

“Yes, I do but not with you”: Qualitative analyses of sexual/ romantic overture-related aggression in bars and clubs

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Assaultive and aggressive behaviors related to sexual overtures are common in commercial drinking establishments (bars, pubs, and clubs). In this article, we examined the thematic content of 251 incidents of verbal and physical aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures documented by researcher-observers in a study of Toronto bars and clubs. Aggression was examined as it emerged in the following stages of the social interaction process: (a) sexual/romantic overtures that began aggressively; (b) initiators of sexual/romantic overtures who became aggressive later in the social

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interaction process; (c) aggression by targets of overtures; and (d) aggression by third parties. From these thematic analyses we identify the distinctions between predatory and genuine overtures and explore the potential role of the effects of alcohol.

In these social overtures aggression occurred as part of the initial overture, during the interaction following the overture (i.e., aggression by the person who made the initial overture, by the target or third parties), and in response to rejection by the target. Targets of overtures responded aggressively to perceived inappropriate overtures; third parties played important aggressive and nonaggressive roles; and alcohol intoxication was identified as contributing to aggression in a number of ways. The theoretical significance and practical implications for prevention of the findings are discussed.

KEY WORDS: *Sexual assault, alcohol and violence, commercial drinking establishments, social interaction, situational crime prevention.*

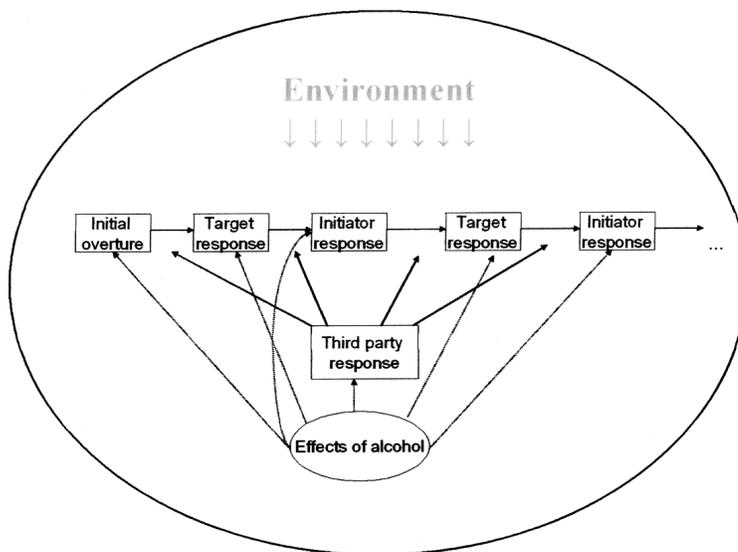
One of the main reasons people go to public drinking establishments is to connect with other people, including potential sexual/romantic partners (Cavan, 1966; Goffman, 1963; Purcell & Graham, 2005). Bars are considered “open” social spaces where people have the *right* to initiate social interactions with others, and where people generally have some responsibility to accept these overtures (Cavan, 1966). However, the social nature of the drinking environment comes with a price. Although social overtures in bars are usually positive experiences for those involved, a substantial proportion of violence in drinking establishments is related to these overtures. Violence related to sexual overtures, in particular, is a common theme identified in studies of female bar patrons (Parks & Miller, 1997).

As noted by Hepburn (1973), “Violent behavior is constructed within a situation, between two or more persons, through a process of interaction” (p. 427). Therefore, it is important to

understand the social interaction process in which aggression arises. A model of the social interaction process involved in social overtures is shown in Figure 1. As shown in the figure, the nature and length of the sequence can vary considerably, with an aggressive act possible at any stage in the social interaction process. For example, the social overture, itself, may be aggressive. In fact, sexual harassment and sexual aggression can often be done with some impunity in the guise of normal sexual behavior in permissive barroom environments in which sexual/romantic overtures are common. This kind of behavior can be defined as “predatory” in the sense that the target of the social overtures is *simply a victim who is being preyed on for the predator’s own needs* (see Scully & Marolla, 1993), as compared to overtures intended to engage the other person in a sexual/romantic social interaction.

