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**“Which Kind of Paddy?”  
A Survey of the Literature on the History,  
Sociology and Anthropology of Alcohol  
and the Irish**

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## 1. Introduction

Research on alcohol has been preoccupied by the moral debate. An extensive review of the literature has revealed a stark dichotomy in approaches to the subject. On one side the literature has been medically oriented and focused on alcoholism as the outcome. On the other side, which can best be described as sociologically analytical in its focus, it has endeavoured to study *all* forms of alcohol behaviour especially constructive or social drinking.

The medical side of the debate was spearheaded by Jellinek (1942) and arising from his work this school of thought considers alcohol issues from a medical perspective concentrating on definitions of alcoholism and also the negative aspects associated with alcohol use. This viewpoint has been influential in the work of the consumption distribution theorists. From the sociological perspective Bacon (1943) pushed for a diverse approach with analysis of *all* forms of alcohol behaviour, especially constructive or social drinking. This approach has been criticised again in recent years and will be discussed later in the anthropology/ethnographic section.

This survey reviews the literature within a number of cognate disciplines – history, sociology, anthropology – on alcohol and the Irish. The strong association between the two throughout time has also influenced theoretical developments on a more global basis. A survey such as this serves to remind us that any discussion on the Irish and alcohol is complex and cannot focus on one outcome over another. Rather, concentration on different aspects of the subject area by scientists from all disciplines serves to demonstrate how multifaceted it is and that each informs the other.

## 2. Images of the Irish drinker

Images of the Irishman at home and abroad have tended until recent years to be colourful and focusing very often on his love of “the drink”. The stereotype of the drunken Irishman has been evident in popular literature and more recently through the medium of radio, television and cinema. Researchers on alcohol have also helped to reinforce this image especially Bales early work in 1946 and more particularly his work on drinking in Irish culture published in 1962.

Bales’ work was based on documentary material from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century and also relied heavily on Arensberg and Kimball’s work on the family and community in County Clare in the 1930s. Implicit in his research was the assumption that his results were particular to the Irish situation only. However Fitzpatrick (1971) found that Irish customs, attitudes and use of alcohol were similar to that of the English. Bales’ views of Irish drinking patterns set the tone for research in decades to come whereby Irish society was characterized by (i)absence of change, (ii) universal consensus, (iii)social harmony and (iv)social isolation (Dahrendorf 1958). Implicit in his work and of those who followed him was that the practices and attitudes to alcohol that he identified persisted inter-generationally.

Proffered explanations for Irish drinking patterns have been varying. Irish culture has been regarded as “ambivalent” towards alcohol and this was regarded as a major contributory factor to heavy drinking and alcoholism. A review of the literature can be collapsed into three theoretical groupings: family structure explanations; the use of alcohol to relieve sexual and emotional problems; Irish demographic patterns.

Theories on the role of family and community life in alcohol use were largely drawn from Arensberg and Kimball (1940) and were subsequently drawn on in the development of social organization explanations. Field’s study of drunkenness in primitive societies (1962) believed that social organization determined drinking behaviour. In Ireland specifically he regarded social organization as being weak and the family structure as

being rigid thereby setting up a situation, which contributed to and tolerated heavy drinking.

Analyses of Irish literature are replete with references to superstition, guilt and sexual tension. As Greeley (1971) noted the Irish were consequently “given frequently to alcoholism in search of emotional release” (Saris 1995; Baillie 2005). Arensberg and Kimball amongst many others considered these problems to derive from Ireland’s demographic patterns, in particular, the rates of and age at marriage.

As a mainly agricultural society until the latter half of the twentieth century the patterns of land/farm inheritance, low marriage rates and the importance of chastity outside of marriage prescribed by the Catholic Church contributed to a well-defined role system in Irish society (Kennedy 1973). The emergence of the “Irish bachelor” was considered a natural response to this tightly defined society. McNabb (1964), Brody (1973) and Stivers (1976) suggest that a major social link in this bachelor group was their use of alcohol. Stiver’s work, which was based on archival material, suggested that heavy drinking among Irish bachelors was a result of the collapse of the traditional Irish culture during the famine. Drinking was thus regarded as a means of maintaining one’s status in the bachelor group.

The review above is notable for the fact that many of the conclusions reached in the works evaluated centre on the fact that the Irish drink a lot and consequently many socio-behavioural problems arise as a result. Bretherton (1986) noted the first attempts to deal specifically with the issue of alcohol misuse in a medical setting. Published research in both Irish and international medical journals including Perceval (1955) and Walsh (1968) concentrated on establishing the levels of alcoholism were in Ireland. Subsequent work focused on hospital admissions for alcoholism, alcohol related diseases and consequent morbidity levels (Kearney, Lawler and Walsh, 1969; Walsh and Walsh 1973). Little of the work referenced thus far established any normative scale of drinking patterns and behaviour.

