



Published in final edited form as:

*Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2011 September ; 30(5): 554–563. doi:10.1111/j.1465-3362.2010.00252.x.

## Behavioural Indicators of Motives for Barroom Aggression: Implications for Preventing Bar Violence

Kathryn Graham, Ph.D<sup>1</sup>, Sharon Bernards, MA<sup>2</sup>, Samantha Wells, Ph.D<sup>3</sup>, D. Wayne Osgood, Ph.D<sup>4</sup>, Antonia Abbey, Ph.D<sup>5</sup>, Richard B. Felson, Ph.D<sup>6</sup>, and Robert F. Saltz, Ph.D<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Scientist and Section Head, Social and Epidemiological Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, London, Ontario, Canada; Adjunct Research Professor, Dept. of Psychology, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada; Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Professor (Adjunct), National Drug Research Institute; Curtin University of Technology; Perth, Western Australia, Australia

<sup>2</sup>Research Coordinator, Social and Epidemiological Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, London, Ontario, Canada

<sup>3</sup>Scientist, Social and Epidemiological Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, London, Ontario, Canada; Adjunct Professor, Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada; Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<sup>4</sup>Professor, Crime, Law, and Justice Program, Department of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

<sup>5</sup>Professor, Psychology Department, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

<sup>6</sup>Professor, Crime, Law, and Justice Program, Department of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

<sup>7</sup>Senior Scientist and Associate Director, Prevention Research Center, Berkeley, California, USA

### Abstract

**Introduction/Aims**—To develop new strategies for preventing violence in high risk licensed premises, we identify behavioural indicators of apparent motives for aggression in these settings and outline the implications of different motivation for prevention.

**Design/Methods**—The four types of motives for aggressive or coercive acts defined by the theory of coercive actions framed the research: gaining compliance, expressing grievances/restoring justice, attaining a favourable social identity, and pursuing fun/excitement. Incidents of aggression from the *Safer Bars* evaluation research [1] were analysed to identify behavioural indicators of each motivation.

**Results**—Compliance-motivated aggression typically takes the form of unwanted social overtures, third party intervention to stop conflicts or staff rule enforcement. Prevention strategies include keeping the aggressor's focus on compliance to avoid provoking grievance and identity motives which are likely to escalate aggression. Grievance motives are typically elicited by perceived wrongdoing and, therefore, prevention should focus on eliminating sources of grievances and adopting policies/practices to resolve grievances peacefully. Social identity motives are endemic to many drinking establishments especially among male patrons and staff. Prevention involves reducing identity cues in the environment, hiring staff who do not have

identity concerns, and training staff to avoid provoking identity concerns. Aggression motivated by fun/excitement often involves low-level aggression where escalation can be prevented by avoiding grievances and attacks on identity.

**Discussion/Conclusions**—Knowledge of behavioural indicators of motives can be used to enhance staff hiring and training practices, reduce environmental triggers for aggression, and develop policies to reduce motivation for aggression.

### Keywords

alcohol & violence; licensed premises; prevention; motivation; gender issues

## Introduction

Most people who go to commercial drinking establishments (bars, pubs, nightclubs) go there to socialize not to fight. Nevertheless, a number of studies [2–7] have demonstrated that drinking establishments are common settings for aggression and injury [8,9], especially among young men [10–12]. Little research, however, has examined apparent motivations in order to better understand why aggression occurs in these drinking contexts. The theory of coercive actions [13–15] provides an ideal framework for understanding the motives underlying barroom aggression because this theory relates motives to the social context and immediate precursors leading to aggression. In its current form [16], this theory includes four motives for using aggression, or more generally, coercion:

1. *Compliance.* Aggression to make others comply with the aggressors goal's, for example, to obtain something from someone, to get one's way, to make someone do something, or to stop someone from doing something;
2. *Grievance/justice.* Aggression involving grievances or punishments for wrongdoing, to defend rights and freedoms or to restore justice, or in response to perceived unfair treatment or violations of norms of politeness and respect for others;
3. *Asserting or defending social identity.* Aggression to assert identity (e.g., bullying) or defend identity (e.g., save face);
4. *Fun/excitement.* Aggression purely for fun, excitement, pleasure or thrills.

Although these motives for coercion are conceptually distinct, they often occur jointly. For example, if a person feels insulted or wronged, aggression motivated by the desire to address a grievance may also involve asserting or defending social identity. As well, aggression sometimes involves an escalation process with different motives coming into play at different stages in the process.

Existing research on motives for barroom aggression is limited. Ethnographic [17] and interview [12,18,19] research on male barroom aggression has noted the salience of two dominating social interactionist motives, (1) concerns with male honour/social identity and (2) the enjoyment and excitement of fighting. Research on security staff (door staff, crowd controllers) has also identified social identity concerns as an important contributor to aggression [20]. Grievance motives have also been cited as triggers for male-to-male aggression in bars, although these grievances appeared to be largely defined by concerns over male honour and masculinity [19]. A more recent study of female barroom aggression [21] found that female bar aggressors had similar grievance and identity motives to those of males in terms of reacting to feelings of being disrespected; however, their identity motives did not involve concerns with dominance and masculinity; nor did they appear to engage in aggression motivated by fun/excitement, as has been found for men.

