

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AN ALCOHOL PROBLEM

THE CASE OF MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVERS AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE 1980s

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Social problems have careers that ebb and flow independent of the "objective" incidence of the behaviors thought to constitute them. This is nowhere more amply illustrated than in the history of alcohol issues. I offer here a description of the rise and impact of Mothers Against Drunk Driving—the latest in a long line of social movements that have contended over the definition of alcohol problems—and an interpretation of why this movement managed to make drinking-driving into a major public problem in the conservative ethos of the 1980s.

The anti-drunk driving movement did not spring from any rise in the incidence or prevalence of drinking-driving or in accidents thought to be related to it. In fact, the rate of road accidents in the United States remains lower than in most other Western industrial democracies. It is widely believed that people who drink and drive end up in accidents in which there is tragic and costly loss of life, limb, and property.¹ However, none of the organizations or leaders of the movement against drinking-driving have even suggested that their efforts were prompted by some sudden rash of drinking-driving accidents. On the contrary, all claim that their work arose from the fact that the injustices attributed to drinking-driving have long been a problem and have never been treated seriously by legislatures and courts. Indeed, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the federal government promoted and funded a variety of drinking-driving countermeasures, and arrests did rise in several states. However, despite a steady stream of accidents and the

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best efforts of both local civic groups across the country and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), it was not until 1981 that a *movement* against drunk driving arose and succeeded in putting the issue in the public policy spotlight.²

Thus, the thematic questions addressed in this article: If the carnage along U.S. highways thought to be causally related to drinking-driving has long been part of our culture—and always an unacceptable one—while a national movement against this has never before existed, why all this fuss *now*? How was a problem long held to be merely an unfortunate fact of modern life—or, in Joseph Gusfield's phrase, a "folk crime" (an offense routinely committed by many a "good citizen")—reconstituted into a focal point of public outrage? And why should this occur in the early 1980s?

By making this sort of question central, I am placing my analysis of MADD squarely within the social constructionist tradition in the study of social problems. This tradition has focused on the claims-making activities and structuring practices that, whether or not "objective" human suffering exists or is rising, constitute the *sine qua non* of a social problem.³ Such an analytic stance draws attention to the role of interest groups and social movements that contend for ownership of a problem and the power to define and give public prominence to it.

The MADD case raises the issue of the *viability* of claims made by social movement organizations about putative conditions being problems.⁴ I suggest that the viability of a claim that a problem exists depends upon the *interaction* of at least two factors—the credibility of the claims-makers and the historical context in which such claims become utterable and resonate with the dominant discourse. In the case of MADD, the credibility of those who have lost children to drunk drivers has, quite rightly in my view, never been questioned. But the fact that thousands of such victims and their family members have been heretofore mute is intriguing. After describing the rise and impact of MADD, I shall argue that its foci and tactics succeeded when they did largely (although not merely) because they were in harmony with the morality, policy ideologies, and social-control strategies of the Reagan administration and a nascent right. First, however, it is useful to review briefly the history of earlier constructions of alcohol problems.

The modern understanding of alcohol as a dangerous and problematic substance was first articulated at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States. In the colonial era alcohol consumption was virtually universal and drunkenness common practice. Even the Puritans deemed alcohol "the Good Creature of God." The radical shift in problem definition and public discourse by which the "liquor problem" was constituted began with the writings of Dr. Benjamin Rush. Over the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Rush and a variety of other medical, religious, and business leaders established the anti-alcohol or "temperance" movement and redefined alcohol from the Good Creature to a destructive, demonic, and addictive substance. Temperance authorities scape-

goated alcoholic beverages, blaming drink for most of the ills in American society at the dawn of industrialization—poverty, business failure, broken homes, madness, immorality, and crime. The emerging temperance ideology held that alcohol was *inherently* addicting, and that it weakened the moral and mental as well as the physical constitution of drinkers. By the 1830s, such a view spread downward from elites to the middle classes, and later to women in particular, who saw solutions to the alcohol problem as central to a broader moral reformation. As would be the case with MADD a century later, temperance groups frequently held that “mothers and children” were “the innocent victims” of alcohol.⁵

In the twentieth century a new wave of prohibitionist agitation developed in response to new economic and political conditions, although it continued to scapegoat alcoholic beverages for most social ills and to hold out abstinence as the only hope. Prohibitionists took on the liquor industry and the saloon in an attempt to use the power of state to eliminate alcohol completely and thus help impose a new order on an increasingly conflict-ridden society. Levine captures this well:

In the 19th century, the American middle class thought itself hegemonic; temperance was aimed at bringing the lower classes and outsiders into the middle class society and culture. In the 20th century, however, the middle class of small businessmen and entrepreneurs felt increasingly overwhelmed and displaced by the growing corporate, industrial society. Enormous corporations called “trusts” seemed more and more to control America. Further, the undeniable presence of a permanent industrial working class was shattering the dream of America as the land where everyone could achieve middle class success. . . . The old middle class of small businessmen, and the new middle class of professionals and technical experts, as well as representatives of the corporations, all shared the concern with finding new ways of maintaining social, political, and economic order. The growth of middle class support for legislative and Constitutional prohibition should be understood, paradoxically, both as attacks on the symbols of corporate capitalist society, and also as part of a larger . . . “search for order”. . . .