FIGURE 1

Model of the social overture interaction process in drinking establishments showing potential involvement of third parties and the influence of alcohol and the environment



Sexual harassment of female bar staff has been documented in ethnographic research (Roebuck & Frese, 1976; Spradley & Mann, 1975); however, less is known about sexual harassment or sexually predatory behavior among barroom patrons and how these behaviors can be distinguished from genuine sexual/romantic overtures. Some insight into distinctions between predatory sexual aggression and genuine social overtures is provided by research on bullying (Boulton, 1991) that has identified criteria for distinguishing predatory bullying from mutual horseplay. Specifically, aggressive horseplay was distinguished from nonaggressive horseplay by examining (a) the behavior and its impact (i.e., evidence that the behavior was harmful), (b) apparent distress/annoyance of target (i.e., evidence that the target was harmed), and (c) whether the perpetrator showed surprise or regret if the behavior appeared to cause distress (i.e., a lack of surprise or regret would indicate that the harm was intended).

Alternatively, the initial overture may be nonaggressive but the target may respond aggressively. Aggression can also first occur at the third act, when the initial social overture and the target's response did not involve aggression, but the initiator responds aggressively to the target's reaction. For the initiator, making social overtures, especially sexual or romantic overtures, tends to involve risk, uncertainty, and ego concerns. For this reason, the response of the target, such as how the refusal is made, may play a role in whether the initiator becomes aggressive. For example, the initiator may react aggressively if made to feel embarrassed or rejected by a blunt refusal (Berk, 1977), especially if the rejection is seen as unfair or is witnessed by others (Felson, 1978). The initiator may become aggressive even later in the process by persisting to the point of discomfort of the target if the target does not communicate clearly that the overture is unwanted, and/or the initiator misperceives the target's desires or does not recognize or accept the refusal (Abbey et al., 2002).

On the part of the target, he or she may respond with aggression to the initial overture or to a later overture if the initiator

is perceived as going too far or being too persistent. Third parties (i.e., persons other than the initiator or the target) may also become involved, as aggressors, targets of aggression, and as nonaggressive interveners. For example, a male third party may react with anger to sexual overtures made by another man toward the first man's girlfriend.

Within this social exchange there are a number of factors that may provoke or lead to aggression and violence, including the context or environment in which the interaction occurs (Graham, LaRocque, Yetman, Ross, & Guistra, 1980; Graham, Bernards, Osgood, & Wells, 2006), the effects of alcohol on the parties involved (see Graham & Homel, 2008), and the presence of other people (Cloyd, 1976; Snow, Robinson, & McCall, 1991). For example, misunderstandings and aggressive reactions may occur because of ambiguous or unclear environmental norms for appropriate sexual overtures in the highly sexualized environments of some licensed premises (Purcell & Graham, 2005). With unclear norms, the person making the overture may perceive his or her behavior to be acceptable in the context while the target may perceive the overture as inappropriate. This is especially true for sexual overtures made by one sex toward the other due to gender differences in: perceptions of sexual interest (Abbey, Zawacki, & McAuslan, 2000); the kinds of actions that are perceived as appropriate (Garlick, 1994; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001); expectations regarding obligations to accept overtures (Ferris, 1997; Parks & Miller, 1997; Russell & Trigg, 2004); and perceptions of behaviors that communicate refusal (Wade & Critelli, 1998).

There are also environmental pressures on men in some bar-room settings, such as competition for sexual partners, heightened concerns with image, and a perceived requirement that they must avoid looking weak in front of their peers (Wells, Graham, & Tremblay, 2009). These pressures may lead men to make especially demanding overtures and be unwilling to accept rejection. Additionally, the general permissiveness of

barroom environments is an important factor in aggression, including sexual aggression; that is, some drinking establishments are considered to be locations where “anything goes” and normal rules for expected social behavior do not apply (Graham et al., 1980). As noted by one participant in a recent focus group study of male-to-male aggression (Wells et al., 2009), “. . . if you put them in a library, even if someone brought in another beverage, or whatever, any beverage, would the same thing have happened? No. Because the library, you’re not allowed to fight in a library” (p. 1448).

