

# RESPONSIBILITY AND BRAND ADVERTISING IN THE ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE MARKET

## The Modeling of Normative Drinking Behavior

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**ABSTRACT:** This review compares alcoholic beverage advertising, responsibility advertising, and media advocacy; considers their actual and desired impacts; describes and evaluates the controversy surrounding industry-sponsored responsibility campaigns; and identifies a number of issues that would benefit from additional research. Results indicate that alcoholic beverage advertising does not exert a material influence on total consumption or abuse, but models normative drinking behavior, and thus may actually inhibit alcohol misuse. Industry-sponsored responsibility efforts, like those sponsored by government and nonprofits, appear to affect desired changes, are perceived to be similar to government and nonprofit efforts, model desired drinking behaviors, and may be more effective with heavier drinkers.

Moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages is the norm in the United States. Roughly two-thirds of the American public "has occasion to use alcoholic beverages," and this has been the case since the Gallup Organization first began tracking the consumption of beverage alcohol in 1939 (Gallup 2004). Of those who drink, close to 90% consume an amount consistent with or less than the recommendations outlined in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines on moderate drinking (Gallup 2004).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, underage drinking and alcohol abuse by minors and adults have declined significantly over the last three decades (Johnston et al. 2005; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 2005a, 2005b; Saad 2005).<sup>2</sup> In fact, per capita consumption of alcohol is declining, and has been for more than 25 years (Giesbrecht et al. 2004; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Still, brand advertising in the alcoholic beverage market remains the object of considerable social criticism (Snyder et al. 2006). Calls for more rigorous industry self-regulation and additional investments in industry-sponsored responsibility messages are common (Austin and Hust 2005; Federal Trade Commission [FTC] 1999, 2003; Institute of Medicine 2004). These recommendations notwithstanding, some public health commentators vehemently criticize industry-sponsored moderation efforts. These efforts are characterized as public relations activities that are disingenuous at best and morally suspect at worst (Agostinelli and Grube 2002; Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth 2005; DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992; Kilbourne 1991; Mosher 2001; Smith, Atkin, and Roznowski 2006; Wallack 1990, 1992). Critics see little

difference between the objectives, strategies, and effects of brand advertising and industry-sponsored responsible drinking campaigns (Carr-Gregg and Scott 1993; Institute of Medicine 2004). In contrast, moderation campaigns executed by public health educators (DeJong and Winsten 1990; Giesbrecht et al. 2004) and public service organizations (Conlon 2005) are lauded as important, effective interventions, and media advocacy<sup>4</sup> efforts are offered as the next logical step (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006; Dorfman and Wallack 1993). Thus, a distinction is made between the efficacy, and indeed the morality, of responsibility efforts on the basis of sponsorship (Lavack 1999).

While a comprehensive literature on the effects of alcohol brand advertising exists, and responsibility advertising has been evaluated to some extent, work that explicitly considers the effects of industry-sponsored education campaigns is limited, and apparently no formal evaluation of media advocacy efforts has been undertaken in the alcohol context. Given the role industry-sponsored responsible drinking campaigns and media advocacy may play in the future, consideration of these efforts is warranted.

The purpose of this paper is to summarize, integrate, and reconcile several literatures in an effort to explore differences and similarities in brand advertising, responsibility advertising,

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This paper draws on research funded in part by a contract from the Anheuser-Busch Companies. Willamette University provided additional research, clerical, and sabbatical support that was helpful in completing this project. Pamela Moeller and Karen E. Piter assisted in the preparation of the manuscript. This effort benefited from the comments of Les Carlson, the Editor, and three reviewers. The author thanks each of them for their constructive and thorough evaluation of this manuscript and many helpful suggestions.

and media advocacy; consider their actual and potential impacts; describe and evaluate the controversy associated with industry-sponsored responsibility campaigns; and identify a number of issues that would benefit from systematic, empirical research.

### BRAND ADVERTISING, SOCIAL CAUSE ADVERTISING, AND MEDIA ADVOCACY

Organizations competing in mature or declining markets direct their resources to winning and keeping a desired market share (Kotler 2003). Advertising can be an important competitive tool when the organization's objective is to build and defend selective demand (Feldwick 1999; Jones 1989; Percy and Elliott 2005). In mature markets, wherein the product category has achieved acceptance by most potential buyers, advertising messages focus on further differentiating one brand from another in an effort to reinforce or disrupt existing behavior (Kotler and Keller 2006). This can be accomplished by providing information about brand differences and benefits, associating feelings with the brand, conveying a brand image and personality, and/or associating the brand with reference groups (Batra, Myers, and Aaker 1996; Feldwick 1999; Percy and Elliott 2005).

Advertisers in the alcoholic beverage market, which has been characterized as mature (Calfee and Scheraga 1994) or in decline (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006), apparently do concentrate their advertising efforts on attracting to their brands those consumers who have already made the decision to drink (Blane and Hewitt 1980; Tremblay and Tremblay 2005). In this context, the message strategy might be summarized as, "If you drink, drink our brand because . . ."

Public health education has been characterized as what Kotler (2003) calls social marketing. A key objective of such social marketing efforts is to reduce the psychological, social, and practical obstacles hindering the adoption of a behavior beneficial to the target consumer and society as a whole (Lefebvre and Flora 1988; Maibach, Rothschild, and Novelli 2002). "Social marketing suggests that power over health status evolves from gaining greater control over individual health behavior. It provides people with accurate information so that they can take steps to improve their health" (Wallack 1990, p. 153). Mass media efforts associated with the social marketing of positive health behavior (i.e., social cause advertising) can be expected to provide information about characteristics and benefits of a desired behavior; associate feelings, an image, or a personality type with a desired behavior; and/or associate a desired behavior with reference groups (Andreasen and Kotler 2003; Batra, Myers, and Aaker 1996).

Under its founding director, a major National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) theme was the promotion of "responsible drinking" (Heath 1989; NIAAA 1971). In response to this, and the shifting public opinion it

represented, government agencies (e.g., National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, NIAAA), nonprofit organizations (e.g., National Safety Council, U.S. Jaycees), and industry groups (e.g., Allstate Insurance Company, the three major U.S. brewers) made considerable investments in mass media alcohol education. Since the early 1970s, social cause advertising has been utilized in an attempt "to alter information levels, attitudes, and behavior regarding alcohol" (Blane and Hewitt 1980, p. 2). In the social cause advertising context, the message strategy might be summarized as, "If you drink, drink responsibly, and here's how . . ."