To the old 19th century fear of the barroom as the breeding ground of immorality and personal ruin, was added the almost total identification of it as alien and subversive; the saloon was unmiddle class and unAmerican. Saloons were now not only immoral, they were also political evils, where unions were organized, where urban political machines purchased votes, and where anarchists and communists found recruits. The obliteration of the saloon, it was argued, was a precondition for the management of America in the 20th century.⁶

For both material and ideological reasons, the captains of industry had by 1915 thrown their decisive weight behind Prohibition. Business leaders held that in addition to a more productive labor force, prohibition would reduce industrial accidents and workers’ compensation costs. Also, because workers would be unable to spend their wages on whiskey, their disposable income

would rise such that there would be fewer wage demands, unions, and strikes. Moreover, without alcohol there would be less poverty, disease, madness, and crime, and therefore less need for taxes to support institutions and services. Perhaps as important to a corporate elite then under fire for their avarice was the legitimation to be gained by expressing concern about the nation's social problems—particularly when booze rather than business was construed as culprit. As historian Andrew Sinclair put it, "prohibition became a sort of moral mask for big business."⁷ As I will suggest later, this kind of link to business, at least to the alcohol industry, is also critical in understanding MADE.

Little more than a decade would pass before the onset of the Depression when much of the corporate elite made an about face and began to push for Repeal. As Levine shows, leading figures among the corporate rich wanted taxes on alcohol restored in order to reduce both business and personal tax burdens. Further, many of them began to fear that widespread violations of Prohibition were delegitimizing other forms of law as well, including property law. Ironically, many of the same economic arguments used in support of Prohibition were later invoked to justify its repeal. Former Prohibitionist John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was only the most prominent of corporate leaders to argue that a legalized, healthy liquor industry would mean a desperate-needed increase in employment and tax revenues that could help pull the nation out of the Depression.⁸ In a scant dozen years, spirits were transformed from the source to the solution of economic woes, from panacea to panacea.

At the height of the Great Depression, Repeal set the stage for the redefinition of alcohol problems with which we are most familiar, the alcoholism-as-addictive-disease paradigm. This model of alcohol problems was invented (some might say reinvented, as it borrows heavily from temperance ideology) by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935. It has been clear to most Americans since the end of the nineteenth century that the case for alcohol being inherently addicting was weak. Most drinkers, after all, never became drunks, and the notion that chronic drunkenness was at least in part due to individual character was always part of popular understanding. Yet, throughout the conflict over Prohibition the "alcohol problem" had been seen as just that—a problem having to do with the substance itself. AA set in motion a process that soon succeeded in radically transforming the definition of the problem. In the broadest sense, the alcohol problem was, in Gusfield's phrase, reprivatized—the evil shifted from the bottle to the person. AA maintained that people who drank compulsively had a disease, like an allergic reaction to alcohol. This shift did not signify a complete break with temperance though the disease still was said to be progressive, its defining symptom a "loss of control" over drinking, its cure abstinence. However, AA and the emerging alcoholism movement established a new discourse about alcohol problems: the individual drinker became the locus of "the alcohol problem," and, equally significant, the range of public problems held to be alcohol-related shrank in proportion to the growing influence of the disease model.⁹

AA and the alcoholism movement rapidly gained important adherents who helped establish the disease concept as the dominant paradigm in both social policy and public discourse. By the close of World War II, Yale had established a Center on Alcohol and a Summer School in Alcohol Studies. The scientists associated with these institutions spread a new, medical rather than moral conception of alcohol problems. With their focus on the plight of the individual alcoholic, they steered an ideological course around all of the public, i.e., social and political, dimensions of alcohol that were so central to and problematic for the earlier temperance and Prohibition movements. Indeed, they held that only by dropping alcohol's political baggage could they overcome the moral obstacles to "scientific" treatment for problem drinkers. At the close of World War II, the activist core of the alcoholism movement also established what is now called the National Council on Alcoholism with the express purpose of spreading their new conception of alcoholism.¹⁰ Throughout the post-war period and up to the present, the alcoholism movement has succeeded in maintaining the disease model as the dominant frame through which alcohol problems are viewed in American culture and policy circles alike. As the welfare state grew, this model became ensconced in public agencies at all levels of government, focusing funding, scholarship, and public attention on the disease of alcoholism rather than a range of alcohol problems. In contrast to the morality plays of earlier epochs, on this new "scientific" stage few villains were visible—only victims of a disease in need of treatment.

There are now two generations in the United States who have no personal memory of the "failed" (Herbert Hoover called it "noble in intention") experiment that was Prohibition. They have grown up in a culture in which both drinking and the discourse of disease are taken for granted. If mass-circulation periodicals are any guide, however, there has been more interest in alcohol problems in the past five years than at any time in the past fifty. In its New Year's Eve edition of 1984, *Newsweek's* cover story, "Alcohol on the Rocks," cited "the new prohibitionists" and "the country's new Temperance movement" as having arisen from the anti-drunk-driving movement. Although a shift toward drinking lighter-alcohol beverages had begun in the late 1970s as the baby boom generation became more health conscious, and despite the fact that the scholarly literature in alcohol studies had begun to focus on a range of drinking problems at about the same time, the anti-drinking-driving movement became the centerpiece of the media's attention to the so-called new temperance.

Following *Newsweek*, *Business Week* (2/25/85) offered a similar cover story called "The Sobering of America," and, not to be outdone, *Fortune* contributed to this emerging news theme by following with "America's New Abstinence" (3/18/85). In April 1985, *Newsweek's* "On Campus" edition featured "A New Prohibition" as its lead, and told of "a new era of campus prohibition" springing "from the nationwide crusade against drunken driving." The next month, *Time's* cover, "Cocktails 1985: America's New Drinking

Habits" (5/20/85), referred repeatedly to "the new temperance" in the same terms.¹¹ These were only the most prominent of hundreds of news articles on alcohol issues, most centering on the movement against drunk driving, particularly the largest, most prominent and powerful organization in that movement, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

A Brief History of MADD

In May of 1980, 13-year-old Cari Lightner was walking along a bicycle path in the central valley town of Fair Oaks, California, a suburb of Sacramento. She was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver who was later found to have been intoxicated. He was, moreover, both on probation for previous Driving Under the Influence (DUI) convictions and out on bail for another hit-and-run DUI offense a few days before hitting Lightner. In discovering these facts and following the defendant through the criminal justice process, Cari's mother, Candy Lightner, a part-time real estate agent, grew increasingly outraged at what she perceived as the extraordinary leniency with which DUI offenses were routinely handled. She began channelling her grief and anger into efforts to get tougher DUI laws passed by the California legislature.¹²