The seminal work of Bales on the socio-cultural use of alcohol accepted the pervasive notion that the Irish are intrinsically prone to alcohol-related problems even though he was confronted with “puzzling” statistical evidence which might suggest otherwise. One would expect, he noted, “high death rates from alcoholism in Ireland, so the low rates, which are reported remain a puzzle”. Bales solution to this puzzle lay with the medical community in Ireland. Alcohol, he reasoned, was not regarded as particularly evil in Ireland, its “pernicious” influence on health was not stressed and so Irish doctors were not inclined to make diagnoses of chronic alcoholism where it might have been the case in other countries. To support his case for high Irish rates of drunkenness Bales quotes a report by William Dawson in 1911 that in the early 1900s far more Irish people were arrested when compared with England (Bales 1980:35). Bales neglected to discuss Dawson’s explanation that the higher Irish figures were due to more effective policing especially in rural districts and small towns.

### 3. History

Since earliest records began drinking has been shown to be a central part of the Irish cultural tradition (Warner 1993, 1994). Whiskey was the most popular drink in Ireland unlike England where ale was the most popular (McGuire 1973). As far back as the fifteenth century travellers accounts of drinking in Ireland emphasised the role it played in everyday life with few restrictions on its use. These same accounts also noted that drunkenness was an everyday occurrence and violent clashes often resulted (McManus 1939; Plunkett 1904). Although there were differences in the preferred alcohol of the English and Irish, Dunlop, as far back as 1839, recognised that alcohol use was a problem in both countries.

In certain occupations customs and drinking usage were an integral part of the job. In many instances these customs socialised the workers into patterns of heavy drinking. Absenting oneself from these customs place the individual outside their social group and apart from their peers and had substantive social consequences. The Select Committee on Drunkenness (1834) discussed the almost universal practice of paying workmen in the public house and the custom of “treating” that accompanied this. This involved the

worker buying alcohol in the public house after being paid “as a compensation to the master of the house for the change (*Evidence on Drunkenness Presented to the House of Commons* 1834: 98). Evidence of this custom was also given by James Larkin to a parliamentary committee investigating abuses in the Dublin dockyards (Larkin 1968: 17). A reaction to the custom of “treating” was the formation of an Anti-Treating League in Enniscorthy by a Fr. Rossiter in the early twentieth century. Its success was, however, both limited and shortlived (Plunkett 1904:114).

Historical evidence also shows that drinking was a central feature of economic life in Ireland (Cronin et al 2001). Business deals were sealed with a drink. At events like fair days the amount of alcohol consumed could be considerable. Drunkenness and associated violence were also common occurrences as a result and local magistrates were kept busy in the days following such fairs (Maxwell 1949; Mc Carthy 1911). Given that drinking appeared to be an integral part of the social and economic framework of Irish society drunkenness appeared to be socially structured and thus accepted as a part of social behaviour. On a cautionary note Cullen (1968) noted that visitors to Ireland in the eighteenth century anticipated that heavy drinking would be central to Irish social and business life but on arrival noted that it was not nearly as prevalent as believed.

A review of the history of alcohol usage in Ireland cannot ignore the success of illegal alcohol production. Connell (1965, 1968) examined the history of poteen making. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the increase in the price of whiskey contributed to the growth in the production of poteen. Apart from providing pleasure of an alcoholic sort it also served to provide members of the peasantry with rental money. Connell noted that some landlords were complicit in the production of this poteen as they were keen to receive their rental money. Excisemen were also open to bribery and the scale of complicity in poteen production was attributed to the breakdown of law and order in certain districts. The economic impact of the Famine was responsible for decimating the illicit market in the 1840s. Before moving on to the Temperance movement it is worth noting here that there was an anti-spirits movement in the 1830s. It was led by members of the Dublin Quaker community and some Ulster Protestants. It was a sectional

movement as being largely Protestant, middle-class and conservative it had little to offer the mass of Irish people.

