



### Embodied and Embedded Approaches for Preventing Alcohol Misuse

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### Outline



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### Current Prevention Approaches

- Current behaviour change theories rely on a representational model of cognition.
- Behaviour change theories aimed at preventing alcohol misuse view intentions as the best predictor of behaviour, based upon the view that 'Cognition' (i.e. the mental processes including values, attitudes and intentions) guide behaviour.
- These theories predict intentions well, but are often poor predictors of behaviour (Gerrard, Gibbons, Houlahan, Stock, & Romery, 2008; Vlach & Dolan, 2009).

Prevention efforts need to incorporate a fuller understanding of how people behave within their environment.



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### The Ecological Theory and Affordances

*James Gibson's (1979) ecological approach to perception:*

- Humans directly perceive the functions that the environment (and objects within it) serve for action, instead of inferring meaning using representations.
- Affordances were first described by Gibson to illustrate the potential for action between the organism and the environment.
- Affordances are inherently relational and provide the perceiver with functional information about the material properties of the environment.
- Observing and grouping affordances can illustrate the functional meaning that an environment has for an individual (Heft, 1988).
- Affordances can assist in the creation of conditions that lead to certain behaviours and studying them can reveal predictable social action (Heft, 2003; Marsh, Johnston, Richardson, & Schmidt, 2009).



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### A non-participant observational study in licensed premises

- **Aim:** How effectively can Gibson's affordances be used to assess the functional characteristics of environments where drinking behaviours are carried out?
- **Focus:** Real-time interaction between individuals and their environment, including features which constrain or extend opportunities for drinking alcohol.
- **Procedure:** 2-3 hour observational periods in a broad range of licensed premises.
- A systematic observational protocol is used to record a range of affordances and drinking behaviour observations.
- Environmental observations of affordances are systematically coded in terms of function: classification table, preliminary reports and observational mappings.
- **Conceptual and Methodological Challenges:**
  - Systematically observing and recording affordances in a real-time environment.
  - Classifying and grouping affordances in terms of function.



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### Observational Protocol

- External, Entrance Level Affordances and Behaviour
- Internal Bar-Level Affordances and Behaviour
- Internal Physical Affordances, Atmosphere and Behaviour
- Promotions
- Entertainment



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### Preliminary Findings

- **Environmental Features Observed to Promote Alcohol Consumption:** limited seating, no tables to rest drinks, loud music preventing conversation, staff promotion techniques, bar practices, bar access, drinks promotions advertising, cash or debit card minimum spending limits...
- **Environmental Features Observed to Inhibit Alcohol Consumption:** seating, areas to rest drinks, quieter venues allowing for conversation, games machines, bar practices, bar access, food service, drinks glasses and measures...
- **Next Stage of research:**
  - This data will inform the interview schedule for the second stage of research, which will be concerned with exploring the meaning that individuals place on their environments from their own perspectives.



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### References

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Thank you  
Questions?

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