Most of her initial inquiries were met with indifference by policy makers who tended not to define DUI as a politically "hot" issue. Ms. Lightner has often remarked publicly that prior to her daughter's death she had been apolitical—neither registered to vote nor able to distinguish Democrat from Republican. After being shocked by the legal leniency with which her daughter's killer was treated and repeatedly rebuffed by representatives, her eyes were opened to ways political. With the aid of a few sympathetic legislators, she was given a crash course in lobbying. She began holding dramatic press conferences, giving tearful and angry testimony before legislative committees, and organizing what was to become Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

MADD was incorporated as a non-profit organization in August 1980. Lightner worked tirelessly, full-time on building the organization, and invested her daughter's insurance settlement and her own savings to get it off the ground. She enlisted the help of the executive director of the District Attorneys Association, a few legislative aides who were interested in the issue and skilled at political work, and a few friends and dedicated volunteers. The fledgling group pushed then-Governor Jerry Brown to set up a state task force on drunk driving. Like most legislators, he hesitated initially on the grounds that there was not sufficient citizen interest, and assumed that people tended to feel "There but for the grace of God go I." The governor soon sensed, however, that potential support existed (and little if any opposition), so he set up a task force and appointed Lightner to it.

A MADD board of directors was formed from the nucleus of early activists, and they got a small grant from the American Council on Alcohol Problems for a brochure. Next the board wrote a grant proposal and received \$65,000 from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to organize

more MADD chapters. This was quickly followed by an unstipulated \$100,000 grant from the Levy Foundation, a principal benefactor of which was an insurance company heir who also had lost a daughter to a drinking driver. By 1982 MADD had begun to employ a direct-mail solicitation firm with experience in mailings to Christian constituencies. With growing media coverage and the power of computerized, direct-mail solicitations, "the money just literally started pouring in," according to an original board member.

From the beginning MADD billed itself as "The Voice of the Victim," a victim's rights organization concerned with advocating for and counseling bereaved relatives, preparing them for a trying adjudication process in which "the rights are with the defendant," and ostentatiously monitoring courtrooms in the hope of insuring more convictions and stiffer sentencing of drinking-drivers.¹³ Although the victim remained the focus at local chapters, the strategy of the national organization grew increasingly media oriented. Lightner's preoccupation quickly became the maximization of media attention to what she called the "dirty little secret" of drinking-driving: that 250,000 American lives had been lost in "alcohol-related auto crashes" in the past decade, "70 Americans a day, one every 23 minutes"; that drunk driving was "the leading cause of death for 16-24 year olds," 360 of whom are injured in drunk-driving accidents daily; that a million crippling or serious injuries occur in the United States annually due to drinking drivers; that all this costs more than \$5 billion per year; that on an average weekend night one of ten drivers on the road is intoxicated; and, importantly, that of every 2,000 drinking drivers on the road, only one will get arrested, and the chances of even that one getting any "serious" penalty are "mathematically insignificant."¹⁴ Unlike some other groups such as the Center for Science in the Public Interest, whose strategy was to work against the alcohol industry's massive promotion of drinking in general, MADD focused exclusively on the sins of the drinking driver.

In the past, without a visible moral entrepreneur to give a human voice to these figures, drinking-driving tended to be treated matter-of-factly as episodic, unconnected accidents. But with the rise of MADD, the media seemed willing to oblige in recounting such compelling statistics from a dramatic spokesperson such as Lightner. She appeared in front of all manner of legislative committees, on all national and dozens of local television talk shows, and was written about in literally thousands of newspaper and magazine articles. Virtually all this coverage was explicitly supportive, although one media observer offered a more critical interpretation of why, now, the media found this old issue so appealing:

Television began this groundswell by giving airtime to MADD's painful [Congressional] Hill testimony. . . . It did so not merely because of its perceived importance—important but complex and boring testimony is given all the time without a dream of TV coverage—but because it was emotional, sentimental. No sane news director will pass up a grieving, sobbing mother; it is the basic image of tragedy on which TV thrives. . . .

It was the beginning of an orgy of attention. In their search for safe issues on which to take a 10-second position, TV editorial directors pounced on drunk driving as if it were an end-zone fumble. They called repeatedly, almost weekly for "stiffer penalties." . . . It was a heaven-sent: instantly graspable and without opposition. . . . At the same time, the National Association of Broadcasters organized a massive public service campaign on the problem. . . . Broadcasters aren't stupid; the motivation behind all this attention was forestalling any efforts to ban [alcohol beverage] ads.¹⁵

The efforts of Lightner and the national MADD led to explosive growth of the organization. Only a year after it began, the organization had generated income of nearly a half-million dollars and sprouted eleven new chapters in four states. A year later, in 1982, seventy chapters were in operation. By 1985 MADD had over 600,000 members and donors, 360 chapters in all fifty states, and a budget approaching \$10 million administered by a full-time professional staff of at least twenty.¹⁶ Throughout 1985, not a week would go by without a MADD story in most major newspapers and magazines.