The effects of alcohol are also likely to play a role in aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures. For example, one of the goals of consuming alcohol is to lower social anxieties in order to facilitate social overtures; however, lowered anxiety due to the effects of alcohol may also make the drinker less likely to worry about negative consequences of his/her actions (see discussion by Graham, 2003). Thus, the effects of alcohol are likely to be a key aspect of sexual/romantic overtures, both in terms of facilitating the overture in the first place and in terms of facilitating aggression in responses and counter-responses. The specific effects of alcohol that are relevant to aggression may vary, however, depending on the type of overture-related aggression. For example, the effects of alcohol on a potential predator may increase the likelihood of risking invasive or aggressive sexual acts through alcohol’s effects on the underestimation of risks or negative consequences of aggression (Fromme, Katz, & D’Amico, 1997), and by making the drinker more willing to engage in risky acts even when he or she has an accurate perception of risk (Pihl & Peterson, 1993).

An effect of alcohol known as “alcohol myopia” may also explain aggressive behavior in social overtures (Josephs & Steele, 1990; Steele, Critchlow, & Liu, 1985; Steele & Josephs, 1990; Steele & Southwick, 1985). This involves a person becoming more focused or responsive to salient cues in the environment, especially if countervailing cues are weak or subtle. Specifically, alcohol myopia might lead the initiator to

interpret the sexual attractiveness or sexual behavior of the target as an invitation for sexual advances, and to be focused on this attractiveness rather than the possibility that his or her overtures might not be welcome. By focusing on the attractiveness and provocation of the target, the initiator who is affected by alcohol myopia may also be less aware of sanctions against invasive overtures. The intoxicated initiator may also be less sensitive to body language and gestures made by the target intended to communicate that the overture is unwelcome (Abbey, Buck, Zawacki, & Saenz, 2003; Abbey, McAuslan, & Thomson, 1998; Abbey, Thomson, McDuffie, & McAuslan, 1996; Norris, Davis, George, Martell, & Heiman, 2002). It has been argued that alcohol myopia is most likely to increase aggression in situations involving inhibition conflict (Giancola, 2002). Therefore, alcohol myopia may be an especially relevant factor in the persistence of initiators who know their overtures are unwanted but cannot let go of their initial goal. The effect of alcohol in inhibition conflict situations may also be a partial explanation for why an initiator might engage in invasive contact despite knowledge that the behavior is unacceptable.

There are other effects of alcohol relevant to barroom aggression generally and sexual/romantic overture aggression specifically (see detailed discussion in Graham & Homel, 2008). The effects of alcohol on cognitive functioning and problem solving (see Giancola, 2000), for example, may lead to inappropriate strategies for initiating an overture, reduce the target's ability to communicate in a clear way that the overture is unwanted (Abbey et al., 2002), reduce the initiator's ability to get out of a situation gracefully once an overture has been rejected, and cause third parties to attribute greater aggressiveness to the initiator than may have been intended (Pihl, Zeichner, Niaura, Nagy, & Zacchia, 1981; Sayette, Wilson, & Elias, 1993).

Alcohol-related power concerns may also play a role in aggression. Experimental research in the 1970s (McClelland,

Wanner, & Vanneman, 1972) found that consumption of alcohol was associated with increased concerns about demonstrating personal power. More recent qualitative research (Benson & Archer, 2002; Graham & Wells, 2003; Tomsen, 1997) provides additional evidence that concerns about asserting and defending manhood play a strong role in male-to-male barroom violence, with these concerns heightened by the effects of alcohol. Male perceptions that the barroom setting is a place where “every male in there is your competition” (Wells et al., 2009), combined with increased power concerns from the effects of alcohol, may play a substantial role in invasive and aggressive sexual/romantic overtures by men who are trying to prove their manhood by asserting power and dominance. Concerns about demonstrating personal power may also be a significant factor in the aggressive involvement of third parties, especially when the third party is a man who perceives his role as defending or protecting his girlfriend from unwanted overtures from another man.

As has been observed in ethnographic (Cavan, 1966) and anthropological research (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969), being under the influence of alcohol may also provide some excuse value for aggressive behavior, although the extent of excuse value is both culturally and situationally determined. Even within commercial drinking establishments, there is considerable variability in the extent that sexual behavior and aggression are tolerated or excused (Graham et al., 1980), and, as noted by Graham and Homel (2008), these norms can change over time. Norm violations may also be more likely to be tolerated depending on the level of intoxication of the violator and the nature of the norm violation. For example, inappropriate overtures may be excused or overlooked if the initiator is obviously drunk.