More recently, some mass media health communications have also been described as constituting media advocacy. "Media advocacy . . . is the practice of making sure that the media tell their stories from a public health point of view" (Brown and Witherspoon 2002, p. 163). Rather than attempting to directly change individual behavior, media advocacy seeks to change the ways in which problems are understood as public health issues (DeJong and Atkin 1995; Wallack 1990). The purpose of this sort of public health education effort is to change our thinking about health behavior problems as being solely the responsibility of individuals and to highlight the role of those who shape the environment in which individual decisions about health-related behaviors are made (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006; FTC 2006; Wallack 1990). A media advocacy approach to health communications can be expected to assign responsibility to producers, wholesalers, and retailers, or to propose social controls. Wallack argues that the goal of media advocacy is to go further than increasing knowledge of alcohol/health or diet/health issues; rather, "a strategy might be developed to stimulate media coverage of the ethical and legal culpability of alcohol companies that promote deadly products for consumption by teenagers. . . . The media could be used to present the problem of diet as concerning public policy (regulation of saturated fat levels in food) rather than unsatisfactory eating habits (a . . . knowledge problem)" (1990, pp. 150–151).

Since the early 1990s, media advocacy has been used most prominently by the "smoking control movement" (Pechmann and Reibling 2006; Pechmann et al. 2003; Wallack 1990), although opponents of the fast food industry have also embraced this approach (Adamy and Gibson 2006). Apparently, no formal evaluation of media advocacy efforts in the alcohol context has been undertaken. Nonetheless, commentators have again suggested that health researchers and, by implication, policymakers, abandon "logic that defines alcohol problems as deriving predominately from individuals" (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006, p. 215) and pursue wider social analysis and action. In the media advocacy context, then, the message strategy might be summarized as, "If you drink, it's largely the responsibility of others, and public policy should control these of their activities because . . ."

Brand advertising, responsible drinking messages, and (proposed) media advocacy efforts associated with alcoholic beverages do, therefore, differ in their objectives and message strategies. Brand advertising seeks to differentiate the advertised product from its competitors in a static or declining market, thus maintaining or increasing its market share (i.e., the objective is to affect selective demand). Responsible drinking messages, as social cause advertising, seek to inform individuals and change their attitudes, thus accelerating the adoption of safe drinking practices (i.e., the objective is to affect primary demand). This primary versus selective demand distinction between responsible drinking advertising and brand advertising is consistent with observations of DeJong and Winsten (1990, p. 31). They state, "Commercial advertising seldom is designed to bring about new attitudes or patterns of behavior; rather, it intends to give direction to already existing preferences. In contrast, public health campaigns seek fundamental changes in health-related behavior" (DeJong and Winsten 1990, p. 31). Media advocacy seeks to concentrate attention on the behavior of alcoholic beverage producers, wholesalers, retailers, and others whose decisions are seen as influencing the nature of the market and, consequently, choices available to the consumer. All three message strategies target people who drink, but in the case of brand advertising, the message focus is on influencing a brand choice from among mutually exclusive alternatives; in the case of responsible drinking communications, the message encourages the adoption of behaviors that can be carried out in conjunction with consumption of any brand and/or other safe drinking practices; in the case of media advocacy, the message attempts to shift the responsibility for alcohol-related behavior from the individual to marketing channel members, other drinkers, and even society at large.

While there appear to be no empirical evaluations of media advocacy campaign efforts in the alcohol context (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006),<sup>5</sup> the effects of responsible drinking advertising have been considered in a number of studies, and the effects of alcohol advertising have been studied extensively. A brief summary of the alcohol advertising literature is presented next; it is followed by a brief summary of the empirical evaluations of responsible drinking campaigns sponsored by government, nonprofit, and industry groups.

## THE EFFECTS OF BRAND AND RESPONSIBILITY ADVERTISING

### Alcohol Brand Advertising

In 1985, the FTC staff conducted a thorough review of the literature on alcohol advertising, and concluded that "the bulk of existing studies of alcohol and other advertising have found little or no effect of variations of advertising on total industry consumption" (1985, AA p. 13).<sup>6</sup> That same

year, these findings were echoed by the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. According to its chairperson, "The subcommittee could not find evidence to conclude [that] advertising influences non-drinkers to begin drinking or [drinkers] to increase consumption" (Hawkins 1985, pp. 12669–12670). In 1990, the FTC reiterated its 1985 finding that there is "no reliable basis to conclude that alcohol advertising significantly affects consumption, let alone abuse" (p. 2). Fisher (1993, p. 150) again examined the extant econometric, survey, and experimental research and concluded, "Advertising appears to have a very weak positive influence on consumption and no impact on experimentation with alcohol or abuse of it." The Institute of Medicine returned to the literature on alcohol advertising in its examination of underage drinking and concluded that a "causal link between advertising and youth consumption has not been established" (2004, p. 4). Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti conclude, "After decades of costly research . . . attempts to substantiate direct links between advertising and negative health outcomes have failed" (2006, p. 210).

Thus, while research has failed to detect a material influence from advertising on total consumption, experimentation with alcohol, or alcohol abuse, the FTC did conclude, "there are convincing reasons to believe that advertising of alcoholic beverages serves socially useful purposes" (1985, AA p. 3). In its words, alcohol "advertising provides information about product characteristics that enables consumers . . . to choose the particular products or brands that best satisfy their preferences. Thus, advertising may lead to expansion of market shares of superior brands or brands that cater to particular tastes. . . . [A]dvertising increases new entry and price competition and hence reduces market power and prices" (FTC 1985, AA p. 3).

In its totality, the evidence is consistent with the conclusion that alcoholic beverage brand advertising (1) provides information that enables consumers to make more satisfactory choices; (2) leads to expansion of market shares of superior brands; (3) increases new product entry; (4) increases price competition; (5) gives firms incentives to live up to product claims; but (6) does not exert a material influence on total consumption, experimentation with alcohol, or alcohol abuse.