The media-based organizing strategy of MADD and the media's fascination with Lightner and her organization led to a symbiosis that put floodlights on the issue. Newspaper coverage of drinking and driving grew from a handful of articles in 1978 and 1979 to several hundred articles in both 1983 and 1984. In a 1984 national poll, MADD got 85 percent name recognition—double the percentage of people who could name their congressional representative. A *Washington Post* columnist could claim, without fear of contradiction, that "1984 was the year of the Anti-drunk-driving Campaign," while *Time's* "Man of the Year" edition cited MADD President Lightner as one of "Seven Who Succeeded" because "MADD is getting just about all the laws it wants." Under the magnifying glass of the media, MADD had effectively made drinking-driving into a "hot" issue.¹⁷

Perhaps the most substantive impact of the movement was on law and public policy. Under pressure from MADD, Reagan appointed a Presidential Commission on drunk driving (and, like Gov. Brown, appointed Lightner). It recommended legislation to force states to raise the minimum drinking age to 21. A bill to this effect was originally proposed by congressional Democrats in early 1985. But despite a strong endorsement for the anti-drunk driving movement in the 1984 Republican Presidential Platform and his own Commission's recommendation, Reagan opposed the age 21 measure until three weeks before signing it. The *New York Times* noted that "almost everyone involved was stunned by the swift, overwhelming Congressional approval" (81 to 16 in the Senate), and that "the statistics were alarming but had theretofore failed to provoke action." According to this and many other accounts, MADD's dramatic testimony in favor of the bill—echoed by other important groups like the American Medical Association, the Parent Teachers Association, the National Council on Alcoholism, insurance industry lobbies, and the National Safety Council—led Reagan's advisors to argue that drinking-driving had been made into a "sleeping giant" of an "apple pie issue" that

he could not afford to oppose. Some conservatives still threatened to block the bill on the grounds that it was yet another mode of "social engineering" and an "unwarranted federal intervention into states' rights," but the President began to sense a natural conservative issue and changed direction. The *Times* gave this account of his reversal: "At first President Reagan criticized the legislation . . . as just another instance of Washington wanting to meddle in the states' affairs. But by last week he sounded like a life-long advocate. . . . Looking on were representatives of such groups as MADD, which had lobbied for the legislation for years." In what can be seen as a well-crafted piece of ideological work, the President turned to smile at Candy Lightner, pen in hand, and announced to the assembled press, "The [drunk driving] problem is bigger than the states . . . [so] we have no misgivings about this judicious use of federal power."¹⁸

Less noticed but equally striking was the passage of more than 230 new anti-drunk driving laws at the local level. In virtually every state and city, MADD was acknowledged as the leading force behind the new statutes. All fifty states toughened their laws against drinking and driving between 1981 and 1985, and the number of states requiring mandatory jail sentences for first offenders convicted of DUI doubled in the same period. Other states sharply raised fines, began to suspend licenses, curtailed judicial discretion with minimum sentence requirements, or enacted "per se" standards that make driving with certain blood-alcohol content (BAC) levels criminal offenses in and of themselves. More broadly, under the momentum of the MADD movement, an additional one hundred alcohol control statutes were passed between 1981 and 1984, including server liability laws and bans on happy hours.¹⁹

The Context of Success

Both social movement theory²⁰ and the social constructionist approach to social problems suggest that the existence of compelling troubles or substantial human suffering may be necessary but not sufficient conditions for the emergency of a successful movement for public action. The history of alcohol problems in general and the long latency of the drinking-driving problem in particular suggest the need for an analysis of the special resonance of MADD in the early 1980s. I will argue in what follows that the remarkable rise of MADD must be understood as a product of the interaction between the strategic focus of claims by this moral-entrepreneurial movement and a historical context marked by a peculiar conjuncture of trends favorable to those claims in both the alcohol arena and the larger political culture.

In the late 1970s health consciousness spread across America. Whether this fitness fetish derives from the greater need to exercise in a service economy that reduces the need for physical exertion while increasing tension, from some deeper narcissism, or from the mere demographic ascendancy of the 1960s generation who popularized health foods, few would deny that hordes of run-

ners are visible everywhere and that the health spa and aerobics industries have enjoyed meteoric growth. Bound up with such developments are changes in what we eat and drink: less red meat and more fish and poultry, fewer spirits and more white wine and "lite" beer. It is also worth noting that this health craze seemed particularly marked among the middle and upper-middle class (it is often referred to as a "yuppie" phenomenon) and that these groups are most likely to vote and otherwise participate in political life. Insofar as this makes them the sort of people about whom legislators (and advertisers) worry, trends in their values and behaviors can be seen as influential.

The alcohol industry has adjusted adroitly to such trends by stepping up its marketing of low-alcohol beverages. Yet, distillers, brewers, and vintners perceived more ominous possibilities in all this that were not so amenable to shifts in product lines and advertising strategies. In addition to declining per capita consumption of alcohol and all the media attention to "the new temperance" and "neo-Prohibitionism," the fiscal crisis and growing budget deficits led many legislators to call for increased taxes on alcohol. This strategy is often advocated by many public health specialists as a means of both reducing alcohol abuse and raising revenues needed to pay for alcohol treatment. Still more threatening to the industry, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) launched a national campaign to ban all alcohol advertising in the electronic media (Stop Marketing Alcohol on Radio and Television, or SMART), which had gained endorsements and momentum by 1985. In the context of such developments the alcohol industry began to see the movement against drinking and driving as the lesser of evils.

While other anti-drunk-driving organizations refused industry support, MADD accepted a variety of financial contributions from alcohol interests. Anheuser-Busch and Miller Brewing, for example, both contributed money to the national anti-drunk driving movement. One of MADD's original board members proposed that, as a matter of principle, they refuse to accept money from the alcohol industry. He was out-voted on the basis of Lightner's argument that it is not alcohol itself that causes death and injury but rather irresponsible users and abusers of alcohol. She remained steadfast in her opposition to the idea that widespread promotion of alcohol consumption was in any way related to drinking-driving. Moreover, after Lightner purged the original board of all her adversaries, she appointed to it representatives of the alcohol and broadcasting industries. Unlike many of the lesser known anti-drunk-driving organizations, MADD has not advocated increases in alcohol taxes as a means of reducing consumption or financing prevention and treatment, and it sent a memo to its local chapters stating the official MADD policy against participation in the SMART petition drive. In a position paper, national MADD took the position of taking no position on the debate over regulation of alcohol advertising, save that of urging the industry to "police itself." Further, MADD supported the alcohol and broadcasting industries in their attempt to stave off demands that networks broadcast "counter-messages" to alcohol commercials.²¹

