhelpful.

3. *The sense of socially normative behaviour*

The final salient theme was that for many of the Jewish participants, drinking and drunkenness, and being in pubs – however acceptable for the rest of society – is not acceptable and normative, for Jewish people:

'It's not in their (Jewish) culture – they would turn to their family or friends' (JM, Int6); 'I do not associate with this particular culture' (JM, Int7); 'As an orthodox Jew it is not a place to frequent' (JM, Q39); 'It's unsatisfying' (JM, Int5); 'Not within my lifestyle' (JM, Q44); 'It's not the Jewish way of doing things – you go to a wedding or Bar Mitzvah to meet people' (JM, Int6); 'It's something that non-Jews do generally therefore it is frowned upon in the Jewish community' (JM, Int7); 'It is not deemed appropriate to mix in that type of environment – the environment could lead to other things' (JM, Int7); 'It's not an appropriate social context for Jews' (JM, Int6). 'It's not our society' (JW, Q24); 'I socialise with friends at home' (JW, Q26); 'My social circle doesn't go there' (JW, Q31); 'Not my milieu' (JW, Q75); 'They (Jewish people) have other social occasions and other places to meet and chat...it's not necessary' (JW, Int9); '...they (Jews) like to learn, they like to do maybe social work, or they try and do more ...um have more ideas about helping other people...to do things for others' (JW, Int8); 'Religious Jewish people would have a problem with men and women mixing so freely together' (JW, Int9).

Within the Jewish group, drinking at social occasions largely centred around celebration at religious festivals and ceremonies such as weddings, Kiddush and Pesach, and even then it was declared to be not much enjoyed:

'I find enforced Simcha (joyful celebration) is not helped by alcohol' (JM, Int7); 'I sometimes do not feel like so much wine for Kiddush or Pesach Sedar' (JM, Int6); 'Kiddush wine is to be endured, not enjoyed!' (JM, Int7); 'It is an obligation to partake of alcohol...for me, I could go in and have a Coca-Cola and a piece of cake and I've fulfilled my social responsibility' (JM, Int6).

Jewish descriptions of using pubs made clear that these were not places for Jews – Jews did not feel accepted, did not want to belong there, and did not want to identify with those who were there:

(Would you go to the pub?) *'One tends to feel the stranger...very aware that people were looking at me sideways because I was a stranger' (JM, Int6); 'Men do it more (go to the pub) because they don't talk to each other' (JM, Int6); 'They (those who go) are conforming to a traditional British custom, it's a point of local culture' (JM, Q39); 'It's one of the most popular social activities in this country' (JM, Q43). 'It would be a depressed person who was looking for a quick pick-me-up' (JW, Int8); 'Not a very refined person' (JW, Int9); 'People who are either experiencing breakdown... a nervous breakdown, or someone who is feeling low. They could be social dropouts' (JW, Int8); 'It's normal in the (non-Jewish) society in which we live' (JW, Q75); 'Not in our (Jewish) society' (JW, Q24); "My social circle doesn't go. Others think they have to, for social reasons' (JW, Q31); 'I have no need to go to a pub. (For others) it's fine if that's what they want" (JW, Q27).*

Within the Protestant group there was a feeling that drinking and the pub in particular was a normative, acceptable and pleasant way to meet people, and to make a social occasion or celebration something more special:

(Who would go to a pub?) *'I'd say most people' (PM, Int3); 'It's part of everyday life in the Western society in which we live' (PM, Int4); 'Joe Bloggs, I mean Mr Average...I think that you get a complete broad spectrum of people going' (PM, Int3); 'It is an easy and culturally acceptable way to meet people and talk' (PM, Q1); 'Fine, people need a chance to let their hair down' (PM, Q57). 'Anybody' (PW, Int2); 'If you are in a culture with drink being an important thing, then it would be something you do' (PW, Int1). 'All sorts of people go to the pub' (PW, Int1); (Going to the pub) 'Fine" (PW, Q15); 'Social norm' (PW, Q38).*

At this point, the Protestant men and women begin to tell a slightly different story. Going to the pub – for women, is for socialising, for company.

(Would you go?) *'Um...yes...yes I would'* (PW, Int2); *'I do – every Tuesday! I meet my friends in pubs – I meet quite a lot of my friends in pubs'* (PW, Int1); *'It's a good place to get into conversation if you are a lonely person...rather than sit at home...you go out.'*(PW, Int2); *'(Going to the pub) is fine to relax and enjoy social company'* (PW, Q13); *'...a good place to talk, meet, have a laugh'* (PW, Q60).

Men were more likely to describe the pub visit as for the sake of the drink, in order to socialise:

(Would you go?) *'If you are arranging to meet up with friends you would probably meet up in the pub to have a quick drink before you go out. It's a meeting point'* (PM, Int3); *'People go there (to the pub) to meet their friends – it's a focal point for socialising'* (PM, Int4); *'People may very well go there because they don't have too many other friends as such...they will go there for the company'* (PM, Int4); *'For big social occasions...not just any pop down the pub, but if there is a big gathering of friends'* (PM, Int3); *'People need interaction, and it's an easy way to meet people'* (PM, Q1)

The Protestants' descriptions of drinking featured secular gatherings such as barbecues, dinner parties and birthdays. There was very much a feeling within the Protestant group that drinking at such occasions was very much a matter of free will and only served to increase levels of enjoyment, perhaps particularly for the men. On the other hand, within the Jewish group there was a feeling that drinking occurred at celebrations because it was expected and traditionally formed part of the celebration, rather than because it added to the enjoyment. The striking feature of the qualitative material on this theme is the close link between drinking behaviour and social identity: *"I do not associate with pub culture, as a practising Jew"* (JM, Q39)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate attitudes towards alcohol use in quota samples of Jewish and Protestant respondents, from written open-ended questionnaire responses

and in-depth interviews, to see if these were consistent with the alcohol-depression hypothesis. Protestant and Jewish attitudes towards alcohol did indeed appear to differ from each other in several important respects, in ways that were consistent with the alcohol-depression hypothesis. Several themes emerged within the analysis, which helped to expand our understanding of quantitative findings reflecting lower Jewish use of alcohol (Loewenthal et al, 2001). The ways in which this may impact upon behaviour (that is, the likelihood of turning to alcohol as a response to depression) could be examined further.