Much of the violence that occurs in drinking establishments relates to sexual/romantic overtures (Graham, Tremblay, et al., 2006). Therefore, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of this behavior, including the pathways in which an overture leads to aggression and the differences between

predatory behavior done in the guise of a sexual/romantic overture versus genuine overtures. The present study uses detailed narratives of incidents of aggression that are related to sexual/romantic overtures to delineate the form and circumstances for aggression occurring at each stage of the social interaction process and the role played by predatory sexual acts within this process.

Methods

The data used in the present analyses were collected as part of a randomized control trial to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Safer Bars* intervention to reduce aggression in bars (Graham et al., 2004). The study included 1334 nights of observations conducted by 148 observers (in male-female pairs) in 118 large capacity (> 300) bars and clubs in Toronto, Canada, during the periods of November 2000 to June 2001 and December 2001 to June 2002. Observations were conducted on Friday and Saturday nights from about 11:30 P.M. until after 2:00 A.M. when the bars closed.

Researcher-observers were given extensive training in recognizing and documenting aggression and other aspects of the barroom environment. The observers were encouraged to record even mild or ambiguous incidents, including borderline and incipient behavior such as provocative acts and horseplay. Narrative descriptions of incidents of aggression were prepared independently by observers using the following procedures. When the observers saw an incident, they watched and listened as closely as possible without making themselves conspicuous. When necessary, they made notes (discretely) to help them to remember the incident for later recording. As soon as possible after leaving the bar, and no later than first thing the next morning, the observers independently completed detailed step-by-step descriptions of the incident and recorded the sex, age, and role in incident for each participant (see http://publish.uwo.ca/~kgraham/aggression_form.doc).

These incident descriptions were submitted to the Field Coordinator who prepared a narrative incorporating details from the two independent descriptions prepared by the observers when both observers had seen the incident. Not all incidents were recorded by both observers, usually because the other observer did not see the incident (e.g., observers were looking in different directions or the observers were not together at the time of the incident), although there were a few incidents that were seen by both observers but viewed as aggression by only one of the observers. Overall, 51% of incidents were reported by both observers, the remainder by only one. At the weekly meeting, the observers reviewed the combined narrative and resolved any discrepancies or omissions.

When possible, the observers also rated the level of intoxication of each person in the incident on a scale from (0), totally sober, to (10), falling down drunk, based on criteria developed by Teplin and Lutz (1985). Intoxication level was not rated for some individuals because the observers did not see the person, or saw the person so briefly (e.g., in a brawl involving a large number of people) that it was impossible to assess intoxication level. Even when a rating was provided, however, the observers often were only able to observe the person for a short duration (because the person moved away or was ejected following the incident), so these ratings were only moderately reliable with an interobserver agreement of $r = .66$. Therefore, although we use these ratings in our qualitative analyses, they need to be interpreted cautiously given the difficulties in accurate assessment of intoxication. In addition, while these ratings were sufficiently reliable to identify general trends, e.g., the extent that level of intoxication was associated with level of aggression (Graham, Osgood, Wells, & Stockwell, 2006), particular caution is needed when using these ratings for specific individuals.

Once the study was completed, the level of aggression of all persons involved in incidents was assessed by a minimum of two independent raters. Incidents that did not meet standard

criteria for defining aggression, namely intentionally causing harm (Baron & Richardson, 1994), were identified and excluded from the dataset. More details about the rating of level of aggression are provided in Graham, Tremblay, et al., 2006.

For the present analyses we identified all incidents that were related to sexual/romantic overtures, including incidents where aggression occurred later in the interaction process following a nonaggressive initial overture (e.g., aggressive rejection by target, aggressive involvement of third parties). In total, we identified 251 incidents of verbal or physical aggression that were related to sexual/romantic overtures (about 24% of all incidents). In the present article, we use a qualitative approach (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2006) that involves applying a preliminary framework for understanding the relationship between sexual/romantic overtures and aggression. The preliminary framework involved understanding aggression as emerging in various stages of the social interaction process in social overtures, as displayed in Figure 1, and recognizing the potential distinction between genuine sexual/romantic overtures and predatory behavior disguised as an overture. Using this framework, we use selected examples to illustrate the thematic content that characterizes incidents that involved: (a) sexual/romantic overtures that began aggressively; (b) initiators of sexual/romantic overtures who became aggressive later in the social interaction process; (c) aggression by targets of overtures; and (d) aggression by third parties. From these thematic analyses, we identify the distinctions between predatory and genuine overtures and explore the potential role of the effects of alcohol and the drinking environment.