### Responsible Drinking Campaigns Sponsored by Government and Nonprofit Organizations

One of the first efforts to review and synthesize formal evaluations of responsible drinking campaigns sponsored by government agencies and nonprofit organizations was undertaken by Whitehead (1979). He concluded that, in general, early alcohol education programs were largely ineffective in altering behavior. He characterizes these campaigns as plagued by

inadequate evaluation methodologies, ineffective program design, and poor implementation. At about the same time, Blane and Hewitt (1980) carried out an extensive state-of-the-art review of public education efforts, and essentially echoed the conclusions of Whitehead (1979). "Research findings concerning the effectiveness of public education programs related to alcohol suggest that mass media messages may affect attitudes and knowledge levels, but seldom make a significant impact upon behavior" (Blane and Hewitt 1980, pp. 6–7). In a review of the reviews, Wallack (1980) concurred, attributing these apparent failures to poor program design, faulty implementation, and/or shortcomings in evaluation.

Comprehensive reviews of the use of mass communications in drinking and driving programs were subsequently conducted by Haskins (1985) and Vingilis and Coultres (1990). Their findings converge, and are well described by Vingilis and Coultres:

Evaluations of campaigns in the drinking-driving field are based on the . . . knowledge-attitude-practice model and predicated on the belief that if people are given factual information on drinking-driving, this information will change attitudes which will lead to a desired change in behavior. And indeed, there is some evidence that publicity . . . can affect self-reported behaviors. . . . Thus, the literature suggests that mass communications may have some role to play in behavior change, but the extent of the role is most likely much weaker and indirect than previously assumed. (1990, p. 75)

Another review and evaluation by DeJong and Winsten concluded that mass media campaigns can succeed, and do so more often when they "address an issue of ongoing public concern and incorporate both the 'consumer' orientation of commercial marketing and research-based principles of behavior change" (1990, p. 32). "In retrospect, it is evident that many campaigns whose failure was regarded as evidence of the mass media's limited potential were seriously flawed" (DeJong and Winsten 1990, p. 32). "Public health advocates, while producing increasingly sophisticated media campaigns, still have much to learn from the successes of the commercial sector" (DeJong and Winsten 1990, p. 30).

In this vein, Lastovicka and his colleagues (Lastovicka 1988; Lastovicka, Murry, and Joachimsthaler 1990; Lastovicka et al. 1987), and Murry and his colleagues (Murry, Lastovicka, and Bhalla 1989; Murry, Stam, and Lastovicka 1993, 1994, 1996) chronicle the marketing research, campaign development, media planning, and evaluation of a paid advertising campaign focused on reducing young male drinking-driving behavior. They report the following results. Pre- and postintervention differences in the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds claiming to drink and drive after four drinks decreased. Average total monthly fatal and incapacitating accidents decreased. Time series analysis demonstrated a decreased proportion of fatal

and incapacitating accidents. The proportion of fatal and incapacitating accidents in the target populations returned to their original baseline levels at the campaign's conclusion. Finally, there was a significantly greater decrease in fatalities at the campaign site relative to the control site.

In 1998, DeJong and Hingson conducted a review of post-1988 efforts to increase awareness of the risks associated with driving after drinking, designating a driver, and intervening to prevent alcohol-impaired people from driving among the general public and college students. They concluded, "on balance, these findings provide strong evidence of a sharp drop in the number of impaired drivers on the road as a consequence of the usage of designated drivers" (DeJong and Hingson 1998, p. 372).

In its totality, then, the evidence is consistent with the conclusion that responsibility advertising sponsored by government and nonprofit organizations can affect changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, although knowledge is likely to be influenced the most and behavior the least.

### Industry-Sponsored Responsibility Advertising

In a comparison of responsibility advertising sponsored by industry and government/nonprofit organizations, Lavack (1999) analyzed the content of television commercials dealing with alcohol moderation and drinking/driving. Industry responsibility ads were less likely to feature negative consequences than government/nonprofit ads, although about 46% of industry messages did so. Industry-sponsored messages were less likely to feature threats or mention negative consequences than government/nonprofit ads, but didn't use humor or other positive approaches more often than government/nonprofits. According to Lavack, no differences in the overall tone of the advertisements were noted. She concludes: "Given the self-interested nature of corporate sponsors, it is not surprising that they would try to avoid making viewers uncomfortable by avoiding fear appeals. However, it is somewhat surprising that corporate sponsors do not try to portray their product category more favorably by using more humor or positive approaches than non-corporate sponsors" (1999, p. 29).

In a laboratory message testing study, Atkin, DeJong, and Wallack (1992) asked a sample of high school and college students to react to responsible drinking ads sponsored by beer companies and public service organizations. (See Smith, Atkin, and Roznowski 2006 for a very different treatment and analysis of what appears to be the same data.) The "overall rating was measured along a single Excellent-Good-Fair-Poor scale. . . . For the nine beer company ads, an average of 58% of the overall sample rate the ads as either 'excellent' or 'good.' . . . This compares to an average of 63% giving positive ratings to the nine non-industry PSA's [public service announcements]" (Atkin, DeJong, and Wallack 1992, pp.

5–6). No obvious differences were found on 9 of 11 message qualities. Similarly, reactions were quite comparable on five of seven negative features. Respondents indicated that the main purpose of company-sponsored messages is to either prevent drunk driving (32%) or promote responsible drinking (28%). Thus, it appears that company- and public service organization-sponsored ads examined by Atkin, DeJong, and Wallack (1992) stimulate similar audience responses.

To evaluate the effects of PSAs and industry-sponsored moderation ads on people's cognitions related to drinking and driving and self-reported behavior, Ognianova and Thorson (1996, 1997a, 1997b) surveyed a representative sample of adults and young people under the age of 21. Just under 40% of both the adults and youth could remember either a PSA or a moderation ad. Yet "memory for PSAs and moderation ads are significant negative predictors of major unsafe highway behaviors including drinking and driving, and riding with a drinking driver, and are positive predictors of using a designated driver and serving as one" (Ognianova and Thorson 1996, p. 2). While industry-sponsored messages were less strongly associated with driving behaviors, "This study finds clear evidence that [the] message . . . drinking is acceptable, but do so in moderation . . . is coming across" (Ognianova and Thorson 1996, p. 19) and conveys that adults must "drink less to be able to drive safely" (Ognianova and Thorson 1997a, p. 12). "These data suggest that ads that tell people not to drink and drive, to use designated drivers, to drink in moderation, and so on may actually be having an effect at the behavioral level" (Ognianova and Thorson 1996, p. 20).