Historical work on Ireland suggests that alcohol pervaded all aspects of Irish social life. Larkin (1968) notes that at the beginning of the twentieth century the economic problems of Dublin were exacerbated by social problems, including high levels of alcohol usage. Concern was noted over the number of women and children who used public houses. Poverty levels at this time also drove many to drink methylated spirits or turpentine. The consequences of this development were believed to have contributed to increased levels of mental illness (Bretherton 1986a, 1986b). Gallagher's follow-up to Arensberg and Kimball's study in the 1960s which remains unpublished (see O'Connor 1978:51) noted that attitudes towards alcohol were tolerant. Use of alcohol was rarely censured and only in circumstances in which it was at the expense of one's job or family. Gallagher noted that the amount of alcohol consumed at fairs and social events was the key feature referenced by those he interviewed.

Malcolm (1986) and Bretherton (1986a, 1986b, 1991) amongst others have written about the history of drinking patterns in Ireland. One aspect of this history is the change in drinking habits of Irish people in terms of spirits and beer. With regard to spirits, the middle to late 1820s and the middle to late 1830s were periods of record consumption. There were also less dramatic peaks in the mid 1850s and mid 1870s but thereafter consumption stagnated. Production on the other hand did increase with the introduction of Coffey's patent still, the system of bonding whiskey was improved and the export market expanded rapidly. Concomitant with this pattern of spirit consumption were changes in the patterns of beer consumption. It has been shown that brewing declined during the pre-famine period but began a slow but steady growth from the mid-1850s. Thus by the turn of the 20th century annual production was nearly five times what it had been in 1850. Guinness's growth was even more spectacular. Between 1850 and 1875 its sales increased by 600%. From the mid-1850s the Irish rural market became the most dynamic part of Guinness's business.



The Temperance movement has been well documented and is worthy of a review paper in its own right. There were two waves in Ireland's temperance movement. The first wave was essentially Protestant and was spearheaded by key elements in the country's elite. Those behind the movement were regarded as progressive landlords and industrialists, plus Dublin's patrician classes of doctors, bankers, clergymen and other professionals. Among the landlords and industrialists there was a general concern to improve the lives of their tenants and workers. For example Quaker employers such as the Grubbs of Clonmel, the Malcolmsons of Portlaw, the Richardsons of Bessbrook and the Jacobs of Dublin all had policies to encourage their workers to join Tontine clubs which were in effect savings clubs which required their members to be teetotal (Mc Mahon 1985). Some historians regarded this as an effort by the ruling classes to maintain their own grip on power. A subset of this group found temperance a cheap solution to all of Ireland's and more specifically Dublin's problems. If the poor would stop drinking they would no longer be poor and thus would cease to be a burden on the city's charities and other such resources.

The second wave of temperance recruited from among the less well off. Unlike the moderationists of the first wave they advocated total abstinence from alcohol. Described by Bretherton as "radicals and ascetics" (1991) they were better able to appeal to their followers longing for freedom from alcohol and often threw freedom from England into the equation as well. Leading this second wave was Father Matthew who was initially successful in appealing to both Protestants and Catholics (Quinn 2002; Townend 2002). The church was often in opposition fearing alienation of its supporters and priests. Father Matthew's movement later moved closer to the Catholic Church and gained support during the so-called "devotional revolution" following the famine in Ireland (Ferriter 1999).

The role of the Temperance movement has been considered in sociological analyses of the Irish and alcohol. Bales writing in the 1940s noted that Irish "teetotalers" reflected the inner tensions of abstinence. He regarded them as potential sexual deviants since they did not drink as an outlet for such urges and concluded that drinking acted as a

sexual substitute in Irish society. Stiver's seminal study Hair of the Dog (1976) noted that abstainers viewed drinkers in a similar way: drinking led to the loss of inhibitions which could result in sexual deviance. He argues that heavy male drinking in Irish society was the result of "cultural remission" due to social changes in marriage and the family since the famine. Much of the research done between the 1940s and 1970s connects drinking issues to the issue of sex and also to the famine.

It has also been noted by historians that Irish drinking since the famine acted as a food substitute. Mc Carthy noted that the "main difference between the drinking habits of Ireland and Great Britain is that Irishmen drink fasting whilst English men drink with and after food" (1911:296). However this relationship between food and drink was also evident in other parts of Britain and may well be related to class rather than religion. Harrison's impressive study of the temperance movement in Britain noted that these patterns were also seen amongst the poor in 19th century Britain (1971).

## 2.2 The Irish Abroad

Wherever the Irish migrated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the stereotype of their being prone to use alcohol to excess followed (Cahalan 1978; Herd 1983). In the United States (Miller, 1985), Australia (O'Farrell, 1987) and Britain (Swift and Gilley, 1989) reports of the "problem" of alcohol and the Irish were common. These fed into popular images of the Irish, and Irish men in particular, in which the presence of alcohol was ever-present (Curtis, 1971).