Findings

Aggressive social overtures In this section, we describe incidents in which the initial social overture was aggressive in nature. Based on usual criteria for defining aggression (see Baron & Richardson, 1994: 7), an aggressive social overture would be one in which the person

making the overture intentionally caused harm to the other person. Because these types of incidents occur in the context of a social overture, harm is usually emotional rather than physical; that is, causing negative impacts in the form of discomfort to someone, making the target feel bad or humiliated, or invading someone's space, as in the following example. In the examples used throughout, intoxication ratings (0 – 10) by the female (fo) and male observers (mo) for each participant are provided in parentheses (e.g., fo: rating; mo: rating) following the first mention of the participant. Some incidents have only one rating because the incident was recorded by only one of the observers.

1. ANONYMOUS BUM GRAB *A woman (fo: 0) was standing with her male partner near the dance floor when a man (fo: missing) pushed past her and brushed against and grabbed her buttocks. She exclaimed "What the hell was that!" as the man quickly disappeared into the crowd. Angry and upset, the woman stood helpless.*

What is noteworthy about this incident is that, while it involved sexual behavior (i.e., touching someone's buttocks), it clearly did not involve a genuine invitation to engage in mutual sexual/romantic interaction. That is, the initiator was using the woman to obtain excitement, fun, or possibly dominance, control, or power for himself regardless of the effect on her. It is unknown whether intoxication was a factor because the female observer who recorded the incident saw the initiator only briefly and did not have sufficient information to make an intoxication rating.

Although interviews with convicted rapists provide clear distinctions between sexual overtures motivated by desire for sexual/romantic interaction and predatory sexual aggression (Scully & Marolla, 1993), the predatory nature of more minor unwanted sexual acts that occur in bars may be more difficult to discern if the sexual act is fairly minor and directed toward a potential sexual/romantic partner. The following incident

involves persistent unwanted contact of a sexual nature where the target is likely considered by the initiator to be a potential romantic/sexual partner. Nevertheless, the lack of regard for the comfort or wants of the target suggests that the behavior is at least somewhat predatory.

2. PERSISTENT INVASION BY MALE DANCER *A man (fo: 4) approached from behind a woman (fo: 5) who was dancing by herself and began to dance with her. She continued to dance at first but then tried to move away. The man put his arm around her and held her by the waist, holding a beer in his other hand. This brought the front of his body in full contact with her back. In this position, he proceeded to fondle her, moving his hands over her side, her hips and bum. She tried to push his hand off her and move away from him, but as she tried to move away, he would use this as an opportunity to slide his hands down her hips and bum, then move them back to her waist and move closer to her. This action was repeated four times until the woman more aggressively pushed his hands off her and moved away. The man then went back to stand with his friends.*

In this incident, there is the semblance of a social overture in that the initiator stayed around rather than disappearing into the crowd. Moreover, the initiator may well have welcomed a sexual response from the target. Nevertheless, the approach by the initiator involved clear aggression in that he intentionally forced sexual contact on an unwilling target. His lack of concern about the reaction of the target suggests that this incident was predatory. It is difficult to assess whether intoxication was a factor, but the rating by the female observer of 4 (out of 10) suggests only mild-moderate intoxication that would have been unlikely to impair his ability to recognize that the overtures were unwanted, but may have been sufficient to cause him to risk persevering.

The following incident, although involving only very mild aggression, also appears to involve predatory sexual behavior in the intentional discomfort it caused to the targets.

3. MEN DELIGHT IN DISCOMFORT THEY CAUSED TO WOMEN *A group of about 16 very intoxicated men were “scoping” women on the dance floor. There appeared to be a formula to their approach—one of the men would approach a woman, stand within arms length and stare very intently at her. If she did not notice him, the man would move close behind her, looking her up and down. Typically, female targets would notice and move away. One man (fo: 6) was the most obvious, licking his lips as he looked over the woman. One time he reached and touched a woman’s (fo: 3) hair without her knowing. The female observer felt the men were doing this to intimidate the women and appear macho in front of the other men in the group. One man (fo: 5) was trying to talk to a woman (fo: 4) who apparently wanted to be left alone, as evidenced by her angry facial expression. When she yelled at him, the man reacted by saying, “I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” in a joking tone, after which he walked away laughing. His friends who had been watching patted him on the back and laughed along with him. Staff did not intervene although the observers felt that staff must have noticed the antics of these males because so many were involved.*