Observational research has partly explored motives by categorising incidents according to the apparent main issue or reason leading to the conflict [22,23], including, for example, aggression in response to bar rules (i.e., compliance or grievance motives), aggression in which a barroom activity leads to grievance-related aggression (e.g., fights over pool games) or involves aggression for fun (e.g., rough dancing), and social identity-related motives such as trouble-making and offensive behaviour and jealousy. However, a theory-based systematic approach to assessing motives for aggression based on observational research has not been developed.

In this paper, we explore behavioural indicators of motives for barroom aggression using documented incidents of aggression observed as part of the *Safer Bars* evaluation project [1]. We focus on *behavioural indicators* of motives even though motivations are internal processes, because social interactions are determined by perceived motives of others, judged by their words, actions, facial expressions and body language [24]. For example, a person must assess the verbal and physical cues of others to decide: did that person push me purposely or accidentally? Was that comment intended as an insult, a compliment or a joke? Thus, judging other people's motives is a continuous and intuitive process that is an intrinsic part of social interactions, including aggressive interactions in bars. In the present research, we identify behavioural indicators of apparent motives for aggression observed in bars and clubs in order to provide the foundation for making these judgments more explicit and objective.

### Research Objectives

The first objective of the present paper is to develop behavioural indicators for rating the extent that different types of motives are apparent in aggressive and coercive behaviour of bar patrons and staff using detailed descriptions of incidents of observed aggression.

The second objective is to consider how knowledge of motives can be applied to preventing and reducing bar violence. Drawing on relevant literature we discuss the prevention implications of identifying behavioural indicators for understanding motives for barroom aggression for each of the four coercive motives and combinations of these motives.

### Methods

#### The *Safer Bars* Dataset

During 2000 – 2002, 1334 observational visits were conducted by male-female pairs of trained observers between midnight and 3:00 A.M. on Friday and Saturday nights in 118 large capacity bars/clubs (>300 people) in the city of Toronto, Canada. Researcher-observers visited the premises as patrons and conducted observations unobtrusively. Owners and staff were not informed of their presence. Qualitative and quantitative data were recorded for 1057 incidents of aggression involving 2700 patrons and 806 staff. Incidents varied from very minor (e.g., mild angry words) to more severe (e.g., punching). The narrative descriptions of the incidents include details about the facial expressions, body language, signs of intoxication and behaviour of each individual involved in each incident, with descriptions of some incidents running several pages. Additional detail about the observation methods and other aspects of the study are provided in previous publications [1,25,26] as well as at [http://publish.uwo.ca/~kgraham/safer\\_bars.html](http://publish.uwo.ca/~kgraham/safer_bars.html). Although the study excluded smaller pubs and bars, the establishments included in the sample are typical of many high-risk drinking establishments.

## Developing Behavioural Indicators of Apparent Motives for Aggression

**Step 1. Preliminary coding scheme**—An initial coding scheme was developed based on the existing literature about the defining features of the four coercive motives described in the introduction. This initial scheme was reviewed and revised by the research team.

**Step 2. Rating motives and providing comments explaining and justifying ratings**—Five male and five female university students familiar with the contemporary bar/club scene were hired to apply and further revise the coding scheme. Familiarity with the bar/club scene was included in the job recruitment advertisement, and this familiarity was assessed during the interview by asking how frequently the applicant attended bars/clubs, which clubs they attended and some details about their experiences. All coders had frequent experience as bar/club patrons and two were current employees of a large nightclub similar to some of those included in the study. The names of the bars/clubs in the study were not revealed to the coders. A minimum of four coders rated the behaviour of each person who engaged in any aggressive or coercive acts. The four types of motives (i.e., compliance, grievance, identity and fun) were rated on a scale from 0 to 10 where a rating of 0 indicated that the motive was not involved, 1–3 indicating that the motive was a very small factor or influence, 4–6 that the motive was a fairly important factor or influence, and 7–10 reflecting a situation where this was the primary factor driving the person's aggression or coercive act. The coders made extensive notes on the justification for their ratings, including the types of behaviours, body language and actions that led to their ratings for particular motives. At meetings with the coders, ratings made for particular incidents were discussed and sources of discrepancy were clarified. When discrepancies reflected confusion regarding the meaning of the different types of motives, the constructs were clarified through discussion in the group and/or revisions and refinements to the original coding scheme.

**Step 3. Defining behavioural indicators**—Observers' descriptions and coders' ratings and explanations were examined to identify specific behaviours exemplifying each type of motive. The ratings and explanations were also used to clarify issues that may lead to problems in identifying motives, such as, how to code motives when a person engaged in two separate acts of aggression with different motives for each act, overlapping of constructs, and so on.

**Step 4. Identifying implications for prevention**—The extant barroom literature was reviewed to identify applications of knowledge of behavioural motives to prevention.