The literature on the Irish and alcohol in the US is vast and spread across a number of disciplines including the historical (Cahalan et al 1968; Baumohl 1990, 1991). Nineteenth century US evangelicals in the period of the Great Awakening were keen to point out that the misuse of alcohol by Irish immigrants was the product of official Roman Catholic policies on drinking and drunkenness.

Many hypotheses in the literature focus on the gender patterns of drinking and alcohol related diseases among the Irish. Patterns of drinking among Irish males were explained

as a means of escape from homes “dominated by their women” (Bales, 1962). The cultural repression of sexuality amongst Irish males, both in Ireland and in the US, was considered to have contributed to their greater need for alcohol (Opler and Singer, 1956). The unique demographic feature of middle-aged bachelorhood amongst Irish males was regarded as also contributing to heavy drinking patterns (Ghinger and Grant 1982; Knupfer 1989).

Room (1968) used the 1890 US Census data to overturn some of the perceptions of Irish immigrants and alcohol. It was noted that Irish females exceeded males in death rates from liver diseases compared with Germans who showed the highest excess of males over female deaths from such diseases. It was suggested that German disparity was a reflection of the subordinate status of women in the nineteenth-century German patriarchal household which effectively kept them from behaviour associated with alcohol. Irish women, on the other hand, occupied a much less subordinate position within the household and consequently had greater access to alcohol with often detrimental consequences. Single Irish male immigrants in the US were much more likely to drink and suffer from alcohol related diseases compared with single Irish women (Levine 1980). The latter, in fact, were far less likely to suffer from alcohol related diseases although this may reflect that many single Irish women emigrants in the US were in service and so opportunities to avail of alcohol may have been limited. Overall analyses of late nineteenth and early twentieth century US Census data has cast doubt on the peculiarities of the Irish male role as a factor in Irish alcohol use. Household dynamics were seen to be an important part of explaining levels of alcohol use (Knupfer and Room 1967).

Stivers (1976) noted that Irish drinking patterns came to the United States with the emigrants. Along with them was the entrenching in American consciousness of the Irish stereotype, that of the brawling drunkard. Stivers found that the Irish response to this stereotyping was to turn it from a negative to a more palatable one. They became instead the carefree and happy drunk. This change was in essence a function of Irish assimilation

in the US whereby it facilitated mobility out dire poverty and acceptance by Americans and other immigrant groups.

### *The Irish in Britain*

Efforts to assess the use of alcohol amongst Irish people in Britain immediately run into stereotypes of the Irish as prone to using alcohol to excess. Indeed in some quarters the term “Irish” and “alcohol” have become synonymous (Foster 1993). Despite this stereotype data relating to alcohol use and the Irish in Britain is actually quite scarce. Gray and Kinnane (1990) noted that fear of reinforcing the stereotype especially in the post-war era led to an immobilization within the Irish community leading to a paucity of data.

From the 1980s onwards the historical study of the Irish in Britain was transformed. These studies have concentrated on different aspects of the Irish in Britain but particularly on their socio-economic impact particularly in the period after 1800. A leitmotif in many of these studies is the impact of alcohol usage. Fitzgerald’s study on Irish migrants in England from 1560-1640 (1992) noted that many of those who sought assistance under the poor laws or were arrested for vagrancy had their difficulties attributed to the use of alcohol. It is a view that is evident in the more readily available archival material of the nineteenth century. The *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain* (1835) attributed many of their problems to the use of alcohol. Alcohol was seen to be a contributory factor to the higher crime rates among Irish migrants throughout the nineteenth century. Although three times more likely to face prosecution than their English neighbours and five times more likely to be convicted and imprisoned the evidence suggests that Irish criminality was strongly concentrated in the interrelated categories of drunkenness and disorderly behaviour (Swift and Gilley 1989).

There is a wide body of research on anti-Irish attitudes in Victorian Britain. For the purposes of this review an important undercurrent to much of this literature is the association of the Irish with alcohol and the perceived negative impact on their community in Britain. Commentators as diverse as Froude, Disraeli, and Carlyle

commented on the contribution of alcohol to their “clannish broils” (Gilley 1978). These views and anti-Irish prejudice in general among the Victorian intelligentsia were viewed by Curtis as evidence of whole scale anti-Irish prejudice (Curtis 1971). They have been challenged by several historians in more recent times and pertinent to this review is Gilley’s argument that British stereotypes of the Irish could be classified as benign as well as menacing. Being chaste, hospitable, witty, kind and generous were characteristics of the former stereotype whilst being drunk, feckless and unreliable were characteristics of the latter (Gilley 1978).