In a context marked by "neo-temperance" sentiments, declining alcohol consumption, and increasing pressure for higher alcohol taxes and tighter controls over alcohol advertising, the advantages of MADD's narrow focus on the drunk driver—on the individual deviant—was not lost on alcohol producers. Indeed, both the alcohol and broadcasting industries "courted" MADD. As the *Wall Street Journal* put it, "In an effort to blunt criticisms of its products and restrict the debate to alcohol *abuse*, the industry has lent its financial support to those combatting drunk-driving." This way, the "new prohibitionism" would not, as one alcohol industry executive put it, "dis-member" the beverage alcohol business "one bite at a time."²² In fairness it must be said that the alcohol industry was never the main source of funding for MADD; nor can it be proven that industry contributions softened MADD's stance. What can be noted, however, is the *affinity* between MADD's strategy of rhetorically locating the source of the problem in individual-level deviant behavior and the alcohol industry's strategies for deflecting attention away from the full range of problems related to consumption of their products in general. One consequence of this affinity was that a potentially powerful form of corporate opposition to MADD was not only neutralized but turned to the organization's financial and ideological advantage.

Other developments on the government side of the alcohol arena also made for fertile soil for the growth of MADD. Although the disease paradigm had been part of state and local government alcohol programs for most of the post-war period, the alcoholism movement first established a national institutional beachhead in the welfare state in the early 1970s—the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). By the late 1970s a growing network of state and local alcohol agencies, treatment programs, research centers, and alcohol professionals was funded by NIAAA. They constituted an active, institutionalized constituency, which arguably had created cultural space for and was ready to echo the cry of an anti-drunk-driving movement.²³ More specifically, this network of institutions was by 1980 edging away from the intellectual hegemony of the disease concept toward a "disaggregative" approach to alcohol problems. In this framework a *range* of alcohol-related problems is held to exist, rather than one in which all such problems are conceived as either so many manifestations of an underlying "disease" entity called alcoholism or as the less important, poorer relatives of the disease.

Robin Room's historical analysis of the disease concept notes that "In the last few years, . . . an 'alcohol problems' approach has gained considerable ground in alcohol policy statements [which entails] the abandonment of the assumption of entitvity" underlying the alcoholism-as-disease-entity paradigm. This shift may be seen, for example, in recent policy statements contained in a 1979 report to Congress ("Alcohol problems in the general population do not seem to form a coherent pattern. The problems are too diffuse to be described as part of a single concept of alcohol addiction . . ."). A 1980 World Health Organization Expert Committee Report said much the same thing ("Until recently, there has been a widespread tendency to concep-

tualize the whole gamut of alcohol problems as manifestations of an underlying entity, alcoholism. . . . Alcohol dependence constitutes only a small part of the total of alcohol-related problems.")²⁴

Bound up with these developments is the emergency of a "public health" perspective on alcohol that takes a *preventative* approach to alcohol-related problems.²⁵ Examples of this include the recent increases in federal funding for prevention education, the sponsorship of national prevention research centers, and the SMART campaign against deceptive alcohol advertising in electronic media. In a related development, the private National Council on Alcoholism experienced an internal rift over what many staff felt was an alcohol industry-induced, excessively narrow focus on the disease and its treatment at the expense of other alcohol problems and solutions. In the end, NCA moved to limit industry involvement on its board and to broaden its perspective toward a general public health view. Such arguable liberal, at least partly progressive developments in the scientific and public policy sides of the alcohol arena seem to have given intellectual elbow room to those calling attention to non-disease alcohol problems such as drinking-driving.

The second set of historical developments that has aided the rise of MADD concerns changes in the broader political arena. Here I shall refer to the political culture of Reaganism and suggest that MADD's claims were ideologically harmonious with the policy rhetoric of the Right. Like the Temperance and Prohibition movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, neither MADD nor the anti-drunk-driving movement in general are politically monolithic or ideologically homogeneous.²⁶ It is possible, however, to glimpse MADD's underlying conservatism by contrasting its politics with those of the "Stop Marketing Alcohol on Radio and Television" campaign (SMART). The origins of SMART lie in the consumer movement for *corporate* accountability and responsibility. SMART leaders speak of the "total social costs" of alcohol production and consumption; they explicitly confront corporate power and influence; they propose solutions aimed at the *structural* sources of alcohol-related problems.²⁷ Their rhetoric evokes notions of *collective* responsibility and social justice, and implies regulatory-state solutions when corporations and industries resist or ignore moral appeals for the public good.

MADD's origins, on the other hand, lie in victims' rights movements, which seek retribution from criminals. MADD's Lightner chose an organization name that ends with "drunk drivers" rather than "driving" and yields an acronym symbolizing moral anger; MADD members repeatedly rail against the "Killer Drunk"; they complain of the neglect of drinking-driving as "America's most frequently committed violent crime," the "only socially acceptable form of homicide."²⁸ MADD's organizing strategy is explicitly one of personal vilification, and it assiduously avoids attention to corporate interests and structural sources of alcohol problems in favor of a rhetoric of *individual* responsibility, the private moral *choice* of drinkers, and solutions based upon *self-regulation* by both drinkers and the alcohol, advertising, and broadcast industries.²⁹

From the MADD perspective, then, the *aperture of attribution* for all the suffering and social costs that they claim are caused by drinking-driving is constricted; only the lone deviant comes into focus. Such constriction, I submit, largely explains industry support for the movement. It tacitly legitimizes the continued production, promotion, and consumption of alcohol products that are vulnerable to the more structural critique of SMART and other groups. Some forty years ago in the pages of *American Sociological Review*, Alfred McClung Lee offered an analysis of the politics of Prohibition that parallels this point:

Large contributors to political movements and campaigns found that the Drys offered a more attractive issue than did those who stressed issues more fundamental to the control of our economic and political institutions. The "era of the muckrakers" of about 1901 to 1912 . . . struck many business leaders in particular as having an unsettling tendency. The Prohibitionists merely attacked Booze, the Saloon, the Whisky Trust, and the Brewers, but Lincoln Steffens, Ray Stannard Baker, Upton Sinclair, and others went after the political bosses, the public utilities, patent medicines, advertising, and even capitalism itself. Let the reformers have Booze and the Saloon. Let that keep them busy!³⁰

MADD's self-image as "the voice of the victim" also lends itself to a narrow and conservative focus. The organization has drawn upon the victims' rights groups that were first given national recognition in the law-and-order campaign of the Nixon administration. Both victims' rights groups and MADD bemoan the injustices victims suffer at the hands of defendants whom they see as overly protected by Miranda rights and other impediments to retribution, which are also anathema to the Reagan/Meese Justice Department. Both MADD and its law-and-order, victims' rights predecessors call for less judicial discretion and an end to plea-bargaining so as to ensure longer sentences. Newspaper accounts of MADD often cite, for example, the "national punishment mentality" in the "very punitive era" of the 1980s as a factor in the organization's rise.³¹

Each of these major facets of MADD's orientation—its individualist focus, its systematic inattention to structural/corporate sources of problems, and its narrow retributive prescriptions—is in ideological harmony with and gains legitimacy from the policies and the rhetoric of Reagan and the New Right. There is also some preliminary evidence on the social base of the movement that supports such an interpretation. Although a substantial number of MADD activists (e.g., chapter officers) are either victims of drinking-driving accidents or members of families with victims, the rate of MADD chapter formation across states and regions of the United States is strongly correlated with standard survey measures of politico-religious conservatism. Moreover, the National Association of Evangelicals pushed for stiffer punishments for drinking-driving and was instrumental in getting a plank to that effect put into the 1984 Republican Presidential Campaign Platform. New Right fundraisers also have targeted people who strongly oppose drinking-driving as people who look to them for leadership.³²

Of course, neither the shifts in the alcohol arena nor those in political culture can be construed as *causal* in any rigorous, theoretical sense. However, they do suggest that a thorough, textured account of the rise of MADD cannot rest upon the mere existence of drinking-driving accidents and an effective social-movement organization; the former has long existed and it is the effectiveness of the latter that needs to be explained. Rather, this form of anti-drunk-driving movement took off when it did in large part because of its *elective affinity* with a political context dominated by Reaganism and the Right, and also, ironically, with a subtle shift toward what I would construe as more liberal, public health perspectives in the alcohol arena.

Weber's concept of elective affinity seems especially valuable here. His most well-known use of it was to conceptualize the relation between Calvinism and other Puritan sects and the spread of capitalist social organization and accumulation. Weber argued that although the "spirit of capitalism" and the accumulation of "worldly goods" flowed quite naturally from Puritan religious principles designed to ensure the "salvation of the soul," the material results that stemmed from such "purely religious motives" were "unforeseen and even unwished-for." He explicitly rejected both the idea that the Reformation could be deduced "as a necessary historical result" of the rise of capitalism, as well as the converse notion "that the spirit of capitalism [. . .] could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation." What he attempted to demonstrate instead were the ways in which the Puritan ethic had *taken part* in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of the spirit of capitalism.³³ Whatever subsequent scholars have made of the specifics of Weber's case, the theoretical and conceptual utility of "elective affinity" has endured. I believe it most closely captures the more or less fortuitous, mutually-informing relation between MADD and elements of the new conservative era in which it grew.

Clearly most people stand firmly against the loss of life, limb, and property at the hands of drivers who have been drinking. But MADD's claims draw much of their support from and resonate strongly among the core constituencies of nascent conservatism. Thus, I would argue that the rather remarkable fortunes of this movement cannot be understood apart from their emergence in an epoch about which it safely could be said, "The notion is gaining that intervention in other people's lives is more legitimate." For the Right, as its leaders proudly profess, is as anxious to intervene in most private moral spheres as it is loath to do so in public economic ones. MADD's approach to drinking-driving fits snugly within this ideological mold.³⁴

What MADD Has Wrought, and What It Means

Although changes in the alcohol arena contributed to the emergency of MADD and the anti-drunk-driving movement, it is also true that MADD and the movement have in turn altered the alcohol arena. First and most obvious, both the quantity and quality of anti-drinking-driving weapons have

increased. The following measures are all parts of the MADD agenda and most have been enacted in many states: computerized criminal and driving record retrieval systems for police cars; citizen reporting systems; elimination of plea bargaining for DUI offenses; reduction of the blood-alcohol-content standard from .10% to .08% or even .05%, with implied consent from all licensed drivers for BAC testing and "per se" license suspensions on the scene for any who meet that standard; mandatory jail sentences and higher minimum fines; pre-sentence probation investigations of driving records and alcohol-problem assessments, reclassification of alcohol-related injury and death accidents to felonies; "dram shop" (server) liability laws; roadblocks or highway "sobriety checkpoints" to stop vehicles randomly; and a nationwide minimum drinking age of 21.³⁵ Together such measures open up to surveillance new areas of the private sphere for more and more people, and invite concern about the erosion of civil liberties.

