

Fire and Brimstone, Lager and Pot: Religious Involvement and Substance Use*

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Data from nearly 5,000 high school seniors from six states in the northeastern region of the United States are analyzed using religious preference and attendance to predict substance use (hard liquor, beer, marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, heroin, LSD, and cocaine). It was hypothesized that (1) denomination and attendance would be significantly related to the use of alcohol and that an interaction would occur between these two predictors, (2) church attendance should have special impact within proscriptive denominations, and (3) for harder drugs, church attendance would be inversely related with use. Analysis-of-variance and multiple classification analysis were employed. Weekly use and having ever employed the substance were utilized for alcohol and marijuana and having ever used the substance was used for hard drugs. The data support the hypotheses.

The relationship between religiousness and drug use has received attention both from scholars in the sociology of religion and from those concerned with mood altering substances and deviance. Both groups emphasize involvement in the religious system as related to lower rates of substance use and deviance. Little regard has been paid to differences among denominations in their outlooks toward drugs, including alcohol. Yet the older literature stressed such differences, noting that some denominations had taken strong stands against the use of alcohol and that these denominations were still identified with these positions (Bainton, 1945; Landis, 1946; Thorner, 1953). Some religious bodies have maintained their traditional policies, for example, the Baptists and Quakers against any alcohol use, the Catholics and Episcopalians for moderation but not for prohibition. Others changed in their position, but have been identified for two or more decades with their current stand. The Methodists are a special case, only recently relaxing their prohibition standard (Houghland et al., 1974).

In the older studies it was observed that denominations could have an effect at two levels: through the impress of official ideology upon members and as the result of denominational support of social movements, especially prohibition (see Gusfield, 1963). As a result of church stance, norms would become internalized through the striving of the church member for cognitive consistency. In contrast, contemporary studies of religious influence emphasize social participation theory—that social control is exerted through interaction with other parishioners who have expectations for normative behavior, rather than control being exerted through an official pronouncement of the church hierarchy. (For a

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comparison of these two views, see White, 1968.) The perspectives, seemingly disparate, cohere when church bodies take stances that reflect the views held by most of the parishioners.

Both forms of religious influence were utilized by Britt and Campbell (1977): (1) as part of the social environment by which the individual is exposed to social pressures to avoid drinking through involvement in church activities and (2) as part of normative structure, such as believing that "drinking is wrong as a matter of principle" and that "God will punish you if you drink alcohol." They do not employ denomination as a variable. In their conclusion they emphasize the importance of the normative structure of self-standard upon alcohol use, and they note that the individual selects social environments that support the "adjusting [of] his drinking behavior and norms to one another."

Other researchers (identified below) generally neglect that normative influence of religion but do employ, however, the sanctioning power of religion, using belief in afterlife and the devil to form a "supernatural sanction scale." That their major emphasis is upon church attendance rather than denomination indicates that theirs is an interactionist perspective. We turn now to the findings by researchers with this deviance and, implicitly, interactionist perspective.

After commenting that Hirschi and Stark (1969) reported little relationship between religious involvement and adolescent delinquency and concluded that religion was "irrelevant to delinquency," Burkett and White (1974) hypothesize that the ascetic morality engendered through church participation should increase the likelihood that frequent attenders would not engage in victimless crimes, especially alcohol and marijuana use. They studied high school seniors in three Pacific Northwest schools, and they report moderately strong, inverse relationships between religious attendance and the use of these substances. Also, belief in supernatural sanctions and belief that substance use is sinful were related to diminished use. Differences by denomination are not presented.

Two studies presented in 1977 were replications of the work of Burkett and White, but introduced important situational aspects. Higgins and G. Albrecht used data from Atlanta tenth-graders to show a moderate, inverse relationship between church attendance and delinquent behavior, including the use of narcotics and the drinking of alcohol. They suggest (p. 957) that religion, including church attendance, is more salient in the South than for the California sample of Hirschi and Stark and, hence, its greater effect in Atlanta.