## Results

### Behavioural Indicators of Motives

**Compliance**—The theory of coercive action's standard example of compliance-motivated behaviour is aggression for financial gain, for example, a robbery where the target of the aggression/coercion is forced to give up money or some other possession; however, aggression for financial gain is rare in barroom settings. Rather, compliance-motivated aggression in bars is more likely to involve either making someone do something he/she doesn't want to do (e.g., forcing sexual contact) or stopping someone from doing something that he/she wants to do (e.g., staff enforcing rules with an unwilling patron, using physical force to stop a fight). Specific indicators of compliance motives are shown in Table 1. Some indicators apply to patrons (e.g., using aggression to obtain compliance from staff), while others apply primarily to staff (e.g., rule enforcement) and others could apply to both patrons and staff (e.g., stopping an unwanted overture).

**Grievance**—Behavioural indicators of grievance/justice motives are defined by the actions of others that made the aggressor feel or believe that he/she has been wronged or offended. Therefore, in order for grievance/justice to be identified as a motive, there needs to be evidence that (a) someone has done something to trigger the aggression and (b) that the aggression/coercion is in response to this act. Indicators for grievance motives are shown in Table 2. Again some motives apply primarily to staff while others apply to patrons or both staff and patrons. Grievance motives can be differentiated from compliance motives in that compliance is focused on changing the behaviour of the target while grievance is focused on correcting the offence (not just the behaviour) or expressing one's objections regarding the offensive behaviour.

**Identity**—As noted in the introduction, social identity motives are common in barroom settings, especially among male patrons and staff, and reflected in a wide range of behaviours, as described in Table 3. As with grievance, identifying social identity motives requires consideration of the context. For example, a staff member who uses mild physical force when a patron repeatedly breaks the rules is likely to be motivated by compliance; however a staff member who grabs someone and shoves him/her out the door without first giving the person an opportunity to leave voluntarily is likely motivated more by identity concerns than by compliance.

Identification of social identity motives also requires examining whether other motives apply and can account for the behaviour. For example, grievance would be the obvious motive for aggression in response to being bumped – that is, the aggressor is reacting to being wronged (i.e., being bumped). However, for grievance motives, the reaction should be proportionate to the wrong [15]. Therefore, if the aggressor's response is disproportionate to the bump (e.g., punching the person), this suggests that identity concerns are involved such as wanting to demonstrate publicly that the aggressor is someone who cannot be pushed around.

**Fun/excitement**—Table 4 shows the types of behaviours that typically reflect fun/excitement motives. Although fun/excitement motives may be the sole reason for aggression, they are also often linked to other motives such as identity (e.g., teasing for fun can also include dominance motivation). Only grievance motives are unlikely to overlap with fun/excitement because grievance motivated aggression rarely involves fun or enjoyment for the aggressor.

### Implications for Prevention

We have described the behavioural indicators for four types of motives for aggressive or coercive acts: gaining compliance, expressing grievances and restoring justice, attaining a favourable social identity, and pursuing fun/excitement. In the following sections, we describe how knowledge of these motives and their behavioural indicators can be applied to preventing aggression in the barroom setting. We discuss first compliance and fun/excitement motives which tend to be associated with more minor forms of aggression, and then focus on grievance and identity which the existing literature suggests are likely to be involved in more severe forms of violence. And finally, we discuss the potential for coercion or aggression to have prosocial goals especially relating to compliance motives in the barroom setting.

**Preventing the occurrence and escalation of compliance and fun/excitement-motivated aggression**—Bar aggression motivated solely by compliance tends to be mild. For example, compliance-motivated aggression such as forced sexual contact is likely to be limited to minor assaults because other patrons and staff are almost certain to intervene

to prevent forced sexual overtures from progressing to rape. Nevertheless, forced sexual contact can cause considerable discomfort to the target, and other analyses suggest that staff rarely intervene in such incidents [27].

Incidents of aggression and coercion motivated by fun/excitement in barroom settings also typically cause low level harms to targets, with harms mainly taking the form of annoyance and discomfort, with the exception of fun-motivated involvement in an ongoing brawl [7,19]. Therefore, for both compliance and fun/excitement motives, prevention needs to be directed at setting norms to contain such aggression and preventing compliance- and fun-motivated aggression from escalating due to grievance and social identity motives elicited by the initial aggressive acts. For example, one of the most severe incidents in the study began with an inappropriate sexual overture (motivated by compliance and fun/excitement) toward a female patron whose boyfriend then became involved on her behalf (grievance motive). The identity motives that emerged on all sides and the grievance motives on the part of the target and her boyfriend led to a brawl in which one person sustained a head injury and another an apparent broken nose. The sexual overture that led to the brawl was one of a series of sexual harassment acts committed by this man and his friends. Thus, the brawl itself might have been prevented by staff had they intervened sooner in the initial aggressive acts that were motivated by compliance and fun/excitement.