Potentially the most interesting finding in the initial Ognianova and Thorson (1996, 1997a, 1997b) study was that "the frequency and amount of drinking significantly predicted awareness of moderation ads, but not of PSAs" (1998, p. 10). The authors wondered "why moderation [ad] messages, which come from the alcohol industry and have a potential credibility problem, are effective in terms of being remembered by those who need them [most], while PSAs are not." This prompted them to undertake a second study. A representative sample of adults 21 years or older participated in the second study, which largely replicated the findings of the first.

Frequency of driving was positively associated with memory for PSAs (though marginally) and memory for moderation ads (significantly). This means that [the] more that respondents reported they drink, the more likely they were to also report seeing drunk driving PSAs and ads about using alcohol wisely in the last month or so . . . [indicating] a greater impact [on] memory for moderation ads than for PSAs and the operation of selective perception. (Ognianova and Thorson 1998, p. 24)

Several experimental examinations of the effects of non-profit- and industry-sponsored responsibility messages undertaken by Blazing (1998), Blazing and Bloom (1997, 1999),

and Szykman, Bloom, and Blazing (2004) offer mixed results, some of which are consistent with those of Ognianova and Thorson (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1998). While the industry sponsor of the responsibility message was generally perceived to be less trustworthy, heavier drinkers perceived the industry sponsor as more trustworthy than did light drinkers. Blazing concludes, "depending on the goals of the message, one type of sponsor may be better suited to deliver an effective campaign" (1998, p. 114).

Thus, this evidence is consistent with a tentative conclusion that industry-sponsored responsibility efforts (1) can affect changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, although knowledge is most likely to be influenced, whereas behavior is least likely to be influenced; (2) are perceived to be quite similar to those sponsored by government/nonprofit organizations on a number of important dimensions; and (3) may be more effective than government/nonprofit messages with heavier drinkers.

#### THE CONTROVERSY: COMMON CRITICISMS OF INDUSTRY-SPONSORED RESPONSIBILITY ADVERTISING

Industry-sponsored responsible drinking campaigns have been the object of three basic criticisms. First, the major brewers have been accused of using "vague slogans and other advertising strategies that fail to define 'moderate' drinking" (DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992, p. 663). Phrases such as "Know When to Say When," "Think When You Drink," and "Drink Safely" have been criticized because they do not enumerate all possible risks associated with alcohol use, convey consumption guidelines, or emphasize that abstinence is an option.

Second, it is asserted that moderation advertising "undermine[s] the pro-health message of responsible consumption by introducing pro-drinking themes and images that are typical of the companies' standard . . . commercials" (DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992, p. 669). "Themes and images used in much of this [responsibility] advertising are consistent with the beer companies' regular brand promotions, which works to the detriment of providing a clear, unambiguous public health message" (p. 663). Brand and responsibility advertising are thus asserted to promote consumption and to worsen the problems caused by heavy alcohol consumption.

Last, advertising that promotes the use of designated drivers is said to represent a mixed message in that "it encourages or gives tacit approval to excessive drinking by the driver's companions . . . it undermines a strong no-use message for underage youth . . . [and] it removes a barrier to and may even encourage excessive alcohol consumption, especially among groups of teens and young adults" (DeJong and Wallack 1992, p. 434). "Designated driver is a made-to-order idea for the beer industry, a partial solution to the problem of alcohol-impaired

driving that puts the spotlight on individual consumers rather than on industry practices" (DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992, pp. 665–666). Clearly, industry-sponsored individual responsibility messages contradict a media advocacy approach (e.g., Dorfman and Wallack 1993) and are apparently therefore dismissed by their critics.

The results of several reviews of social modeling and social learning theory in the alcohol context may assist us in putting such criticisms of industry-sponsored responsibility campaigns, and for that matter, alcohol advertising, into perspective.

### SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND DRINKING

Most human behavior is learned by observation through modeling (Bandura 1986). By observing others, we form rules of behavior, and this coded information serves as a guide for future action. This capacity to learn by observation enables us to expand knowledge and skills beyond the situations and activities we can directly experience. Much social learning is fostered by observing the behavior of others and the consequences of these actions for them. Moreover, knowledge can be transmitted through the medium of symbolic models. By drawing on conceptions of behavior portrayed in words and images, observers can transcend the bounds of their immediate environment (Bandura 1986 and citations therein). Given that advertising often depicts behaviors advertisers wish consumers to emulate, it has the potential to significantly affect social learning (Bailey 2006).

As suggested by Strickland (1983) and Strickland and Pittman (1984), the consumption of alcoholic beverages is learned, and the mechanisms by which drinking is learned are specified by the principles of social learning theory. These principles are: (1) behavior, including drinking, is regulated by its consequences, that is, by the balance of reinforcement associated with it; (2) behavior can be learned observationally through a variety of vicarious reinforcement mechanisms; and (3) behavior can be cognitively represented, enabling symbolic enactment of behavior and anticipation of consequences. "In the case of advertising and alcohol consumption, social learning theory is especially appropriate both because of its emphasis on the interaction of the person and his or her environment in regulating behavior and because of its emphasis on learning via observation of the behavior of others" (Strickland 1983, p. 204).

Several reviews of the literature on social learning theory and drinking lend credence to Strickland's position and suggest social modeling as a potentially viable method by which maladaptive drinking habits might be prevented or modified. In their 1981 review of the literature on the influence of personal modeling on drinking behavior, Collins and Marlatt report, "overall, the results of the research on the modeling of alcohol

consumption suggest the existence of a powerful effect wherein an individual's consumption of alcohol will vary to match that of a drinking partner" (p. 235). A meta-analytic review of the effects of personal modeling on alcohol consumption carried out by Quigley and Collins (1999) echoes these findings.