S. Albrecht et al. (1977) employed data from Mormons residing in Idaho, Utah, and southern California. Religious attitudes and behavior were more likely to reduce victimless than victim deviance. Victimless deviance include the use of beer, hard liquor, and marijuana which are strongly prohibited by Mormon ideology.

In a later study Burkett (1980) surveyed junior high school students in a Pacific Northwest city for the purpose of distinguishing the standards of ascetic morality from the effects of religiosity and denomination (Catholic versus Protestant) in relation to alcohol use. Consistent with the findings in Burkett and White (1974), religiosity and church attendance were found to be related to a lower incidence of alcohol consumption, as was acceptance of the ascetic standard regarding abstinence. Further analysis revealed the belief that alcohol is sinful to be held principally by Protestants who had high religiosity scores.

A study by Jensen and Erickson (1979) tested for the interaction of denomination and attendance in predicting 18 acts of delinquency, using data from Mormon, Catholic, and Protestant high school students in Arizona. Church attendance was found to be more strongly related to substance use among Mormon youth than Catholics or Protestants. This was less true for more serious drug use. Jensen and Erickson found no difference in the impact of religion on victimless versus victim acts of delinquency. In their conclusion, they note (p. 169) that "consideration ought to be given to the types of moral messages presented by specific denominations or churches."

In a recent study of youths in grades seven through twelve in the Brazos Valley area of Texas, McIntosh et al. (1981:70) report that "religion, for all its emphasis on correct moral behavior, is most effective in controlling modest forms of unconventional behavior such as adolescent beer drinking." This finding agrees with those we have already reviewed; as employed in these studies it is victimless deviance which is more "modest." More serious drug use has a weaker relationship with religiosity. More important for our study, McIntosh et al. state (p. 70) that "despite most of various religious/denominational differences with regard to official interpretations of 'upright' behavior, the impact of religion as a social control is universal. It has the same effect for Catholics, fundamentalists, and liberals alike." (Baptists were an exception; for them attendance had pronounced impact.) Their sample heavily consisted of Black Americans and Caucasians; there were relatively few Mexican-Americans. It is possible that their social environment was so uniformly religious as to preclude major denominational variation in stance toward alcohol use.

The Present Study

The conclusion reached by Jensen and Erickson that we should pay attention to standards of the different denominations and the lack of clear findings in this regard, perhaps because only two or three denominations have sufficient N's or are only represented in these studies, brings us to the present study. Our analysis utilizes both the normative and the interactionist effects of religion upon substance use. From the normative perspective we anticipated that attendance in Protestant bodies that have, or until recently have had, proscriptive norms toward alcohol should be inversely related to alcohol use. For the other Protestant bodies and for Catholics, we would expect little or no impact, given that these religious organizations basically affirm secular attitudes about the use of alcohol. From the interactionist perspective, we expect attendance to have an effect on alcohol use. In addition, we might also expect significant interaction between denomination and attendance in predicting alcohol use, with attendance having a greater effect in the proscriptive than in the prescriptive Protestant or Catholic bodies. It should be noted, however, that attendance involves not only interaction but is also a measure of exposure to the teaching of church norms.

The use of marijuana and harder drugs constitutes an act generally disapproved by society as well as by churches. Normatively, religiousness represents conforming behavior (see Goldsen et al., 1960:177-80; Putney and Middleton, 1961; Weigert and Thomas, 1970). Jessor and Jessor (1975:48) report the anticipated effects of church and other conventional group participation on drug use. Second, social participation in religious organizations would involve sanctioning as the deviant individual interacted with fellow church mem-

bers. Such sanctioning would also occur in other conventional group settings as well, and, hence, church attendance should not be a unique force for curtailing such acts (Burkett and White, 1974:455-56). Figure 1 represents a summary of the impact attendance should have on drug use.