Escalation is particularly likely when staff use excessive, inappropriate or disrespectful coercive acts to obtain compliance from patrons, thereby provoking both grievance and identity motives in the patrons who are the targets of their actions. Staff need to be taught that compliance is likely to be obtained with minimal aggression and escalation if their actions stay focused on the goal of achieving compliance, if rules are reasonable and if enforcement is respectful and fair. Similarly, staff also tend to escalate the situation when they take it personally if a patron does not comply (with staff motives shifting from compliance to identity and grievance regarding the perceived personal insult) [28]. Good management and house policies are needed to ensure that the focus for staff remains on compliance (not identity). With regard to addressing fun/excitement motives for aggression between patrons, staff should (a) recognize the potential for fun-related aggression/coercion to escalate and (b) address fun-related aggression/coercion at the earliest opportunity in order to prevent fun/excitement motivated aggression from eliciting grievance or identity motives.

**Preventing and de-escalating grievance-related aggression—**Most grievances in the present study of crowded late-night large capacity venues were about immediate transgressions (bumping, spilled drinks, harassment) perpetrated by strangers rather than about longstanding grudges. Therefore, one direction for preventing grievance-related aggression in such establishments is to make environmental changes that reduce or eliminate common sources of grievances [e.g., avoid bottlenecks and cross traffic that lead to bumps - see 28]. Grievance-related aggression can also be minimized by having house policies and staff practices that involve resolving grievances (such as replacing spilled drinks) and restoring a sense of justice for patrons who are the victims of careless or intentional bumping or harassment by intervening to stop such behaviours.

A primary source of grievance-related aggression in some establishments is arbitrary, unfair, officious or aggressive staff behaviour [28]. Therefore, it is especially important that house and management policies do not create grievance situations but actually try to reduce situations likely to lead to grievances (e.g., minimizing line-ups, making line-ups more pleasant, operating lines fairly, having reasonable and consistent rules, enforcing rules fairly). As noted above, prevention of grievance-related aggression toward staff can also be achieved by training staff how to enforce rules and intervene in conflicts in ways that do not

provoke grievance and identity motives. For example, an overly aggressive ejection is likely to make the patron feel that he/she has been wronged (i.e., grievance motive) as well as eliciting identity motives (i.e., the need to save face).

Grievance-motivated aggression by staff who are frustrated by a lack of compliance can also be addressed by the use of teamwork. For example, the “tap out” technique included as part of the *Safer Bars* training program [29] involves a predetermined agreement whereby a staff member who is seen to be getting angry because of a patron’s lack of compliance is joined by another staff member who touches the shoulder of the first staff member (i.e., “taps him out”) and takes over dealing with the patron, allowing the first staff member to withdraw from the interaction without losing face. In cases where the patron is expressing a grievance related to the initial staff member’s behaviour, this procedure would allow the patron to feel some satisfaction or respect for their grievance and also diffuse attention focused solely on the first staff member.

**Preventing identity motivated aggression**—As has been recognized in previous research [17–19], identity motives are at the root of much of the aggression that occurs in drinking establishments, especially for young men. For example, young adult male participants in a recent focus group study of male-to-male barroom aggression [30] described how image was a key concern for them, particularly in bars and clubs. Because of heightened sexual competition, male rivalry and peer norms, these men described bar attendance as being all about image. Tomsen [17] also found that identity concerns were important in male barroom aggression, noting the importance of preserving honour and the “humiliating social consequences of publicly refusing any challenge” (p. 94). Therefore, an important direction for prevention is to lower situational threats to identity through policies, environmental controls and better practices for hiring and training staff.

Identity motives are a major issue for security staff at bars. Ethnographic and other research [17,20,31–35] suggests that the culture of security staff is largely dominated by identity concerns that are manifested in the way that staff treat patrons. In fact, staff often provoke identity issues among male patrons at the door before they even enter the drinking establishment [28,33]. The behavioural indicators of identity motives developed in the present research (including staff-specific indicators such as officious rule enforcement as well as more general indicators such as “tough guy” attitudes and excessive reactions to perceived offensive behaviour) can be used to help staff and managers identify their own identity motives and understand how these motives affect the behaviour of patrons. This knowledge can also be used to raise awareness among owners and managers of drinking establishments regarding the identity motives displayed by their staff and the effects these motives have on patrons’ behaviour and the environment generally.

Critical directions for preventing identity-related aggression include: employing bar staff who do not have the need to assert or defend their identity; eliminating the culture of identity among security staff in many drinking settings including avoiding dress codes for security staff that reinforce a “tough guy” image; use of intervention techniques that avoid causing threats to identity of patrons; and adopting a more welcoming and less intimidating environment at the door and within the establishment. Changing the gender-dominated job roles in drinking establishments, especially employing women as well as men in security roles, may help to change this culture. For example, research in the UK [31] found that female bar staff could resolve problems more readily because they were not obligated to maintain a status of dominance, although this research also found that female security staff tended to adopt the identity issues normative among male security staff. Thus, gender-neutral job categories would need to be part of an overall effort to change the culture of identity endemic to many bar settings. Beyond the barroom, prevention programs might

address boy's and young men's concerns about conforming to traditional masculine norms. As well, programs might be developed that give boys and young men practical skills for responding to perceived social pressure and saving face without resorting to aggression [see 30].