Less obvious are the changes wrought by the movement in the treatment of alcohol problems. In many jurisdictions fee-paying drunk drivers have replaced public inebriates, alcoholics, and other problem drinkers in both public and private treatment programs. With arrests rising and stiffer sentences, fines, and drinking-driver education becoming increasingly mandatory, a brisk business in the treatment of drinking drivers has developed. It is not clear where the old clients of the alcohol treatment system are going instead, if anywhere. This shift in clientele also seems to entail a subtle but important shift in treatment ideology. It had been axiomatic in the alcohol treatment field that alcoholics must "hit bottom," "be ready," and frequently volunteer for treatment if it was to be effective. Now phrases like "constructive coercion," "breaking down denial," and "tough love" have crept into the argot of alcohol treatment professionals, and clients more frequently enter treatment under court sentencing.³⁶

The new laws enacted at the behest of the movement have provided treatment programs with a new funding base as well as a new class of clients. Convicted drinking drivers are now assessed fines (often allocated in part to treatment programs) and required to attend treatment programs that charge fees. These developments have fed other treatment trends that began prior to MADD.

The growth of what may fairly be called a treatment industry began in the early 1970s. First, in response to the fiscal crisis many counties began "contracting out" or "privatizing" treatment programs that had previously been public social-service functions. Some states adopted the quasi-partnership role of organizing the efficient distribution of state-referred clients and ensuring "sufficient marketing of provider services . . . [to] demonstrate market demand."³⁷ Second, during the same period NIAAA and other treatment interests succeeded in getting alcohol and drug problems defined as diseases for purposes of health-insurance coverage. These so-called third-party payments added to the pool of financial resources on which the new treatment industry could draw.³⁸ Third, in response to rapid growth and high profit

margins in the health care industry, many hospitals expanded. This additional bedspace became excess plant capacity, however, when Medicare reforms and other cost-containment measures of the early 1980s reduced many hospital stays. With occupancy rates down and profits squeezed, many corporate hospital chains either started marketing their own alcohol and drug treatment programs or sold franchises for "chemical dependency units" to national companies specializing in this service. All of these supply-side trends created a new growth industry in alcohol and drug treatment.³⁹ The anti-drunk driver movement has now provided an additional market segment and a new funding base that has furthered the growth of private, for-profit treatment—for a different, more well-heeled clientele with different alcohol problems, for whom treatment is not voluntary and traditional treatment ideology is not designed.

MADD's success also has implications for the criminal justice system. Higher arrest rates, mandatory jail sentences, prohibitions on plea bargaining, and other features of the new laws are putting added stress on courts and jails. A recent National Institute of Justice study, for example, warns that the movement's impact has led to the need for more judges, jail cells, and probation reports, and that such strains should be considered before enacting additional "mandatory confinement" laws.⁴⁰ Additional problems are likely to result as more middle-class defendants are caught in the new, wider drunk-driving nets. They are more likely to pay private attorneys and demand jury trials to avoid jail and license revocation. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that under the new laws, defending drinking drivers has become "a booming and lucrative legal speciality," and the "fastest growing area of the law." Such cases are taken more often by senior attorneys (who charge "three to ten times more") because the "stakes are higher." These lawyers are attempting to "put the breathalyzer on trial"; to use physicians who will testify that because alcoholism is a "debilitating disease" the criminal status of drinking-driving is dubious; and to question the constitutionality of arrests on the grounds that people too drunk to drive are incapable of understanding their Miranda rights.⁴¹ While the ultimate success of such strategies and their impact on conviction rates and drinking-driving cannot be known at this writing, it is clear that stiffer penalties have evoked stiffer resistance, that average adjudication times will probably increase, that there will be new legal challenges to drinking-driving statutes and arrest procedures.

Beyond these relatively concrete effects of MADD on the alcohol arena and the criminal justice system, the movement may well have other, more profound implications for problem definition that are less amenable to empirical description and interpretation. First, there is MADD's role in the ongoing construction of alcohol problems. In the post-World War II period the disease concept became the dominant paradigm in alcohol treatment and policy—dominant but not completely hegemonic. Robin Room has argued persuasively that at least in popular culture and public opinion, the notion that problem drinkers of all sorts had a disease about which they had "no

choice" (and, implicitly, therefore, reduced responsibility for their actions) has always coexisted with earlier notions about free choice and moral culpability. We have had, that is, something like a dialectic of ambivalence wherein "both choice and compulsion" are juggled, the one or the other invoked as the micro-political exigencies of the situation require. Orcutt suggests that this ideological amalgam of medical and moral frames may be emblematic of a "transitional" stage in the broader historical trend away from moral and toward medical views.⁴² This is a useful insight, but just as opiate addiction was effectively demedicalized by pressure from the federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, so MADD has further complicated the trend toward medicalization of deviance by again drawing out those ostensibly dormant antagonisms to a pure alcoholism-as-disease paradigm. The movement has successfully claimed that drinking drivers are, first and foremost, "violent criminals" in need of punishment rather than merely victims of a disease in need of treatment. Thus, the march of medicalization may be less inexorable and more circuitous than many have believed. Just as the old moralistic frame was politically supplanted by the scientific alcoholism movement forty years ago, the medicalization of at least some alcohol problems has now become vulnerable to the vicissitudes of politics—this time the retributionism of MADD as it echoes harmoniously with the calls of the New Right for harsher social control.⁴³

Such a conceptual-ideological shift carries with it some potentially important implications for public discourse and public policy. To the extent that MADD has captured popular imaginations on drinking-driving issues, and insofar as the alcohol industry continues to counter the myriad threats posed by the so-called New Temperance with support for the anti-drunk-driving movement, then the "evils of drink" will continue to be situated squarely *in the person* rather than *in the bottle*.⁴⁴ Thus, another facet of MADD's impact will be to limit discussion of alternative or structural conceptions of alcohol-related problems and the policies that might be brought to bear upon them. In this new delimited discourse, we will hear less and less, for example, about safer automotive design, the lives saved by seat belt laws, the auto industry's success in forestalling air bags, cuts in funding for public transportation, and the dubious advisability of tacitly subsidizing alcoholic drinks by making them tax-deductible "business expenses."⁴⁵ Perhaps most important, the rise of MADD has helped to eclipse competing claims about the social costs of unregulated cultural promotion of *drinking-as-intrinsic-to-social-life*. By this I mean the expansion through alcohol advertising the number of spheres and practices in which alcohol is depicted as a natural accoutrement—and this in a society organized around the automobile as the principle mode of transport from one sphere to another.