In this case, the motives appeared to be amusement of friends and peer approval rather than dominance. However, the impersonal nature of the approaches made by the men and the lack of consideration of the impact on the targets suggest that these behaviors were predatory. The men were moderately intoxicated, perhaps enough to impair their judgment, increase risk taking (especially given the encouragement from the group), and reduce awareness of the negative reaction they were having on the targets of their antics.

The following example of a predatory approach involving a sexual/romantic overture was one of the few incidents where the aggressive overture was made by a woman rather than a man, but displayed similar disregard and lack of concern about the effect on the target. Notably, it was also one of the few that attracted intervention by staff, possibly because of the gender norm reversal.

4. FEMALE RUBS PELVIS INTO MALE MAKING HIM UNCOMFORTABLE AND ATTRACTING NOTICE OF STAFF *A woman (fo: 6) who was dancing in the middle of a narrow inclined walkway, with railings on both sides saw a man (fo: 5) approaching and blocked his passage with her dancing body, apparently trying to entice him. The walkway was crowded and it was difficult for him to squeeze by. A female friend (fo: 5) of the first woman flung her leg out over the other rail, laughing as she trapped the man between herself and the first woman. She then brought her leg down and rejoined two male friends who were leaning against the rail. Both women were quite intoxicated. The male target who looked uncomfortable managed to pass by turning his body sideways and squeezing past the first woman. He ignored her as she followed close behind him and rubbed her pelvis into the back of him. After about five steps, she turned back toward her friends laughing. The two male friends laughed with her while shaking their heads. A male staff member (fo: 0) tapped her on the shoulder to get her attention and leaned down to tell her something with a calm and neutral expression (presumably telling her to stop). She teased him for scolding her and tried to entice him as well (shaking her hips in his direction). He shook his head, slightly smiling, as he returned to his post at the top of the ramp. She began “dirty” dancing with one of her male friends.*

The women in this incident were at a similar level of intoxication as the men were in the previous incident and probably affected by similar effects of alcohol (thinking, risk taking, reduced awareness of cues that their behavior was unwanted). The man was also rated as moderately intoxicated but showed no particular effects in this incident as he waited for the women to allow him to pass.

Overall, the above examples show behaviors that are fairly easy to classify as predatory; however, because predatory behavior can be done in the guise of social behavior and the harm from predatory social overtures in drinking establishments tends to be minor or subtle (e.g., causing discomfort, embarrassment or

possibly fear to the victim), it is often difficult to judge whether harm was intended, and it is useful to consider some of the criteria for identifying predatory behaviors that take the form of sexual/romantic overtures. In addition to the criteria identified from research on bullying (Boulton, 1991), namely, whether the behavior was harmful, apparent distress/annoyance of target, and a lack of surprise or regret by the initiator, other criteria evident from the examples above include:

- (1) contact is made anonymously so there is no possibility that mutual social interaction is the goal (as in incident 1 above);
- (2) the initiator continues the behavior even though he or she is aware of the discomfort or harm experienced by the target (as in incidents 2, 3 and 4);
- (3) the initiator uses force to keep the target in the situation (as in incident 2); and
- (4) the overture is not intended as a way of initiating a mutual social interaction (e.g., done to amuse and impress friends as in incidents 3 and 4).

Even these criteria, however, cannot rule out all ambiguity, in that, behavior that appears to be predatory might simply reflect intoxicated misjudgment, poor social skills, or inappropriate strategies for connecting with sexual/romantic partners. Identifying predatory aggression is also made difficult by the highly sexualized norms in many drinking establishments (Purcell & Graham, 2005) where rubbing, “grinding,” and other explicit sexual contact is commonly part of consensual sexual interactions. Moreover, clear refusals may be difficult for targets to make because the open social environment requires some tolerance for overtures, even when unwanted. For example, the following incident is ambiguous both in terms of the behavior of the initiators and in terms of the responses of targets.