**The volatile combination of grievance and identity motives**—The mixing of grievance and identity motives may lead to particularly high risk situations. As noted in previous research [19], male-to-male aggression in drinking settings often involves a comingling of grievance and identity motives. Similarly, recent analyses of motives of young offenders convicted of alcohol-related offences [36] found that almost two-thirds (62%) committed violence in pursuit of social dominance goals with grievance a common trigger for these offenses. Of particular importance, this study found that identity-motivated violence tended to be more severe than violence that was motivated by monetary gain (i.e., compliance) or self-defence; further, offenders motivated by identity did not express remorse or regret.

Identity motives may be particularly likely to emerge if the person with the grievance does not feel that he/she received an adequate response, consistent with the observation by Felson and Tedeschi [14, p.156] that “Concern for justice and deterrence may be central in the initial stages of the encounter whereas social identities become more salient as the incident escalates.” Thus, if staff dismiss grievances or assert their own identity when responding to grievances, this is likely to escalate the situation by provoking identity motives in the grievant. Therefore, policies, practices and environments that minimize provocation of grievances and provide quick and effective solutions when grievances occur are important for preventing grievance-triggered identity fights.

**Encouraging prosocial compliance-motivated coercion**—In barroom settings, compliance-motivated coercive acts may be done for pro-social reasons, for example, using force to stop a fight. The current practice in most drinking establishments, however, is to discourage prosocial compliance motives among patrons, placing all responsibility for intervening in fights to bar staff, specifically security staff [28]. This commonly-accepted policy may need rethinking in that recent analyses of closed-circuit TV footage of street fights (where there were no official persons such as bar staff or police present to stop the fight) [37] suggest that coercive or aggressive actions intended to *de-escalate* a situation are common in these circumstances. Therefore, a greater effort to foster pro-social coercive acts and group responsibility might be an effective strategy for reducing violence in licensed drinking establishments. Consistent with this, Wells & Graham [38] found that 49% of observed incidents of aggression in their barroom study involved third parties and, of these, 40% involved peacekeeping behaviours that resulted in a decrease in aggression. Thus, one strategy that might reduce the escalation of aggression in drinking establishments would be to have policies and practices that recognize and reward prosocial coercion by patrons such as using peaceful means to stop friends from fighting, even if the reward is only words of recognition from staff.

It needs to be recognized, however, that there are potential problems with encouraging coercive acts by patrons, if the motive for stopping friends from fighting is primarily to assert identity or show power/dominance (e.g., the self-appointed rule enforcer) rather than to simply achieve peaceful compliance. Therefore, staff need to be trained in awareness of patron behaviours indicative of identity concerns so that they can take advantage of natural allies among patrons while at the same time discouraging coercive acts motivated to display dominance.



## Discussion and Conclusions

Knowledge of motives for barroom aggression has implications for management and policy of drinking establishments, including structure of the physical and social environment as well as hiring, training and management of staff. From an environmental perspective, grievance-motivated aggression might be prevented by thoughtful design of the physical structure and location of activities, efficient and well-organised services and reasonable and respectful policies. Aggression related to compliance, fun/excitement and social identity might be prevented by strategies such as establishing norms for acceptable behaviour, early intervention and by banning persistent trouble-makers who frequently provoke grievance and identity motives in others.

As we have noted above, much of the use of knowledge of motives for aggression falls to staff. The behavioural indicators of aggression motives in the present research can also be used to enhance staff training programs such as the *Safer Bars* program [1]. Specifically, staff can be trained to recognize, through knowledge of behavioural indicators, issues motivating aggression among patrons. By recognizing the underlying motive of the patron, they can de-escalate the situation by addressing the key issue (e.g., addressing the grievance, recognizing and defusing identity concerns, directing a person engaging in minor aggression motivated by fun/excitement toward more socially acceptable behaviour) rather than by applying a generic response regardless of the patron's motive. For example, as described above, grievance-related motives might be addressed by acknowledging the grievance and rectifying it when possible. Additionally, staff can be trained to recognize their own motives and how these may affect their dealings with patrons. A critical direction is to reduce the current focus among male security staff on identity issues [17,20,32,35] through better training and the use of teamwork.

Even when armed with greater knowledge and sensitivity to understanding motives, however, the challenges faced by owners, managers and staff are formidable because of the risky nature of social interactions among strangers in bars and the general designation of drinking establishments as places where normal conventions and restrictions do not apply. Furthermore, the identification of "real" motives is complicated by the presence of alcohol, which likely impairs not only the actor's ability to communicate his or her true motive, but also his/her ability to interpret correctly the motives of others [39] or even to assess and remember stressful situations accurately [40].

The obfuscating role of alcohol on perceptions is compounded by the additional complication that some patrons intentionally disguise their motives or may be consciously seeking to play with the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable motives (e.g., as when claiming they were "only joking") [19,27]. This appears to be a special form of the "deviance disavowal" theory of alcohol-related aggression whereby aggressive persons use alcohol to excuse their behaviour while it is occurring rather than after it has occurred [see 41,42]. This purposive ambiguity created by the actor may give him/her a possible escape for behaviour that might be judged as inappropriate in other (sober) situations. However, better knowledge of the behavioural indicators of motives can provide important tools for setting clear policies and enforcing policies consistently. For example, if the establishment has clear policies prohibiting behaviours that reflect identity challenges, patrons who exhibit behaviours indicative of identity challenges can be ejected from the premises regardless of whether their intoxication made them less aware of their effects on others.