At the most general level, MADD and the anti-drunk-driving movement it spawned have resurrected a drama that *reaffirms a particular symbolic order*. As Joseph Gusfield renders it,

The laws against driving under the influence of alcohol constitute a moral drama which states the public definition of moral conduct in American life. In differentiating the drinking driver from the traffic offender these laws create an identity for the moral person and a counteridentity of deviance and guilt. The law in this area symbolizes a public commitment to the centrality of work, safety, and individual responsibility in American society. It supports and enhances a view of a "generalized other," of a "society" committed to the legitimacy of a style of living in which alcohol is a symbol of risk and danger and its control a mark of morality and social responsibility. The modern world has not been the first to discover the joys of inebriety. It is, however, unique in defining these also as woes that call for public actions.⁴⁶

This conflict between the moral safety of self-control and the dangerous immorality of self-indulgence was increasingly camouflaged in the post-World War II years. The combination of the Repeal of Prohibition and the narrowing of alcohol problems to the disease concept normalized drinking in American society. Repeal made drinking acceptable while the success of the alcoholism movement meant that people with alcohol problems had a disease and thus were to be helped and redeemed through science rather than punished and stigmatized.⁴⁷ Now that the anti-drunk-driving movement has created a public problem where once there were only tragic "accidents," they have helped define a discourse in which there is, as Gusfield puts it, "the re-emergence of the perception of alcohol problems as those produced by people who make trouble rather than those from troubled people."⁴⁸

Neither the reaffirmation of this symbolic order nor the new discourse that reduces social problems to individual immorality is the handiwork of MADD alone. On the contrary, as suggested above, MADD is but a part of similar and more sweeping shifts in political culture and public policy in the 1980s. While these shifts differ in each sphere of life and realm of public policy, taken together they seem to center on the *re-regulation of pleasure and the constriction of personal liberty*. In the past few years drugs, sex, and rock and roll have all been defined as *dangerous*, and those who indulge in such problematic practices have been subjected to greater surveillance.⁴⁹ I am speaking here of more than mass urinalysis testing, the promotion of chastity as public policy, and attempts to censor rock music lyrics. The new minimum drinking age law, for example, central to MADD's legislative agenda, limited the liberties of youth, albeit "for their own good." It is at least arguable that this law is part of a wider network of control measures enacted in the Reagan era, which include greater discipline in school, the renewed use of corporal punishment, adult trials for juvenile offenders, drug searches, dress codes, curfew laws, and "squeal rules" that inhibit the flow of birth control and abortion information to young people. At the risk of oversimplification, I suggest that the 1980s constitute an epoch in which corporation, state, church, and family are all reasserting authority over individual desires, and in the process attempting to reimpose a real or imagined moral *ancien régime* in which social control

takes precedence over social welfare as the organizing axis of both ideology and policy.

The kind of relation I have tried to sketch between MADD and its context is neither a simple nor a novel one. Alcohol problems have never been merely problems having to do with alcohol. It is as if battles against alcohol in American history have been the cultural equivalent of the civil conflicts of Third World countries that provide terrain for the proxy wars of distant superpowers. I have tried to show that the movement against drinking-driving, too, is about more than just its stated object, serious though that object is. The problem that remains is how this might be theorized fruitfully. Clearly the moral/symbolic facets of social movements and social problems cannot neatly be reduced to any material/economic core. MADD in some senses did suit the interests of the alcohol, advertising, and broadcasting industries who were facing what they saw as a broader threat, and the movement both aided and was aided by broader conservative currents. Yet, unrelated and arguable progressive shifts in the alcohol arena also abetted MADD. Further, the conflict over drinking-driving has always been largely moral and symbolic in nature, cutting across social classes and having very different implications for different fractions of capital (alcohol, advertising, and autos, versus insurance), different aspects of the state (alcohol treatment versus criminal justice), and different strands of conservative ideology (libertarian versus law and order). Nor does it seem to be the case that MADD designed its focus to fit with the new conservatism or the affected business interests. There is nothing in MADD's organizational history to suggest that its strategies were anything but the instinctual consequence of a bereaved and angry American mother bent on rectifying injustice who then developed a lucrative career as a moral entrepreneur. Yet, although MADD's birth seems quite autonomous, its particular power in adolescence surely owes much to the political and economic circumstances of its development.

Notes

¹ Although they are beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that there are many questions about both the extent of alcohol-related accidents and the extent of alcohol's role in accidents so categorized; serious doubts exist about the validity of commonly used figures on the number of injuries and fatalities said to be "caused" by drinking-driving. These methodological and measurement problems are well covered, e.g., in J. Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981); D. S. Reed, "Reducing the Costs of Drinking and Driving," in M. Moore and D. Gerstein, editors, *Alcohol and Public Policy: Beyond the Shadow of Prohibition* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1981); H. L. Ross, *Detering the Drinking Driver: Legal Policy and Social Control* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1982); "Social Control Through Deterrence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 22; and L. Lanza-Kaduce and D. M. Bishop, "Legal Fictions and Criminology: The Jurisprudence of Drunk Driving," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 77 (1986): 358-78.

² Ross, *Detering the Drinking Driver*, T. Cameron, "The Impact of Drinking-Driving Countermeasures," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 8 (1979): 495-565; "Trends in Alcohol Problems in California, 1950-1979," in N. Giesbrecht et al., editors, *Consequences of Drinking: Trends in Alcohol Problem Statistics in Seven Countries* (Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1983).