Figure 1

PREDICTED IMPACT OF ATTENDANCE ON
SUBSTANCE USE, SPECIFYING RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Religious Preference	Substance Use		
	Alcohol	Marijuana	Hard Drugs
Proscriptive Protestant	High	Low	Low
Other Protestant	None	Low	Low
Catholic	None	Low	Low

Research Procedures

The data were collected by the second coauthor in the spring of 1977. The data are from a survey of high school seniors from six states in the Northeast region of the U.S., constituting a well-balanced mix of urban and rural schools. Approximately 70 percent of the students were drawn from 14 public schools and 30 percent from 13 Catholic high schools. The 4,491 usable questionnaires represent 76 percent of the total senior classes; the 24 percent loss represents absentees, those handing in blank or incomplete questionnaires, and those giving erratic and unusable responses. Additional loss comes from no response to the denomination question (the N of 4941 includes this 1 percent), an item on use of a substance (an additional 1.5 or 2 percent), and similar small losses with other variables.

The analysis had the dependent variables dichotomized. For alcohol and marijuana, this was done in two ways: (1) whether or not the respondent had ever employed their use and (2) whether or not the substance was used weekly. There were two measures of hard drug use: (1) whether the respondent had ever used amphetamines or barbiturates, and (2) whether the respondent had used heroin or LSD or cocaine. For alcohol use, the respondent's responses about the use of hard liquor and beer were used. In order to present parallel data, only the analysis involving whether the respondent had *ever used* hard liquor, beer, Amphetamines/barbiturates, and heroin/cocaine/LSD will be reported by displaying hard data. The findings for those analyses not reported resemble those shown.

Denominations that were coded include (1) Catholic, (2) Episcopal, (3) Presbyterian, (4) Congregational, (5) Lutheran, (6) Methodist, (7) Baptist, (8) other Protestant bodies (these were fundamentalist), (9) Jewish, and (10) those with no church identification. The 23 Black Muslims were combined with the 279 "other Protestants" in that all share proscriptive norms and a sectlike position in American society.

Later in the analysis, the sectlike category and the Baptists and Methodists will be combined as a separate, proscriptive grouping, which, again, is basically Protestant. The remaining Protestants will be combined as an "all other Protestants" or prescriptive grouping; this includes Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and so on. The third basic category will

consist of Catholics. Those who are Jewish or have no religious identification will be excluded at this point in the analysis. From the original total of 4,941, those who are Jewish (89), have no religious identification (275), or were nonrespondents to the identification question (46) are subtracted, leaving a total of 4,531 for analysis.

Church attendance is trichotomized as low (less than once a month), moderate (at least monthly), and high (weekly). Later in the analysis, it is dichotomized as less than weekly and weekly.

Other variables include residence, occupation and education of the father. Residence, which was employed because Jensen and Erickson (1979) also reported that denominational differences were more pronounced in the small than the large towns, was dichotomized as SMSA and non-SMSA in the analysis. Residence and occupation and education of the father had no significant effects on substance use, nor were there significant interactions employing these variables that resulted in the analysis. Hence, these variables will not be mentioned further.

Analysis of variance (and breakdown by means) and Multiple Classification Analysis were used in the statistical analysis. Where interaction was present (as indicated by ANOVA), combined categories of the predictors were used in inspecting the means. Given that the dependent variables were dichotomized, these means are shown as percentages.

The Findings

Table 1 presents the unadjusted and adjusted means by religious identification and attendance. The effect of each predictor is adjusted by the other through the use of MCA, which assumes the absence of interaction between the predictors. Significant interaction between these two predictors is expected, however, for beer and hard liquor use. Table 1 also presents the percent of the variance explained by each predictor and through interaction between the two predictors. It can be observed that attendance and denomination are about equal in their power to predict the use of beer or hard liquor and that significant interaction occurs between these two variables. The four to seven percent of variance explained by the two predictors is relatively small, but this is consistent with the findings reported by others. It can also be observed that interaction between the two predictors is not present when the dependent variable is marijuana or a harder drug.