### Strengths and limitations of the research

This research has taken the unusual approach of examining motives from the outside – that is, from observed behaviour. There are, however, several limitations of basing motivational

data on documented incidents of observed behaviour. First, observers of the incidents and readers of the documented aggressive behaviours do not have access to the aggressor's internal thought processes; therefore, judgements can reflect only "apparent" motives. Second, in the present study, we are relying on observers' descriptions of the words, body language and behaviour of participants in aggressive incidents rather than assessing behavioural indicators first-hand. These written descriptions, although detailed, cannot include all information that would be available to someone observing the behaviour directly. Third, because these incidents were observed as they occurred in real-life settings, observers may have missed some aspects of the incident (e.g., missed the first part, unable to see some parts because of other patrons blocking their view). Finally, these observations were conducted in a single large Canadian city and some of the findings may not apply equally to behaviour in licensed premises in other cultures.

Despite these limitations, there are several advantages to using behavioural indicators for understanding motives for barroom aggression compared with asking people about their motivations. First, when people describe their own motives, these descriptions are filtered through biases related to self-interest and self-presentation. Second, self-identified motives are likely to be affected by memory biases that may become more extreme over time. Third, self-attributed motives reported after an aggressive incident by an intoxicated participant may include considerable guesswork based on blurry and incomplete memory and perceptual biases due to the effects of alcohol [40]. Thus, despite the lack of data on internal thought processes of individuals involved in aggressive incidents, clear and objective descriptions of observed behaviour may provide even better information about likely motives than can be obtained from the actors in some contexts.

In sum, our analyses have identified concrete observable behaviours that provide insight into the motives underlying aggression in commercial drinking establishments. We have also outlined a number of strategies for applying knowledge of these behavioural indicators of motivations to preventing barroom violence. Existing evidence suggests that bar violence can be reduced through interventions directed toward licensed premises [1,43,44] and that such reductions will not necessarily have a negative effect on the pleasures of attending the bar and the bar's profitability [45]. The prevention strategies outlined in the present research can be used to further reduce violence in licensed premises by focusing on behavioural indicators of motivation for aggression.

## Acknowledgments

Work on this paper was supported by a grant from the U.S. National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) (R01AA017663) as was the original research on which the paper is based (R01 AA11505). In addition, support to CAMH for salary of scientists and infrastructure has been provided by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The contents of this paper are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the NIAAA or NIH or those of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. We are grateful to Patrick Gruggen, Michael Holder, Kayla Janes, Eric LeBlanc, Laura Olszowy, Tyler Pirie, Andrew Pulford, Michael Rooyakkers, Stephanie Weldon and Rebecca Wilson who played an important role in identifying behavioural indicators of motives and clarifying key constructs through their coding, comments and discussions and to Sue Steinbach for editorial assistance.

## References

1. Graham K, Osgood DW, Zibrowski E, Purcell J, Gliksmann L, Leonard K, et al. The effect of the Safer Bars programme on physical aggression in bars: Results of a randomized controlled trial. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2004; 32:31–41. [PubMed: 14965885]
2. Harford TC, Wechsler H, Muthen BO. Alcohol-related aggression and drinking at off-campus parties and bars: A national study of current drinkers in college. *J Stud Alcohol.* 2003; 64:704–711. [PubMed: 14572193]