It is clear that the Irish in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain came to the attention of authorities and social commentators of the time for a variety of reasons including their use of alcohol. Studies by Waller (1981), Finnegan (1982) and Walter (1989) amongst others show that many of the Irish were no different to the native-born British in their social behaviour. Alcohol misuse for both groups was attributed to it being a palliative measure for living in difficult circumstances in poor areas (Mulia 2003). Historical debate has been fierce around the subject of Irish ghettos in Britain. What is clear, however, is that the concentration of poor Irish migrants in Britain’s industrial cities drew attention to problems such as alcohol misuse. Equally clear is that there were Irish migrants upwardly mobile into the upper working class or even middle class. Their social integration into these classes meant that their alcohol habits did not become a matter for social discourse. Thus the stratification of Irish migrants in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain contributed to the sometimes adverse stereotype of their relationship with alcohol.

The Labour politician Roy Hattersley, who for many years represented the heavily Irish constituency of Sparkbrook in Birmingham, noted in a portrait of the Irish that they “appear uniformly violent and unskilled, with a pick-axe in one hand, a bottle of stout in the other, and the name of a building contractor stencilled on their backs” (O’Connor 1974: 138). Hattersley’s picture focused on an image of an Irish drinker as being male, between 30 and 50 years of age, in semi or unskilled employment. Thompson (1990) did recognise such a group in his work. Their marginalization in relation to the wider Irish

community can be seen as a reflection of the cultural ambivalence towards the use of alcohol within this community. Thus it also reflects the process of distancing that occurred between the settled Irish community in Britain and those who conformed to the stereotype of the drunken Irishman.

Analysis by Mc Mahon (1993) of the General Household Surveys, which looked at the lives of largely post-war immigrants in Britain shows that the prevailing stereotype of the single, male manual worker dating back to the nineteenth century was actually more complex. Irish migrants were no more likely to use alcohol than the native-born British. Irish respondents in the GHS who had higher levels of alcohol consumption were not confined to the single male in manual occupations. Migrants in general suffer various forms of social disadvantage than the native born and Irish migrants were no different. Not only the vulnerable Irish migrant faced social isolation, poor housing, poor returns to education, and racism (both overt and covert). This structural vulnerability associated with an Irish immigrant cultural milieu in which alcohol was treated with both tolerance and condemnation suggests that the stereotype of Irish alcohol use in Britain is one that needs revision (Greenslade et al 1995; Hamson et al 1997).

### 3. Sociology

It is noted that much of the historical review above reflects the divide on the moral debate around research on alcohol. Although cognisant of the socio-cultural aspects of drinking many historians conclude with reflections on the prevalence of alcoholism including morbidity. At around the time that Jellinek (1942) was advocating a medical approach Bacon (1943) called for a sociological perspective outlining the importance of studying all forms of alcohol behaviour, in particular social drinking.

The central theory that recognised the variation in use of alcohol consumption has focused on *social ambivalence*. Myerson (1940) introduced the concept of social ambivalence to the study of alcohol by linking it to societies with histories of temperance movements. Myerson and those who followed him viewed the temperance movement as having created confusion within society at large with regards to the use of alcohol. Some

researchers such as Bales (1946) incorporated notions/elements of abstinence into their models of alcoholism. Just over a decade later Ullman (1958) moved the research forward with his “integration” theory. The absence or prevalence of ambivalence or culturally consistent stable drinking customs would, he believed, influence levels of alcoholism in a society. Advocates of Ullman’s integration theory have supported policies of responsible drinking through education and socialization channels.

The references on ambivalence in this section thus far have been used to explain drinking patterns in the US. More recently, however, Morgan and Grube (1994) reworked the ambivalence concept into a study on the Irish and alcohol. They suggested that drinking in Ireland should be considered a “classic case of ambivalence” due to the then lower consumption rate of alcohol compared to the European average; lower expenditure on alcohol; and the very visible presence of drinking in Irish society.

In the decades after Ullman’s paper a related area of sociological literature differentiated between drinking cultures in terms of whether they had “proscriptive”, “prescriptive”, “permissive” or “nonscriptive” norms on drinking (Mizruchi and Perucci, 1962; Larsen and Abu-Laban, 1968). This area drew on examples primarily from North America but Pittman (1967) drew on it and the ambivalence tradition to propose a continuum on which all cultures can be placed with regard to their attitudes to alcohol. He identified four positions from this continuum: the abstinent culture, the ambivalent culture, the permissive culture and the over-permissive culture. The latter he regarded as being only partially existent. Pittman did recognise that an abstract concept such as “cultural position” on drinking did not determine the actual patterns of drinking in a society.