5. LEERING AND TOUCHING UNLIKELY TO LEAD TO HOOKING UP *Two men were standing in a section where patrons passed from one part of the premises to another. They were drinking but displayed no signs of intoxication except for the fact that they were not subtle about their sexual interest in women, with*

noticeable leering at women's buttocks and breasts. At one point, one man (mo: 4) unbuttoned his shirt to show his hairy chest, while the other man (mo: 3) laughed in response. Both kept trying to talk to women who generally ignored them. After getting no responses, the man who had unbuttoned his shirt placed his hand on the buttocks of a passing woman (mo: 1) in order to pull her toward him. She looked at him and kept on walking. This harassment of females continued during the course of the evening until eventually the same man found a woman (mo: 2) who responded positively and they went off to the dance floor. The other man continued to approach different women with little success.

The men in this incident were behaving in a manner similar to those in incident 3 above; however, later behavior suggested they really were hoping to connect with women in a mutual social interaction and their apparently aggressive behavior reflected poor strategies for accomplishing this rather than intentionally predatory behavior. Additionally, while some of the targets displayed minor annoyance, others responded positively to the sexual advance. The ratings of intoxication were relatively low (4 and 3) suggesting that alcohol likely had only a minor role in their behavior. In fact, although their overtures appeared to be rather indiscriminating (and at least one was invasive), they never persisted with any particular target, perhaps reflecting an unimpaired ability to pick up refusal cues due to their relative sobriety.

Initiator becomes aggressive following nonaggressive overture	As described in the introduction, social overtures can involve an extended social interaction in which aggression only emerges later in the process. In the incidents above, the overtures were themselves aggressive. In this section, we present examples of incidents in which the initiator became aggressive after an initially non-aggressive overture. Three patterns of aggression by the initiator following a nonaggressive overture were identified: (1) the initiator interprets acceptance of the first overture as consent for more extreme, sometimes predatory, behavior; (2) the initiator persists despite clear signals
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from the target that he or she is not interested; (3) the initiator takes offence at rejection.

In the following incident, although the initial overture appeared to be an invitation to engage in mutual social interaction and was apparently accepted by the target, the subsequent behavior was predatory in that the initiator appeared to be using the victim to meet his own needs and intentionally ignoring the lack of willingness by the target.

6. MALE'S AGGRESSIVE PURSUIT LEAVES RED MARKS ON DRUNKEN FEMALE
A man (fo: 5, mo: 5) approached a very drunken woman (fo: 9, mo: 8) on the dance floor and began grinding up against her backside. She noticed and put her hand on his hip. Her friends then escorted her to the restroom where they held her up while she vomited in the toilet. The man remained standing nearby. When the woman emerged, he quickly approached her and tried to kiss her and dance with her. She seemed to smile and welcome his advances at this point, but the look on her face was dreamy and blank—she did not seem fully aware of what was going on. The observers saw the woman periodically throughout the night. They observed her kissing at least three men throughout the evening and joining up with her friends for more drinks as the night went on. At 1:30 a.m. the man from earlier in the evening approached her from behind and again grinded up against her, grabbed her hips and tried to get her to gyrate in rhythm with him. She looked over her shoulder at him and laughed and started to move away. He kept following her and holding her hips, as she tried to walk away. He then grabbed her forcefully. She moved through the crowd and tried her drunken best to lose the man in the crowd, but he kept dancing up behind her, grabbing her hips with his hands and placing his groin up against her behind. She finally made it across the dance floor to where her friends were standing, with the man still at her behind. Her friend (fo: 6, mo: 6) recognized the man from earlier in the evening, stood between them and told the man loudly “she’s not interested in you okay?” clearly upset that he was not leaving her friend alone.

He just stood there, looking at the woman as she stumbled towards the bathroom. Her friend and another woman followed. The female observer entered the restroom and saw the woman complain about the man's aggressive behavior, showing her friend the hand prints (which were red and very obvious) that he had left on her body from grabbing her so hard. She mentioned that her back was hurting and she thought the marks would turn into bruises. She asked her friend to help her avoid the man. The observers noted that earlier in the evening, the woman might have been slightly interested in the man's advances, but that as the evening wore on, his advances were increasingly unwanted.