3. Lang E, Stockwell T, Rydon P, Lockwood A. Drinking settings and problems of intoxication. *Addict Res.* 1995; 3:141–149.
4. Hobbs D, Lister S, Hadfield P, Winlow S, Hall S. Receiving shadows: Governance and liminality in the night-time economy. *Br J Sociol.* 2000; 51:701–717. [PubMed: 11140891]
5. Ireland CS, Thommeny JL. The crime cocktail: Licensed premises, alcohol and street offences. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 1993; 12:143–150. [PubMed: 16818323]
6. Leonard KE, Quigley BM, Collins RL. Physical aggression in the lives of young adults: Prevalence, location, and severity among college and community samples. *J Interpers Violence.* 2002; 17:533–550.
7. Pernanen, K. Alcohol in human violence. New York: The Guilford Press; 1991.
8. Macdonald S, Cherpitel CJ, Borges G, DeSouza A, Giesbrecht N, Stockwell T. The criteria for causation of alcohol in violent injuries based on emergency room data from six countries. *Addict Behav.* 2005; 30:103–113. [PubMed: 15561452]
9. Roche AM, Watt K, McClure R, Purdie DM, Green D. Injury and alcohol: A hospital emergency department study. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2001; 20:155–166.
10. Coid J, Yang M. Violence and delayed social independence among young adult British men. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2009; 45:301–308. [PubMed: 19504032]
11. Graham K, Wells S, Jelley J. The social context of physical aggression among adults. *J Interpers Violence.* 2002; 17:64–83.
12. Rolfe A, Dalton S, Krishnan M, Orford J, Mehdikhani M, Cawley J, et al. Alcohol, gender, aggression and violence: Findings from the Birmingham Untreated Heavy Drinkers Project. *J Subst Use.* 2006; 11:343–358.
13. Felson, RB.; Tedeschi, JT. Aggression and violence: Social interactionist perspectives. Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association; 1993.
14. Felson, RB.; Tedeschi, JT. A social interactionist approach to violence: Cross-cultural applications. In: Ruback, RB.; Weiner, NA., editors. *Interpersonal violent behaviors.* New York: Springer Publishing Company; 1995. p. 153-170.
15. Tedeschi, JT.; Felson, RB. *Violence, aggression, & coercive actions.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 1994.
16. Felson, RB. A rational-choice approach to violence. In: Zahn, MA.; Brownstein, HH.; Jackson, SL., editors. *Violence: From theory to research.* Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing; 2004. p. 71-90.
17. Tomsen S. A top night out -- Social protest, masculinity and the culture of drinking violence. *Br J Criminol.* 1997; 37:990–1002.
18. Benson D, Archer J. An ethnographic study of sources of conflict between young men in the context of the night out. *Psychol Evol Gend.* 2002; 4:3–30.
19. Graham K, Wells S. "Somebody's gonna get their head kicked in tonight!". *Br J Criminol.* 2003; 43:546–566.
20. Hobbs D, Hadfield P, Lister S, Winlow S. 'Door loor' The art and economics of intimidation. *Br J Criminol.* 2002; 42:352–370.
21. Spence CE, Williams SE, Gannon TA. 'It's your round!' - female aggression in licensed premises. *Psychol Crime Law.* 2009; 15:269–284.
22. Forsyth AJM, Lennox JC. Gender differences in the choreography of alcohol-related violence: An observational study of aggression within licensed premises. *J Subst Use.* 2010; 15:75–88.
23. Graham K, Wells S. Aggression among young adults in the social context of the bar. *Addict Res Theory.* 2001; 9:193–219.
24. Heider, F. *The psychology of interpersonal relations.* New York: Wiley; 1958.
25. Graham K, Bernards S, Osgood DW, Homel R, Purcell J. Guardians and handlers: The role of bar staff in preventing and managing aggression. *Addiction.* 2005; 100:755–766. [PubMed: 15918806]
26. Graham K, Tremblay PF, Wells S, Pernanen K, Purcell J, Jelley J. Harm, intent, and the nature of aggressive behavior. Measuring naturally occurring aggression in barroom settings. *Assessment.* 2006; 13:280–296. [PubMed: 16880280]

27. Graham K, Wells S, Bernards S, Dennison S. "Yes, I do but not with you" - Qualitative analyses of sexual/romantic overture-related aggression in bars and clubs. *Contemp Drug Probl.* In press.
28. Graham, K.; Homel, R. *Raising the bar: Preventing aggression in and around bars, pubs and clubs.* Cullompton Devon, UK: Willan Publishing; 2008.
29. Graham K, Jelley J, Purcell J. Training bar staff in preventing and managing aggression in licensed premises. *J Subst Use.* 2005; 10:48–61.
30. Wells S, Graham K, Tremblay PF. "Every male in there is your competition": Young men's perceptions regarding the role of the drinking setting in male-to-male barroom aggression. *Subst Use Misuse.* 2009; 44:1434–1462. [PubMed: 19938926]
31. Hobbs D, O'Brien K, Westmarland L. Connecting the gendered door: Women, violence and doorwork. *Br J Sociol.* 2007; 58:21–38. [PubMed: 17343636]
32. Lister S, Hobbs D, Hall S, Winlow S. Violence in the night-time economy. *Bouncers: The reporting, recording and prosecution of assaults. Policing and Society.* 2000; 10:383–402.
33. Monaghan LF. Regulating 'unruly' bodies: Work tasks, conflict and violence in Britain's night-time economy. *Br J Sociol.* 2002; 53:403–429. [PubMed: 12227842]
34. Wells S, Graham K, West P. "The good, the bad, and the ugly": Responses by security staff to aggressive incidents in public drinking settings. *J Drug Issues.* 1998; 28:817–836.
35. Winlow, S. *Badfellas: Crime, tradition and new masculinities.* New York, NY: Berg; 2001.
36. McMurrin M, Jinks M, Howells K, Howard RC. Alcohol-related violence defined by ultimate goals: A qualitative analysis of the features of three different types of violence by intoxicated young male offenders. *Aggress Behav.* 2009; 35:1–13. [PubMed: 18925634]
37. Taylor PJ, Jacques K, Giebels E, Levine M, Best R, Winter J, et al. Analysing forensic processes: Taking time into account. *Issues Forensic Psychol.* 2008; 8:45–57.
38. Wells S, Graham K. The frequency of third party involvement in incidents of barroom aggression. *Contemp Drug Probl.* 1999; 26:457–480.
39. Abbey A, Zawacki T, Buck PO, Clinton AM, McAuslan P. Sexual assault and alcohol consumption: What do we know about their relationship and what types of research are still needed? *Aggress Violent Behav.* 2004; 9:271–303.
40. Sayette MA. An appraisal-disruption model of alcohol's effects on stress responses in social drinkers. *Psychol Bull.* 1993; 114:459–476. [PubMed: 8272466]
41. Graham K, Leonard K, Room R, Wild TC, Pihl RO, Bois C, et al. Current directions in research on understanding and preventing intoxicated aggression. *Addiction.* 1998; 93:659–676. [PubMed: 9692266]
42. Leonard KE. Alcohol's role in domestic violence: a contributing cause or an excuse? *Acta Psychiatr Scand.* 2002; 106:9–14. [PubMed: 12100343]
43. Homel, R.; Hauritz, M.; Wortley, R.; McIlwain, G.; Carvolth, R. Preventing alcohol-related crime through community action: The surfers paradise safety action project. In: Homel, R., editor. *Policing for prevention: Reducing crime, public intoxication and injury.* Monsey, New York: Criminal Justice Press; 1997. p. 35-90.
44. Wallin E, Norstrom T, Andreasson S. Alcohol prevention targeting licensed premises: A study of effects on violence. *J Stud Alcohol.* 2003; 64:270–277. [PubMed: 12713202]
45. Homel R, Carvolth R, Hauritz M, McIlwain G, Teague R. Making licensed venues safer for patrons: What environmental factors should be the focus of interventions? *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2004; 23:19–29. [PubMed: 14965884]