Thus, studies conducted in both laboratory and bar settings have produced similar results, suggesting that "generalization of the modeling effect to the natural environment is valid" (Collins and Marlatt 1981, p. 235). Collins and Marlatt go on to suggest that their findings have the following implications:

Since problem drinking behaviors have been said to develop via modeling and other social influence processes . . . it seems likely that techniques based on modeling should readily apply to the prevention of problem drinking. . . . [E]xposing individuals, who are learning to use alcohol (e.g., adolescents) or who are at risk for developing a drinking problem, to a moderate or light drinking model could provide such individuals with a source from which to develop more appropriate drinking habits. . . . [E]xposure to a heavy drinking peer who has experienced negative consequences as a result of the excessive consumption of alcohol (e.g., DWI citations, loss of driver's license, academic failure) along with the presentation of positive models could be a powerful prevention technique. . . . [H]ighly salient models presented by the media might influence the development of drinking habits. This is especially true for the young adolescent for whom the drinking situation is relatively ambiguous. . . . Media presentation of positive social and situational discriminative stimuli for alcohol use are likely to provide models which reinforce the development of moderate drinking habits. (1981, pp. 236–237)

The Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention's (OSAP) 1988 review of "strategies based on theories and models of prevention that can reverse or prevent adolescent alcohol use" considered social learning theory and offered several conclusions as to its relevance in the realm of prevention (Johnson et al. 1988, p. 579). First, OSAP noted, "social learning theory is probably the most widely used among current prevention program planners" (Johnson et al. 1988, p. 579). Second, OSAP recommended "[r]ole modeling of moderate, low-risk use of alcohol by adults of legal age" as an "essential component" of prevention strategies (Johnson et al. 1988, p. 584). Third, the importance of promoting "general social norms, values, and expectations" in the context of prevention strategies was noted (Johnson et al. 1988, p. 584). Last, OSAP asserted that these recommended strategy components be reinforced through the mass media.

In a two-year study to identify prevention research opportunities by the Institute of Medicine (1992), the social learning perspective on prevention research was again selected for detailed review. As had Strickland and Pittman (1984) and OSAP (Johnson et al. 1988), the panel concluded, "alcohol use/abuse and alcohol-related behavior are learned within a

cultural context” and the “media play their parts in significantly affecting the public perceptions of norms of alcohol use” (Institute of Medicine 1992, pp. 7–8). The panel then recommended the effective use of “counteractive media” as an important component of a prevention effort, “especially for young people who are major consumers of media offerings” (Institute of Medicine 1992, p. 8).

Thus, it appears that mass media alcohol education efforts, including industry-sponsored responsibility advertising, have the potential to educate young people by presenting attractive, socially successful models who (1) drink moderately, (2) do not drink and drive, (3) serve as designated drivers, and (4) abstain in situations where drinking is unacceptable (e.g., when working with heavy machinery, operating a snowmobile, hunting, and so forth).

DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack further recommend that:

*Any responsible drinking message*, whatever its sponsor, should adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Make it clear that alcohol consumption is inappropriate before or during certain activities or in any situation that requires alertness.
2. Do not imply that drinking alcohol is the socially accepted norm at any type of social occasion or for any group or type of individual.
3. Do not model, suggest, or otherwise encourage heavy consumption.
4. Do not include scenes that depict revelry or hint at the possibility of inebriation.
5. Neither glamorize alcohol consumption nor depict it as a way to have a good time, to celebrate, to fit in, to project a certain self-image, or to attain social or financial status.
6. Do not portray “sexual passion, promiscuity, or any other amorous activity” as a consequence [of] or in association with drinking beer. (1992, p. 676; emphasis in original)

Given that a reliable and valid content analysis of these dimensions of moderation advertising has not been carried out, one cannot directly evaluate responsibility advertising using the DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack (1992) guidelines. A first, but by no means adequate, step is to take literally DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack’s assertion that brand and responsibility advertising *are* synonymous, and to revisit several studies of alcohol advertising content. A review of the work by Atkin and Block (1981); Austin and Hust (2005); Cui (2000); Kelly et al. (2000); Strickland, Finn, and Lambert (1982); Wyant (1992); and Zwarun and Farrar (2006) is instructive.

#### BRAND ADVERTISING CONTENT AND NORMATIVE DRINKING BEHAVIOR

In Atkin and Block’s (1981) content analysis of alcohol advertising, coders examined the visual and verbal content of

beer, wine, and distilled spirits advertisements from magazines, newspapers, and television collected between 1978 and 1979. Almost all television advertising featured human characters, whereas less than one-third of magazine ads and one-fifth of newspaper ads contained characters. A majority of the characters were male, and the median age was in the early 30s. One percent of television ads, 1% of magazine ads, and 5% of newspaper ads were interpreted by coders as targeting those under 21. Three percent of television characters, 7% of magazine characters, and 0% of newspaper characters were portrayed as intoxicated. Less than 1% of all ads were found to assert or imply that the product would help the consumer get high or feel intoxicated. Five percent of television characters, 6% of magazine characters, and 3% of newspaper characters were portrayed as engaged in a hazardous activity in association with the product. Ads that “assert[ed] or implie[d] that product use is associated with increased self-esteem, greater confidence, and higher personal achievement (e.g., ‘having arrived,’ ‘you deserve it,’ ‘pour it with arrogance,’ ‘When you’ve got the world on a string,’ or picture of rich professionals)” (p. 138) were found to constitute 8% of television ads, 7% of magazine ads, and 5% of newspaper ads. Less than 15% of all ads “assert[ed] or implie[d] that use of the product leads to or is associated with male/female one-to-one interaction of a social, emotional, or sexual nature (e.g., picture of couple hugging or dreamily dining, ‘the drink of love,’ or ‘slow glow’)” (p. 136). Ads that asserted or implied “hedonistic enjoyment” were also rare; less than 3% of ads conveyed “unrestrained pleasure of a transitory nature, such as rowdy fun-making, sensuous lust, wild partying, or excessive self-indulgence” (p. 136).

