

Affordances for Drinking Behaviour within Licensed Premises from a Drinker's Perspective: Challenges and Theory

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Alcohol Misuse is a Public Health Concern

- Young adults are consuming twice as much alcohol as they were ten years ago (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009).
- Binge drinking accounts for more than half of the alcohol consumed in the United Kingdom (HM's Alcohol Strategy, 2012).
- Behaviour change models are strongly influenced by a representational model of cognition: issues.
- Intentions the best predictor of behaviour: cognition guides behaviour.

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Behaviour Before Brain?

- Indirect perception, requires mediation. Dualism between brain and behaviour – how connected to world?
- Predicts intentions: behaviour? (Gerasst, Gibbons, Houlahan, Stock, & Pomeroy, 2008; Vlaev & Dolan, 2009).
- The Ecological Approach: humans **directly** perceive the functions that the environment serves for action, instead of inferring meaning using representations (Gibson, 1979).
- Moves focus from inside the head to the mutual relationship between an individual and their world.

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Embodied, Embedded Cognition:

- Brains are not only embodied, but embedded in rich physical and social environments with possibilities for action (**affordances**) that can be carried out.
- Meaning emerges from the **relation** of an individual to its environment, affordances a unit of measurement (Gibson, 1979).
- Studying behaviour in this way could reveal predictable social action (Wett, 2003; Maistly, Johnston, Richardson, & Schmidt, 2009).
- How is an individual's behaviour **constrained** or **extended** by their relationship with their environment?

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Affordances

- Functional characteristics of an environment (action potentials) viewed in **relation** to a perceiver.
- Goes beyond form-based descriptions.

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Re-defining Subjectivity?

- Need to move away from internal-external dualism (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).
- Understanding meaning not through hidden and private shared representations, but through accessible situated action, at the **relation** of an individual and their world.
- Cannot access this subjectivity directly, affordances provide a window onto this.
- Not against representations, just how conceptualised.
- Affordances: an abstract construct being used to describe the world in order to think about it.

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Study 1: Non-Participant Observational Study

- **Aim:** How effectively can the affordance concept be used to assess the functional characteristics of the licensed premises where young adults might consume alcohol?
- **Method:** Seven UK licensed premises: functional taxonomy and visual maps.
- **Findings:** Illustrated a range of potential alcohol-related affordances. e.g. how drinks container availability, promotions, noise, lighting, access, furniture availability and opportunities for action provided by others promote or inhibit opportunities for drinking alcohol.

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Initial Challenges

- **Conceptual:** Affordance ontology specifies mutuality between individual and environment: language?
- **Methodological:** Measuring relational variables using a systematic functional taxonomy in a changeable environment.
- **Limitations:** Objective observer's perspective, based on their inter-dependency with environment (perceptions, capabilities and history).

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Study 2: Photo-Elicitation Interview Study

- **Aim:** An exploration of the functional meaning that exists between young adults and their drinking environments, from their perspective.
- Photo-elicitation is used to explore the meaning participants place on their environments (Wuworth, 2008).
- 12 students from Oxford Brookes University viewed 50 photographs from 7 different licensed premises.
- *E.g. "For each photograph, talk me through any aspects of the environment, or the arrangement of the environment that you believe to be meaningful to your drinking behaviour, based on your experiences...are there any aspects that are important to you which were not represented by these photographs?"*

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Analysis

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: uncovers the meaning that exists between an individual and their environment (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999).
- **Indirect subjectivity:** Participants viewed photographs of unfamiliar licensed premises, described how they would behave, based on their experiences in similar environments.
- Photographs are **representations** of an environment.
- Recurrent experiential themes were extracted in-line with affordances and patterns across cases were explored.



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Preliminary Findings

• Confirmed alcohol-related affordances from Stage 1 and provided an insight into individual subjectivities.

Preliminary Themes: Affordances (occurrences)	Participant Number and Quote:
Listen-able thing (Entertainment Features)	P6: [music restricts sounds] "It's not very easy to hear people, so I'd probably be, drinking more..."
Information-conveying thing (Promotions, advertisements, Entertainment Features)	P12: [promotion type and placement] "I would drink more because, well it's got offers everywhere on just very, very cheap alcohol"
Light-providing thing (Lighting, Entertainment Features, Premise-Specific, Time, Atmosphere)	P7: [Lighting and time] "the lighting affects my behaviour, because I think it's later therefore, to me its kind of dark, kind of has like a nightclub kind of bar feel, so I drink more"
Purchase-able thing (Drink and Food Availability, Premise-Specific)	P2: [drink availability at point-of-sale] "you can see everything that's on show 'cos obviously they wanna, trying to sell it to you so obviously gonna emphasise, they've got the soft drinks kind of tucked away, obviously emphasising the alcohol"
Sit-on-able thing (Furniture, premise-specific, time, change)	P8: [seating availability, premise-specific] "I associate standing up drinking with drinking quickly...if you can sit, you drink slower"

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Preliminary Themes: Affordances (occurrences)	Participant Number and Quote:
Playable thing (Entertainment Features)	P2: [absorption games machines] "my drinking behaviour probably slows down in here, because obviously I am concentrating on the machine but um, once I've had a go, I have another go...then like I, I'll probably finish my drink after" P7: "... I think I'd be more inclined to drink because I think it'd be easy to drink while I played the game."
Access-able thing (Regulations, Layout and Spacing, Privacy)	P5: [bar access] "the crowd of it would make you drink more alcoholic drinks, but would probably have to wait longer at the bar, so a lot of the time actually when there's a crowd, I will buy like more than one round in order to not have to queue again, which might actually mean that I drink the two in the same time of one." P2: "I would go in there and go no this isn't, isn't worth the effort, this isn't worth the havoc, not drink or like leave"
Communicate-with-able thing (Person Characteristics, Social Aspects)	P5: [social influence] "obviously, like a lot of the time you feel pressure from the others to drink alcohol" P12: "if anything, it would make me purposely not do what they wanted me to do."

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Study 3:

- A combination of findings from Study 1 and 2 will provide a varied concourse of alcohol-related affordances for a Q-Methodology study.
- Identifying patterns of subjectivity that exists between groups of individuals and their physical and social environments.

Conceptual Steps:

- How could behaviour emerge from dynamic, embodied and embedded systems, held in place by the direct perception of affordances?
- Implications for individual differences in behaviour, the suggestibility of affordances and a person's propensity to act in certain social environments.
- How do promotions influence behaviour? Optic array from a picture stimulus provides same functional information as an object? Could affordances prevalent in certain social environments be primed?

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The Ecological Approach: A Global Theory of Behaviour?

- Alcohol-related affordances could advise designers or premise proprietors, implications for other risk-behaviours, e.g. product placement, cigarette selling.
- Requires conceptual re-tooling, not just an acceptance of affordances or direct perception (Jocot, 2007).
- Need to reconsider the organism-environment relationship, representations and subjectivity.



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Thank you Questions?



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