Table 2 presents the percentages reporting alcohol use by the combined categories of denomination and attendance. Here the interaction pattern can be observed: attendance has a clear impact within the proscriptive denominations but only a small relationship exists in the other religious bodies.

Table 3 reports the zero-order relationship between attendance and the use of five classes of substances, within religious groups classified as proscriptive Protestant, the remaining other Protestants, and Catholic. Those who are Jewish or have no religious identification are excluded. Here attendance is dichotomized, since Table 2 shows that the critical difference in alcohol use comes between those with high and moderate attendance. Generally the expectations summarized in Figure 1 are realized in this table, with two exceptions: (1) a moderate, inverse relationship exists between attendance and the use of marijuana on the part of proscriptive Protestants, whereas a low but significant, inverse relationship was expected; and (2) some moderate, inverse relationships exist between attendance and the use of harder drugs for Catholics, while relationships of low

TABLE 1

PERCENT REPORTING SUBSTANCE USE (EVER) BY
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE AND ATTENDANCE (MCA-ANOVA)

Predictors	Percent Reporting Use of									
	Beer		Hard Liquor		Marijuana		Amphetamine/ Barbiturate		LSD/Heroin/ Cocaine	
. . . Percentages . . .										
	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.
RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE										
Proscriptive										
Protestant										
Sectlike (293)	69	68	69	62	54	52	26	25	16	15
Baptist (270)	75	74	62	60	50	47	16	14	10	9
Methodist (328)	81	78	67	65	48	43	18	14	8	6
Other Protestant										
Lutheran (188)	84	82	71	68	42	37	17	14	5	3
Un. Ch. Ch. (119)	84	82	76	74	46	41	18	15	7	5
Presbyter. (172)	84	81	75	72	53	46	21	17	10	8
Epsicopal (125)	86	83	79	76	55	49	22	19	12	10
Other										
Catholic (2967)	87	88	75	77	49	52	19	21	8	9
Jewish (88)	75	71	80	75	50	41	14	8	7	3
None (269)	87	83	76	71	67	56	32	24	16	12
eta/beta	.14	.16	.10	.12	.09	.09	.09	.09	.10	.09
RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE										
Low (1973)	88	89	78	79	62	62	28	28	14	14
Moderate (1020)	87	86	75	75	55	55	23	23	10	11
High (1820)	78	77	66	65	35	34	10	10	3	3
eta/beta	.12	.15	.12	.14	.24	.26	.19	.21	.16	.17
Two-Way ANOVA—Percent of Variance Explained Shown:										
Main Effects (always significant, P < .001, for each predictor)										
Attendance	2.0		1.7		5.8		3.8		2.4	
Denomination	2.5		1.5		.8		.8		.7	
Interaction	2.4 ^b		1.1 ^b		.5 ^a		.4 ^a		.3 ^a	

^a $p > .05$
^b $p < .001$

Note: The Ns (above) vary slightly: for Protestant bodies by 4 (the range), for Catholics by 28, for Jews the Ns are 87 and 88, for none by 15; for religious attendance by 15, 9, and 13, in order.

magnitude were expected. It might be noted that the eta and beta coefficients have not been given positive or negative signs. The direction of the relationship can be determined from a visual inspection of the percentages; these relationships are in the expected direction.

TABLE 2

PERCENT REPORTING THE USE OF ALCOHOL (EVER) BY
COMBINED CATEGORIES OF RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE AND ATTENDANCE