Block summarized his and Atkin’s advertising content findings as follows:

We found that the implicit message in the vast majority of alcohol advertisements was moderate drinking. Our conclusion, based on our content analysis of hundreds of alcohol ads, was that only an exceptionally small number of advertisements portrayed the use of alcohol in troublesome ways, such as portrayals of hazardous activities. Portrayals of responsible drinking situations were the rule, not the exception. (1992, p. 10)

In fact, based on the results of our content analysis, if anything, the advertisements we studied would reinforce only moderate consumption, because that was virtually all that was portrayed in the ads. (1992, p. 8)

Strickland, Finn, and Lambert (1982) and Finn and Strickland (1982) also provide a comprehensive description of the content of print and broadcast alcoholic beverage advertising. With respect to 3,131 beverage alcohol advertisements that appeared in 494 issues of national magazines in 1978, Strickland, Finn, and Lambert conclude that “less than 40% of the ads contained human models and few ads which did

not picture human models presented human model-oriented themes. Relatively infrequent were such controversial themes as sexual connotation, religious symbolism, hedonism and self-indulgent reward; the so-called lifestyle appeals of extreme wealth, achievement and success also appeared infrequently" (1982, p. 679). Moderation messages were found in less than 3% of print ads.

In contrast to print ads, Finn and Strickland (1982) found that over 90% of the broadcast ads they collected in 1979 and 1980 featured human models. With respect to 131 unique broadcast ads, they conclude:

[C]onviviality and sociability themes of camaraderie, relaxation and humor were the most frequent appeals. . . . The more controversial themes based on lifestyle or status appeals, psychological orientations, and sexual or romantic connotations appeared infrequently. . . . [O]ver 80% of the ads analyzed showed a drinking scene. . . . During the drinking scene, relaxation and recreation were the activities most often shown, appearing in three-fourths of the ads. Celebrations or dining were shown in just under one-fifth of the ads. . . . Hazardous or exotic work or recreational activities were shown in 16% of the ads and in every case such activity took place during the nondrinking scene occurring prior to the drinking scene. (1982, pp. 979–980)

Moderation messages were found in none of the broadcast ads.

In a content analysis of alcohol advertising in consumer magazines, Wyant (1992) found much in common with Atkin and Block (1981) and Strickland, Finn, and Lambert (1982). All half-page or larger beer, wine, and distilled spirits ads were taken from 11 consumer magazines published from 1990 to 1991. Less than 46% of the ads contained human models. Of those with models, zero depicted nude models; 5.3% of all models were characterized as partially nude. Ads with erotic/romantic themes (9.4%), ads that were sexually suggestive (8.8%), ads that encouraged moderation in consumption (8.1%), or ads that pictured "living the good life" (5.3%) were relatively infrequent. Fewer still were ads that featured an endorser (5.5%), an expert or professional (3.5%), an identified celebrity (1.1%), an identified entertainer (.4%), or an identified athlete (.2%). Approximately 13% of all ads were characterized as having an explicit (e.g., a baseball game) or implicit (e.g., a close-up of a tennis ball) sports orientation. Of those, 2.9% were coded as conveying a professional sport. Strenuous physical activities were portrayed in 8.8% of all ads; 6.6% of all ads pictured devices requiring a motor to operate.

Unlike the reasonably comprehensive content analyses reviewed thus far, Cui (2000) offers a more general, thematically focused evaluation of alcohol ads appearing in *Life*, *Ebony*, *Glamour*, and *Essence* between 1975 and 1992. She focused on five advertising themes (i.e., "prestige/quality," "taste,"

"sexual suggestiveness," "social occasion," and "tradition") and found that for all four publications, "prestige/quality" and "taste" were either the first or second most frequently used appeal. "Sexual suggestiveness" was found to be the least frequently used in *Life* (9.0%) and most frequently used in *Ebony* (15.7%). "Social occasion" was most frequently employed in *Life* (13.7%) and least commonly used in *Glamour* (6.7%). "Tradition" was most common in *Life* (13.5%) and least common in *Essence* (8.5%).

Kelly et al. (2000) also examine a limited number of ads for beer (i.e., 40 ads) found in 12 consumer magazines published between 1996 and 1997. Nine ads (23.0%) depict no people, and the remainder were said to contain at least some lifestyle elements. In terms of the seven reported advertising themes operationalized in the study, the order of frequency was "outdoors" (35.7%), "rest and relaxation" (14.3%), "romantic/relationship" (7.1%), "professional work" (7.1%), "adventure/risk" (3.6%), "physical sports" (zero), and "physical work" (zero). The authors also note that the beer advertising they analyzed featured no cartoon characters or "personified animals or objects." Moreover, "[b]eer advertisements did not include more visual lifestyle elements . . . than nonalcoholic beverage advertisements" (Kelly et al. 2000, p. 198).

Austin and Hust (2005, p. 774) also report the results of a rather limited content analysis of alcoholic beverage advertising found in "the most popular consumer magazines for ages 12–20" from 1999 to 2000, and on network television during prime time and weekends in the San Francisco market for five composite weeks in 2000. Their findings were reasonably consistent with those reported above. Two percent of the alcohol ads in magazines portrayed risky situations. In television ads, approximately 9% involved a risky situation. Actions portrayed in magazine ads most often included relaxing (45%), flirting (12%), working (12%), and romancing or sex (11%). On television, ads emphasized relaxing (71%) and working (54%), with a minority showing flirting (23%), dining (11%), and romancing or sex (8%). Moderation messages were present in 69% and 10% of magazine and television ads, respectively. The authors conclude that over the past 20 years, the characteristics of alcohol advertising "have remained constant" (p. 782), except for a significantly greater presence of moderation messages and fewer depictions of risky situations.

Another rather limited analysis reports similar findings with respect to the manifest content of alcoholic beverage advertising. Zwarun and Farrar (2006) examined alcohol advertising associated with 39 sporting events broadcast between 1994 and 1997, and 31 sporting events broadcast between 1999 and 2002. According to the authors, no commercials were found to depict actual drinking, none of the ads showed people who were intoxicated, there was one depiction of drinking before or while people were engaged in an activity for which they ought to be alert and functioning at full capacity, and none

of the people depicted in the ads was deemed to be less than 21 years of age. Humor and friendship/camaraderie were the two themes most frequently conveyed.