A seminal and controversial paper by Room (1976) in the *American Sociological Review* attacked the post-war development of the ambivalence theory. Room viewed that “it tends to raise more issues than it resolves” (1976:1062). The work of Bales, Ullman and others is dismissed as providing models of different drinking societies. The common core to these societies is their drinking patterns can be placed along a continuum ranging from integration, ambivalence, confusion, inconsistency to ultimate conflict. Room

places the modern industrial world into the less integrated and more ambivalent part of society in terms of its alcohol use. This, he concludes, is the most difficult location resulting in high rates of alcoholism.

Room moved the debate on from ambivalence to develop the theory of “cultural wetness and dryness” (1989). The terms “wet” and “dry” as applied to the cultural position of alcohol, refer in the first instance as to whether alcohol within a societal framework could be controlled and integrated into daily life or in the second instance be excluded altogether from society. Room argues that wet and dry ideal types include distinctive patterns of consequences of drinking and different societal responses to drinking.

In some sense it can be said that alcohol statistics from Ireland to the present day reflect the ambivalence approach discussed above. Ramstedt and Hope (2005) for example conclude by noting that although a lot of alcohol is consumed in Ireland it is unlikely to be as a result of declining abstention rates as compared to other European countries these remain relatively high. This combination of high reported drinking levels and high abstention rates suggest that drinkers in Ireland drink more than in other western European countries. Inherent in these drinking levels are noted patterns of binge drinking.

A different approach to the use of the theory of ambivalence in the Irish case was O’Connor’s modified anomie scale (see Mc Closkey and Schaar 1965). Applications of the concept(s) of alienation/anomie were used in the study of alcoholism and problem drinking including problem drinking among young people. There are two ways in which the concept tends to have been used: (i) as a condition which develops prior to the onset of alcoholism or (ii) as a condition which develops along with alcoholism. O’Connor’s use of “anomie” is defined as a state of “moral emptiness”. It is evident in an individual if the learning of the norms of a society is impaired. The personal factors that impede the learning of societal norms are cognitive, emotional, and substantive emotions and attitudes. O’Connor used Mc Closkey and Schaar’s anomie scale to understand social and personal influences in the drinking behaviour of young people in Ireland and Britain.



It was found that perceptions of the opportunity structure in and their attitudes towards their country of origin were most associated with their levels of alcohol consumption. Other related variables included age at first drink, occupation, income, sensation excitement seeking behaviour and their level of religiosity.

The work of Cassidy (1996, 1998) referenced at the end of the section four below noted that many aspects of alcohol as a part of popular culture were neglected in favour of studies which concentrated on the negative or “problem” nature of alcohol. Inglis (2002) has noted, for example, that sociologists have yet to provide a major social study of the pub in Ireland. Watson (2002) noted the lack of sociological analysis of the pub and drinking in Britain also.

Given the centrality of pubs and drinking in Irish social life they have received most attention in community studies particularly those of McNabb (1964), Brody (1973), Curtin and Ryan (1989) and Peace (2001). These studies concentrate on the social meanings of public alcohol consumption and have found that Irish attitudes towards alcohol consumption and alcoholism have been tolerant. Drink is seen as being “essential as a means of initiating social contact, especially with a stranger” (Ferriter 1999: 205). Peace (2001) found that in the community of “Inveresk” those who had problems with alcohol were “looked after” by the community.

Share (2003) noted that sociological research on pubs and alcohol in Ireland almost invariably arrived at dual conclusions: that of problem drinking and its links with social problems or on the role of drinking and alcohol in relation to group, community or ethnic identity. Share seeks to develop a third sociological tradition in the Irish context, that of the pub as a site of social interaction, and one that is shaped by broader structural elements such as gender and class. He draws on the work of American sociologist Oldenburg (1999) to suggest a way that the role of the pub in Irish society may be rethought.

Oldenburg uses the concept of the “third place” to explore the historical and contemporary functions of informal settings such as shops, libraries, pubs and bars. Application of the “third place” concept may well be beneficial in Irish sociology to produce a more textured account of the pub in Irish social life. The “third place” is a location that is not work and not home but rather a public place where people can meet easily and interact. They are typified by their open, democratic nature and marked informality. Oldenburg regards them as a major contributor to the maintenance of social capital and healthy community life.