Religious Preference	Categories of Attendance:	Percent Reporting the Use of					
		Beer			Hard Liquor		
		Low	Moderate	High	Low	Moderate	High
PROSCRIPTIVE PROTESTANT							
Sectlike		85 (152)	76 (42)	43 (104)	77 (150)	55 (42)	43 (103)
Baptist		86 (143)	86 (49)	47 (79)	71 (143)	64 (50)	43 (79)
Methodist		88 (190)	77 (79)	60 (60)	74 (191)	65 (79)	48 (60)
OTHER PROTESTANT							
Lutheran		87 (100)	81 (59)	81 (32)	75 (99)	71 (59)	56 (32)
United Church of Christ		89 (63)	83 (35)	68 (22)	86 (63)	63 (35)	68 (22)
Presbyterian		86 (107)	80 (39)	81 (26)	75 (107)	77 (39)	69 (26)
Episcopal		83 (72)	88 (33)	90 (20)	80 (71)	79 (33)	79 (19)
OTHER							
Catholic		89 (854)	90 (666)	83 (1477)	79 (850)	80 (664)	70 (1470)
Jewish		76 (71)	55 (11)	(100) (6)	83 (72)	64 (11)	(67) (6)
None		89 (247)	79 (14)	64 (11)	79 (246)	71 (14)	18 (11)

TABLE 3

EFFECT OF ATTENDANCE ON SUBSTANCE USE
SPECIFYING RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE

Religious Preference	Etas (MCA) in Predicting Use				
	Beer	Hard Liquor	Marijuana	Amphetamine/ Barbiturate	LSD/Heroin/ Cocaine
Proscriptive Protestant	.38 ^d	.27 ^d	.29 ^d	.14 ^d	.13 ^d
Other Protestant	.07 ^a	.10 ^a	.16 ^d	.13 ^c	.13 ^c
Catholic	.09 ^d	.10 ^d	.25 ^d	.24 ^d	.18 ^d
^a P > .05	^b P < .05		^c P < .01		^d P < .001

Note: Attendance was collapsed into low and moderate versus high. Etas from MCA lack signs; the relationships here are inverse.

Conclusions

No major religious body has taken a position in favor of moderate use of marijuana or hard drugs. Since the perception of the normative position on these substances does not differ between denominations, marijuana and hard drug use among adolescents varies only according to attendance which offers exposure to religious norms and reinforcement of societal expectations. This finding underscores religiousness as representing conforming behavior.

The various denominations differ markedly, however, in their positions on the legitimacy of moderate alcohol use and, hence, alcohol use varies according to denominational identification. Clearly then, both denomination and attendance should be employed in studies of substance use.

We have not been able to address the question of whether the impact of religion on alcohol is through sanctioning which occurs in interaction with other parishioners and, presumably, in interaction with peers who may be fellow parishioners, or whether it takes place because norms are internalized through religious socialization. We did note that the perspective taken by the researcher influences whether the denominational variable is included or deleted in the study of the relationship between religiosity and substance use.

Future research should tease out the relative influence of denominational norms and social interaction. Generally, these two are in agreement because denominations that are proscriptive especially thrive where the cultural setting includes norms against alcohol and, there, individuals who are deviant by openly using alcohol select not to join these religious bodies. For example, Baptists in the South find denominational norms reinforced by the same standards held by fellow parishioners. In much the same way Cahalan and Room (1974:193-220) examined the ecology of drinking problems in San Francisco by using census tracts and friendship patterns and ethnicity, a researcher of denominational and parishioner interaction effects could analyze data collected at the congregational or parish level. Of special interest would be Methodist churches in diverse settings. It is the "church" type of religious organization that is especially vulnerable to secular forces (Zald and Ash, 1966; Johnson, 1963; Benson and Dorsett, 1971; Nelsen, 1981) and, hence, the traditional proscriptive norms held by Methodists should be vulnerable to secularization. The change in their denominational standard on alcohol (Houghland et al., 1974), noted earlier, is both testimony to this and might contribute further to changes in parishioners' standards. A clear finding in the present study is that Methodist youths resemble those who are sectlike or Baptist in that attendance and alcohol use are inversely related. In displaying this effect the Methodist church resembles the proscriptive rather than prescriptive Protestant bodies in spite of change in denominational sanction. Whether it is denominational norms or interaction with peers that is operable remains for study. The finding in regard to the Methodist youths suggest that it is the latter that is critical.

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