The importance of control as an alcohol-related theme has already been illustrated. What was particularly apparent however, was the central role that control appeared to play in the lives of many Jewish respondents. It was clear from a number of respondents, that within the Jewish community, this was considered to be a desirable and necessary characteristic of living. It was exemplified by the way in which Jews tended to drink alcohol – in a restricted environment, and primarily in the context of rituals or celebration. This desire to remain in control, in conjunction with the belief that alcohol may serve to decrease personal control, and their negative view of those who have lost control through drinking, may well deter Jewish people from taking this course of action as a response to the symptoms of depression.

This is in striking contrast to comments made within the Protestant group. The men often denied any threat to control posed by alcohol use, and collectively there was enthusiasm for the pleasant effects of alcohol, in releasing inhibitions, making people more relaxed, cheerful and unstressed. Jewish respondents were invariably more cautious about whether these effects were so good, helpful or desirable. For example, whereas Protestants commented on the ability of alcohol to relax you, Jewish people commented that it could relax you ‘too much’. Protestants held that alcohol could lessen the effect of problems, even to the extent of making them ‘go away altogether’. When Protestants described any negative aspects of losing inhibition, these focused on doing embarrassing things. Jewish people were much more likely

to question the wisdom of drinking to deal with problems or negative feelings, and tended to recall explicit examples of negative effects from their own observations. The Jewish depictions of the risks of drink were more serious than the Protestant examples, with reference being made to ‘attacking wives and children’ and ‘destroying furniture’.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) would assert that negative feelings that are associated with drinking alcohol in the context of drinking to cheer oneself up would impact upon the likelihood of engaging in this particular behaviour. Thus, Jewish participants would be less likely to drink alcohol in response to symptoms of depression, and their symptoms would accordingly remain unmasked. The attitudes displayed by both cultural-religious groups are consistent with the idea that Protestants may be more likely than Jews to drink when faced with depressive symptoms.

This may in turn mask levels of depression, which may further lower the prevalence of depression. It is also possible that alcohol actually reduces – rather than just masks, the symptoms of depression. Protestant men in particular argued that alcohol played a role in reducing their levels of worry and relaxing. One male commented that it even made problems ‘go away altogether’. Of course there are other relationships between alcohol use and depression (Kessler, 1997) but here we focus on that effect which was salient in the accounts of our participants, especially the men of Protestant background.

Our third theme was the sense of socially normative behaviour. Overwhelmingly, drinking, drunkenness and going to the pub were seen as normative and acceptable by and for Protestants, particularly men. Previous research has indicated that Jewish people consider the consumption of alcohol (other than within the context of religious rituals or festivals) to be primarily an ‘out group’ characteristic (Glassner & Berg, 1980). There was much evidence to support this view within the interview and questionnaire data. For example, several Jewish people commented that drinking, and going to the pub in particular, was ‘normal...in this

country anyway', which implied that it was not part of Jewish culture. Unlike Protestant respondents who were very forthcoming about their engagement with alcohol-related behaviours, Jewish people were keen to distance themselves from such behaviours and to deny personal participation. It was quite clear from the comments made that drinking outside of the context of ritual and celebratory drinking was 'not appropriate' within the Jewish culture, and this may be a further influence in their reduced drinking habits as compared to Protestant respondents. We have already seen how the Theory of Reasoned Action asserts that intention to perform a behaviour may be influenced by beliefs about what significant others would think one should or should not do. If there is a general consensus within the Jewish community that drinking is not appropriate, then the likelihood of engagement in alcohol-related behaviours would be reduced.

Although care was taken to ensure a balance of equal numbers of Jews and Protestants and males and females across a variety of ages and religious observances, the extent to which these attitudes may exist in other Jewish and Protestant populations is not certain. The statements made by the Jews are consistent with those made in other Jewish studies.

Quantitative research could be carried out on the basis of findings reported here, using a questionnaire measure based on the themes generated in the questionnaire and interview material, administered to a larger and more representative sample of Jews and Protestants. This would enable a more systematic detection of the effects of gender and religiosity.

The current study has been instrumental in two ways. First, by offering an interpretive phenomenology of alcohol use, it has highlighted aspects of Jewish and Protestant beliefs about the use of alcohol which could not have been detected with available questionnaires. Second, it has provided support for aspects of the alcohol-depression hypothesis, namely that Protestants (particularly men) - are more likely to use alcohol because they believe that drinking alcohol releases inhibitions, increases fun, relieves stress, and is perfectly normal, acceptable and not dangerous. By contrast, Jewish people are concerned about loss of control

and the unpleasant consequences of drinking, and do not identify with those who do drink, use pubs and get drunk. By affecting alcohol use, these beliefs could have an impact on the prevalence of depression. Alcohol is truly seen as a drowner of sorrows by many of those interviewed, and may function as such, to the current dismay of those concerned with rising levels of alcohol abuse. (Duckworth, 2001).

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