Thus, a review of the work of Atkin and Block (1981), Strickland, Finn, and Lambert (1982), Wyant (1992), Cui (2000), Kelly et al. (2000), Austin and Hust (2005), and Zwarun and Farrar (2006) indicates that most alcoholic beverage advertising appears to comply with several of the responsibility advertising content guidelines suggested by DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack (1992). Alcohol consumption is depicted as occurring *after* activities or situations requiring alertness. Ads do not model heavy consumption or inebriation. While surely presenting alcohol consumption in a positive light, these ads appear not to depict it as a way to attain social or financial status. And apparently, these ads do not frequently portray sexual passion, promiscuity, or sexual success as a consequence of alcoholic beverage consumption.

While many explanations for the meager effects of alcohol advertising on consumption and abuse have been offered, Leventhal (1964) has suggested that the content of alcohol advertising may actually inhibit the overconsumption of alcohol through portrayals that identify cultural standards for drinking and that imply sanctions for the misuse of alcohol. "Characteristically, the mass media seem to encourage rather ritualized ideas about drinking. . . . The ritualization of drinking patterns and making the use of alcohol relevant to many social goals may, in fact, discourage drunkenness" (Leventhal 1964, p. 292).

Atkin (1990) echoes the conclusions of Strickland and Leventhal. According to him, three processes are relevant to the influence of visual portrayals of drinking. First, observational learning is the transmission of social information about behavior: "Symbolic modeling can . . . shape definitions of normative social practice and standards of conduct, such as the proper quantity of alcohol consumption" (Atkin 1990, p. 11). A second social learning process pertains to inhibitions governing proscribed behavior. "Vicarious punishment will lead to heightened self-restraint, while a reward or lack of negative consequences will be disinhibiting" (Atkin 1990, p. 11). Third, response facilitation is the modeling enhancement of socially sanctioned behavior via a simple reminder. About advertising and alcohol abuse, Atkin concludes:

The likelihood of advertising increasing alcohol misuse is minimized by the rarity of message content that portrays or encourages such behavior. Only a small proportion of the models are depicted as intoxicated, and almost none display improper practices or exhibit symptoms of alcohol abuse. Thus, there is little chance that observers would be disinhibited or inspired to imitation by modeling these behaviors, or derive positive associations with misuse. Indeed, the portrayals of conventional moderate drinking far outweigh any dysfunc-

tional depictions, suggesting the possibility of decreased abuse due to advertising. (1990, p. 19)

More recently, Martino et al. (2006) concur that advertising does expose adolescents to social models of drinking. However, their empirical findings suggest that young people's beliefs about the consequences of alcohol use are likely to be influenced more strongly by peers, parents, and important adults.

## DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### Comparative Content Analyses of Brand and Responsibility Advertising

If, as asserted by DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack (1992), the messages conveyed by industry brand advertising and moderation campaigns are synonymous, then industry-sponsored responsibility efforts are largely in compliance with their suggested guidelines. Alcohol consumption is depicted in brand advertising as occurring after, not before or during, activities and situations that require alertness. Ads do not model, suggest, or encourage heavy drinking. Alcohol is not depicted as a means by which to attain social or financial status. Alcohol advertising does not promise sexual success as a consequence of drinking. Moreover, advertising content asserted to influence youth (i.e., lifestyle appeals, sexual appeals, using sports figures, and showing risky activities) appears in alcohol advertising infrequently at most.

The extent to which industry-sponsored moderation campaigns introduce "prodrinking themes and images that are typical of the companies' standard beer commercials" (DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack 1992, p. 669) is an empirical question best addressed through formal, comprehensive content analyses of both brand and responsibility advertising. No such study exists, probably due to the enormous amount of effort involved. Thus, we are left to rely on the available analyses of brand advertising until a comparative examination of brand and responsibility advertising content is undertaken.

### Copy Testing of Brand and Responsibility Advertising

It can be argued as well that both brand advertising and industry-sponsored responsibility campaigns accomplish OSAP's recommended "role modeling of moderate, low-risk use of alcohol by adults of legal age" and convey "general social norms, values, and expectations" (Johnson et al. 1988, p. 584).

Nonetheless, DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack's (1992) guidelines for responsibility advertising, and implicitly for product advertising, discourage portrayals of alcoholic beverage consumption as socially acceptable, convivial, or celebratory in

nature. Such guidance is at variance with the actual prevalence of responsible alcoholic beverage use and the most commonly articulated consumer motivations for consuming alcoholic beverages. Drinking has long been characterized as a typical behavior in the United States (Goodwin et al. 1969). National surveys, using identical items over time, reveal remarkable stability in the percentage of adult Americans (about two-thirds) who drink alcohol.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, alcoholic beverages are used for social and celebratory reasons.<sup>8</sup>

DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack's (1992) desire to have alcoholic beverage use portrayed as socially unacceptable or as something other than respectable products used by responsible adult consumers is consistent with their control model of prevention,<sup>9</sup> but completely contradicts past and present advertising practice, which typically reflects cultural norms (Cherrington, Chamberlain, and Grixti 2006; Lantos 1987; Schudson 1984). As with virtually all advertising, alcoholic beverage brand and responsibility advertising conveys commonly accepted cultural standards and reasons for product use. Industry-sponsored alcoholic beverage communications are designed to model normative drinking behavior. Copy-testing methodologies (see, for example, Pechmann and Reibling 2006) offer opportunities to explicitly examine whether consumers concur that alcoholic beverage brand and responsibility advertising models moderate, low-risk use of alcohol by adults of legal age, and convey general social norms, values, and expectations.

Although brand and responsibility advertising appear to have in common this general adherence to DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack's (1992) guidelines, these two communication efforts differ in their objectives, strategies, and desired effects. Brand advertising seeks to differentiate the advertised product from its competitors in a static or declining market to maintain or increase its market share. The objective, therefore, is to affect selective demand. The message focus is on influencing a brand choice from among mutually exclusive alternatives. Alcohol advertising has been found to serve socially useful purposes, that is, advertising provides information, leads to expansion of market shares of superior brands, increases new product entry, increases price competition, and gives firms incentives to live up to product claims. Brand advertising does not exert a material influence on total consumption, experimentation with alcohol, or alcohol abuse.