**Table 1**

## Behavioural indicators of compliance motives for aggressive or coercive actions

<b>Behavioural indicator</b>
Social or sexual overtures by the aggressor where the goal is to force the target to engage in an activity with the aggressor against his/her will (e.g., trying to make someone dance, trying to make someone respond to sexual contact)
Aggressive actions by the target of the overtures or by a third party where the goal is to stop unwanted social overtures
Trying to force someone to pay attention
Using aggression to obtain something from staff (e.g., allow aggressor to remain in the bar after a fight)
Aggressive intervention (by staff or patrons) to stop people from fighting
Using aggression/coercion to obtain compliance from patrons who are disobeying the rules or not complying with orders/requests from staff

**Table 2**

## Behavioural indicators of grievance/justice motives for aggressive or coercive actions

---

<b>Behavioural indicator<sup>1</sup></b>
Being the target of an aggressive act(s)
Having one's personal space invaded
Being bumped, having a drink spilled on him/her (even if not done intentionally) and other accidental mishaps
Being adversely affected by horseplay or other actions by others
Experiencing unfair treatment or being ignored by staff or other patrons
Staff reacting to a lack of compliance by patrons who have been told to do something or not to do something

---

<sup>1</sup> Grievance motives also apply when the aggressor is responding to these types of behaviours directed toward someone whom the aggressor is motivated to defend (e.g., an aggressive act toward a friend, unfair treatment of a friend).

**Table 3****Behavioural indicators of social identity motives for aggressive or coercive actions**

<b>Behavioural indicator</b>
Dominating physical space/territoriality (e.g., dominating the dance floor, blocking other people's passage)
Excessive reaction to perceived offensive behaviour of others (e.g., overreaction to accidental bump that goes beyond expressing a grievance)
Claiming entitlement or special status (e.g., "you are throwing ME out?", "I know the manager"), self-important behaviour (e.g., bossing others around), posturing
"Tough guy" attitude, body language, verbal challenges or physical acts done to demonstrate toughness, taking risks (such as challenging larger person or larger group to a fight)
Using physical force to show personal power over someone (e.g., restraining someone against their will unnecessarily, not letting go of someone to show control, persistent and invasive sexual overtures), acting in an intimidating way, or doing something to make another person feel inferior or unimportant (bullying, belittling, demeaning, putting someone down, mean teasing, mocking, ganging up on, showing disdain)
"Cold" or emotionless acts of aggression (e.g., acts of aggression followed by nonchalance or acting like nothing happened)
Being publicly possessive (usually of romantic/sexual partner)
Responding to actions by others that attack the subject's identity (reacting to being threatened, criticized, insulted, mocked, being pushed around), reacting to embarrassment (e.g., aggressive reaction to rejection of a social overture. aggressive reaction to rule enforcement by staff that embarrasses or humiliates the aggressor)
Responding to public pressure from others to become aggressive
Staff being pompous or officious in carrying out responsibilities

**Table 4**

## Behavioural indicators of fun/excitement motives for aggressive or coercive actions

<b>Behavioural indicator</b>
Boisterous horseplay that was fun for participants but was considered aggression because of its intentional negative effect on others (e.g., intentionally bumping others on the dance floor)
Playful aggression or teasing where the aggressor was aware that it caused harm to the target (e.g., playful [but hard] punch)
Romantic/sexual overtures done to harass the target rather than to engage in social interaction
Teasing friends or strangers in a joking manner but where targets clearly experienced harms such as embarrassment or discomfort
Various forms of rebelliousness and rule breaking (stealing a drink, dancing on a table after being told not to) where these acts meet the definition for aggression
Joining into a fight for no apparent reason other than the fun or excitement involved in participating in the fight