Individuals benefit from third places as they are exposed to *novelty*; gain a broader *perspective* on life; are *socially* revived after the stresses of home and/or work; and it provides them with a mean to generate and sustain *generalised friendships*. Moving from the individual to society, it benefits from the existence of such third places. Societal benefits which include many notions of social capital incorporate a broad *political role*, whereby issues are discussed and social and political values are formed and challenged; the development of *habits of association* whereby the emphasis on individualism is broken down; a degree of *local control* of activity and behaviour; and the maintenance of a Habermasian-type of *public domain* which is the antithesis of the growing privatisation of much of western society.

#### 4. Anthropology/Ethnography

Research on the use of alcohol from within the humanities, social sciences or life sciences cannot be undertaken in isolation. Within the social sciences cognate disciplines very often inform the debate in an associated discipline. In this review the debate that Room opened with anthropologists in 1984 marked the start of a long debate around new directions for research on alcohol consumption (Room 1984a; 1984b; 1990; 1991; 1993).

Room’s essential contention is that modern ethnographic literature on alcohol has developed a tendency towards “problem deflation” or under-recognition of the alcohol problems in the cultures being studied. This is the result of a number of problems

including the adoption of certain functionalist assumptions, the anthropologists were usually northern European/English speaking origins, the methodological focus, experiences in the field, and a lack of sensitivity to the potential culture-boundness of alcoholism concepts in their literature (Room 1985).

Studies on the use of alcohol have most often noted the function of drinking as being key to the maintenance of social cohesion. From a Durkheimian perspective the boundaries of the drinking group are often a means of inclusion as well as exclusion. Viewing society or a culture as an organism, functionalism has focused attention on the boundary-defining processes in social life. With regards to drinking norms ethnographic literature has stressed the importance of drinking norms and their cohesion within the societies overall normative patterns. Where anthropologists realise that problems exist with the use of alcohol they use a functionalist perspective to ascribe them to external causes such as political or economic dominance by another society often in a colonial-type relationship.

Anthropologists, in common with many other social scientists, bring to their research the perceptions and values of their own culture. Much of the ethnographic work in the twentieth century was carried out by anthropologists from English-speaking or northern European countries. Most of these countries experienced major changes in their cultural position around alcohol. Room refers to them as the “wet generations”. Many of these anthropologists viewed drinking as a “natural” state and abstinence as unnatural, a view which contributes to the whole issue of ambivalence as discussed above. Room has asserted that the “wet” perspective of modern ethnography is due also to their experiences in the field. Twentieth century anthropologists often came up against the legacy of nineteenth century missionaries who opposed many native activities. Influenced by temperance movements the missionaries strongest opprobrium was reserved for the use of alcohol.

A major problem with ethnographer’s work on alcohol is how they insert the drinking behaviour of their study populations into a disease-concept framework. To be fair to

many ethnographers they have recognised that many of the patterns that they observed did not fit the “Western” or “First world” template of alcoholism (Caetano 1989; 1993; 1997; 1998). Observing that their study populations behaviour did not fit this template many concluded that no alcoholism existed. The question that remains then is how do anthropologists establish an appropriate and culturally sensitive means of characterising these problems (Roizen 1981)?.

Responses to Room’s criticisms have come not only from within the field of anthropology but also epidemiology, sociology, education and alcohol education agencies worldwide (for a useful introduction to these criticisms see, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 25, April 1984)]. From the outset there was general agreement that the “wet generation” sobriquet is as applicable to sociologists, epidemiologists, psychologists and others as it is to ethnographers. The breath of responses to Room’s broadside shows that anthropologists setting out to study problem related drinking specifically do so through a variety of methods including ethnography. Many have agreed with Room that the atypicality of alcohol’s destructive use does not mean that it does not occur. Room’s critics, however, highlight the problems that they face from within their disciplines. By “isolating” the problem of alcohol abuse you get one picture and when you look at the broader patterns of community life you get another (Caetano and Hand 1988).

Some of the most trenchant criticisms of Room’s position have centred on appropriate methodology. Few, if any, agree with Room’s view that survey methodology is more valid than ethnographic methods, which combine observation with open-ended responses. It is agreed that there should be a place for ethnographic results, which produce a different view of a phenomenon because they emphasise context and comparison. Madsen (1984) suggested that there needed to be an acceptance in the wider academic community of the complementarity of ethnographic observations with biomedical studies especially the use of mixed methods (Hines 1993).

Room and Mäkelä (2000) have taken the debate forward again. They recognized that the sociological tradition distinguished between abstinent cultures and prescriptive cultures.