Responsible drinking advertising, on the other hand, seeks to inform and change attitudes, thus accelerating the adoption of safe drinking practices. The objective, therefore, is to affect primary demand. Responsible drinking messages encourage the adoption of one or more complementary safe drinking practices. Mass media efforts sponsored by government and nonprofit organizations have been shown to enhance knowledge, alter attitudes, and change behavior. The extent to which the effects of industry-sponsored moderation campaigns are synonymous with, or *more effective than*, government or

public service organization efforts is again an empirical question. Among other things, the effect of the message depends on the perceived credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and similarity to the recipient of the source (Wilde 1993). Again, copy testing can be employed to examine the effect of differing objectives, strategies, and sponsors on well-specified and relevant knowledge, attitude, and behavior measures.

Social learning theory suggests yet another means by which brand advertising and industry-sponsored moderation campaigns may serve consumers. By modeling normative drinking behaviors, industry, nonprofit, and government communication efforts may well serve to educate adolescents and others as to socially acceptable drinking practices (Austin and Hust 2005). While brand advertising implicitly models normative consumption, moderation messages explicitly reflect changes in social expectations motivated by society's concern with the hazards of alcohol abuse. Industry-sponsored responsibility advertising unambiguously conveys that drinking should be regulated by its consequences. The slogans criticized by DeJong, Atkin, and Wallack (1992) (i.e., "Know When to Say When," "Think When You Drink," and "Drink Safely") may be no more vague than public service organization-sponsored slogans such as "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk," and may explicitly remind viewers of the effects of alcoholic beverage consumption. Moreover, some industry-sponsored responsibility ads explicitly label as such situations wherein drinking is unacceptable, and wherein people who plan to drink or have been drinking give their car keys to a nondrinking companion or are prevented from driving by a companion. It can be argued that such ads enable symbolic enactment of behaviors that engender positive social and health consequences. Thus, portrayals of responsible consumption of legal products in typical settings that focus on positive consequences are likely an effective educational tool due to the very social modeling processes articulated by Atkin (1990) and others. To be sure, such modeling effects are likely to be more subtle, more cumulative in nature, and more difficult to measure than other possible outcomes. Nonetheless, this context provides an interesting opportunity to explore the much-discussed socializing effects of advertising (Schudson 1984). Copy testing could begin to assess the effects of modeling, vicarious rewards depicted, and the slogans designed to provide a shorthand for both.

### The Appropriateness of Media Advocacy Efforts

While the morality of industry-sponsored moderation campaigns has been questioned, the appropriateness of calls for media advocacy efforts in the alcohol context have gone unchallenged. Recall that media advocacy is defined as the strategic use of mass media for advancing social or public policy initiatives. Proponents of media advocacy reject the view that health behavior problems are the responsibility of individual

consumers. Instead, they seek to shift responsibility for health behavior problems to those who shape the environment (i.e., manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, other drinkers) in which individual decisions about health-related behaviors are made. Thus, media advocacy abandons the notion of individual freedom in lifestyle and consumption choices (Sulkunen and Warpenius 2000). It sees marketplace power as residing in manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers, and asserts that producers and/or distributors ought to make particular decisions for individual consumers or be forced to do so by government. Tactically, media advocacy seeks to demonize particular industries and take individual consumers “off the hook” with respect to their own behavior. Operationally, media advocacy focuses on what Pechmann and Reibling have called the “victimizers, not on the victims” (2006, p. 906).

Questions about the efficacy of media advocacy notwithstanding, it is time that we consider the following questions: Is media advocacy a constructive long-term public health strategy? More important, what are the implications for a society wherein individual consumers are not responsible for their choices?

## NOTES

1. No more than two (one) drinks per day for men (women) (*Federal Register* 2005).

2. Between 1980 and 2004, the proportion of high school seniors reporting alcohol use within the last 30 days fell by one-third, from 72% to 48% (Johnston et al. 2005, pp. 601–602).

3. Between 1980 and 2003, per capita ethanol consumption declined from 2.76 to 2.22 gallons, a drop of almost 20% (NIAAA 2006, [www.niaaa.nih.gov/Resources/DatabaseResources/QuickFacts/AlcoholSales/consum03.htm](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/Resources/DatabaseResources/QuickFacts/AlcoholSales/consum03.htm)).

4. Media advocacy is defined as the strategic use of mass media for advancing social or public policy initiatives. See Dorfman (2003) for a recent discussion.

5. Wallack (1990) argues that antismoking activists have successfully employed media advocacy to reframe tobacco issues and strip the industry of its positive symbols. Pechmann et al., however, conclude, “it is unclear whether anti-tobacco industry advertisements work” (2003, p. 1). Results reported by Pechmann and Reibling (2006) also raise doubts about the efficacy of media advocacy efforts.

6. A number of comprehensive reviews of the literature on alcohol advertising exist. The three reported here are arguably the most complete. It is important to note that virtually every review of the alcohol advertising literature concludes much as this one does. See, for example, Atkin (1995), Calfee and Scheraga (1994), Grube (2004), Nelson (2001), and Smart (1988).

7. A 1946 Gallup Poll found that 33% of the American public were abstainers. In 1956, 1966, 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2004, 40%, 35%, 29%, 34%, 39%, and 38%, respectively, of a national adult sample identified themselves as abstainers (Gallup, all years).

8. People expect alcoholic beverages to facilitate relaxation and social functioning (Bauman and Bryan 1980; Glynn et al. 1983; Goodwin 1989; Hauge and Irgens-Jensen 1990; Lowe et al. 1992; Saltz and Elandt 1986). Social and celebratory reasons for drinking are endorsed far more often than are reasons associated with reducing negative affect (Johnson et al. 1985; Wood, Nagoshi, and Dennis 1992).

9. The control model of prevention here refers to reliance on regulatory restrictions to reduce alcoholic beverage consumption. In contrast, the sociocultural model of prevention favors education to foster moderation. For a discussion of the nature and evolution of the control versus sociocultural models of prevention, see Heath (1989). For a discussion of the social control position, see Whitehead (1979).

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Disponível em: <http://www.ebscohost.com>. Acesso em 6/6/2008.