These types were implicitly contrasted with American drinking, which was variously characterized. Recognising that there were problems with the widely-used distinction between "wet" and "dry" or "temperance" cultures Room and Mäkelä proposed a four ideal-typology of the cultural position of drinking. These can be readily distinguished as: abstinent societies, constrained ritual drinking, banalised drinking, and fiesta drunkenness. Such a typology however excludes a large residual category, and a dimensional approach to typology-building may be more appropriate.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Cassidy carried out an anthropological study of alcohol usage in Ireland. She drew heavily on Barth's work on Bali (1993) to develop an appropriate framework for her study. Social research, she noted, needs to delve into the complexity of variation within a society rather than explain it away. In the Irish case there is more than one side to Irish drinking patterns and Cassidy endeavoured to move beyond the surface explanations that traditional ethnographic descriptions allowed.

## 5. Conclusions

This survey has been broad ranging and consequently a number of themes may be identified. One of the most central themes has been the image of the Irish drinker. Whether at home or abroad, the patterns of drinking amongst the Irish have been influenced by changes in Irish society, ranging from post-famine, especially in demographic patterns, through to changes brought on by the growing affluence of Irish society.

A survey of the history of the Irish and alcohol highlights that it was part of everyday life. Alcohol use was a feature of both work and social life and it also became increasingly important in the economic life of the country. Commentators throughout the centuries have noted that social problems did arise from the over-use of alcohol. These informed the views of those who supported the Temperance movements be it from a moderationist or teetotal standpoint. The entrenchment of teetotalism in Ireland has had an impact on sociologists who try to explain subsequent Irish drinking patterns.

The history of Irish emigration has meant that the stereotype of the Irish drinker has become a more global one. In the US the stereotype has been one of drinking to excess. Research has shown that gender and class differences were also evident. The historical stereotype has almost haunted the Irish community in Britain. The attitudes of the community as a whole can be characterized as “ambivalent” in that it was acknowledged that alcohol was consumed but the negative aspects associated with the misuse of alcohol brought unwanted attention upon them. The secondary analysis of data has allowed scientists to overturn the “single, male, manual” worker stereotype. The difficulties of being an emigrant, of either gender or any class, contributed to the problems that some had with alcohol.

This survey has shown that developments in the field of sociology on alcohol use were concomitant with those in the medical field that focused on negative outcomes such as alcoholism and morbidity. From the 1940s a number of different theories have emerged in the sociological field, which have influenced research in all cognate disciplines. Initial theories on the ambivalence of alcohol use in some societies, including Ireland, gave way to theories of integration or the emergence of the responsible use of alcohol. Theoretical developments in the 1960s moved on to develop models of different drinking cultures and to place societies within such a framework. These models are notable for the fact that, unlike the simultaneous strand of research in the medical field, which focused on alcoholism, they concentrated on the more social aspects of alcohol use.

The emergence of Room from the field of sociology in the 1970s has had a major impact on alcohol research in all disciplines. He moved away from the cultural centered approach of alcohol and firmly towards models, which focused on the negative outcomes. Moving away from the cultural continuums he developed new theories on “wet” and “dry” societies whereby each had distinctive patterns, consequences and societal responses towards alcohol use. Tangential to this work was O’Connor’s study of young drinkers in Ireland and Britain (1978). She used a modified anomie scale to explain the patterns that she uncovered in her study. Although groundbreaking in its time many of the variables isolated by O’Connor to explain her results would have to be discarded as

irrelevant to current drinking patterns. Much of the sociological work referenced here focused on the moral aspect. A more recent development has moved the focus from the moral to the role of alcohol in popular culture through the pub or “third place”.

The concurrent streams of research on alcohol were discussed more openly since the 1980s by the debate initiated by Room on the shortcoming of anthropologists in the area. Criticisms centred on their use of functionalism to support that alcohol use is a key to the maintenance of social cohesion; they imposed their largely first world perceptions on their studies; and they ignored the disease-concept framework alcohol use because of their cultural sensitivity. The debate which ensued can be summarised as giving rise to one of two broad perspectives: alcohol use has a negative outcome in terms of anti-social behaviour, alcoholism and morbidity or alcohol use has to be considered in terms of a broader pattern of community life inherent in which may be these negative aspects. Use of a particular methodology tended to support one or other of these perspectives.

As noted at the outset this survey has highlighted the different aspects of alcohol use and its relation to the Irish in particular. The multifaceted aspects of alcohol use by different disciplines serves to highlight that they can inform the work of cognate disciplines. Thus a multi-disciplinary approach has much to recommend in capturing all aspects from the social nuances of a particular group in society through to the epidemiological consequences of its misuse.

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