The initiator was moderately intoxicated (rating of 5) perhaps accounting for his somewhat obsessive focus on the target. However, this level of intoxication does not seem likely to have made the initiator unaware of the level of force that he was using, leaving red marks on the target's neck. The target's extreme level of intoxication not only made her less competent in giving refusal signals, it may have made her an easy target for an intentional predator (i.e., unable to defend herself competently, probably unable to complain to someone coherently and convincingly, less likely to remember the person or perhaps even the incident so that risk of future consequences from her would be minimal). Her friend was rated as quite intoxicated (6) but was still sufficiently capable of fending off the initiator, although she did not lodge complaints with staff about the man's behavior toward her friend which she might have done had she been sober.

Aggression by initiators also occurred when they persisted with the overture despite clear signals from the target that the overture was unwanted. At this stage in the interaction, the overture became aggressive despite the initial motive appearing nonaggressive because the initiator knowingly caused harm to the target (even if only minor psychological distress). In the following incident, the initiator's persistence was not invasive and did not appear predatory (he did apparently want her as a dance part-

ner), but it met criteria for aggression (i.e., intentional harm to another person) given that the target's negative facial cues and evasive actions clearly signaled to the initiator that the overture was unwanted. If the female observer's low rating (3) of the man's intoxication is accurate, it suggests that his persistence was unlikely to be due to alcohol. However, even a low level of intoxication, combined with her initial acceptance, may have made the situation more ambiguous for the initiator.

7. MALE WON'T STOP TRYING TO DANCE WITH RELUCTANT FEMALE
A man (fo: 3) seemed to be focused on one female (fo: 0) in particular on the dance floor. He came up from behind her and started to dance closely with her, but without any contact. She did not seem interested or willing to dance with him; however, she danced with him for about 30 seconds, and then gestured to stop dancing with him by moving a step away. The male started dancing closely with her again (without any contact), but this time she looked annoyed and moved away immediately. She couldn't move very far away, however, because the dance floor was busy. He tried a few more times, and after each time, she looked annoyed and kept trying to move away from him. He eventually got the message and left. By this time, she was clearly upset and appeared glad to see him leave.

As noted in the introduction, making overtures involves some ego threat to the initiator and may lead to aggression by the initiator if the overture is rejected, especially if the initiator feels the rejection was insensitive or public. Few such incidents were observed, possibly because these incidents may be difficult to spot in a crowded noisy bar; however, one incident was documented by the female observer in response to her own rejection of an overture, described in the following.

8. "YOUR FUCKING LOSS" *As the male and female observers were passing by the dance floor, a man (fo: 4, mo: 3) grabbed the female observer's arm forcefully. He held on tightly so that the female observer was forced to turn around. She was upset at being stopped, and turned around and gave the man an agitated,*

irritated look. He wore a dumb smile but didn't respond. A male friend (fo: 6, mo: 3) of the man who was standing beside him said to the female observer, "Come on, give my friend a chance." The observer felt this statement was hostile in that the friend was smiling in an aggressive, "advancing" way. She replied, "Ya, no thanks" and dropped her arm making the man let go. As she moved away, the man yelled aggressively at her, "Your fucking loss!"

In this incident, although the first man reportedly had a "dumb smile," both observers rated his intoxication as low to moderate (3 and 4) suggesting alcohol was not likely a major factor in his grabbing the female's arm. The second man was rated considerably more intoxicated by the female observer and may have been seeing only his friend's perspective and perhaps easily offended due to the effects of alcohol.

Aggression by targets

Excluding negative gestures or facial expressions, as in some of the incidents above, few incidents were documented of targets of sexual/romantic overtures reacting aggressively to unwanted overtures. When aggressive reactions by targets were observed, these were in response to overtures that were perceived as aggressive, inappropriate, or invasive (even when that might not have been the intent of the initiator), as in incident 3 above and in the following incident.

9. PEEK DOWN BLOUSE EARNS SLAP TO THE FACE *A man (fo: 7, mo: 6) walked up to a woman (fo: 3, mo: missing) who was standing near the serving bar and put his face into her low cut blouse. She slapped his cheek hard enough to show that she was not pleased but not enough to cause injury. He attempted to apologize and was verbally trying to convince her that his actions were acceptable. He explained that they knew each other, saying something like "remember we were hanging out last Thursday . . ." After a few seconds, the man bent over at the waist indicating that she should kick him in the buttocks. She did eventually kick him lightly. They talked for a few more minutes then went back to their separate pool tables.*

A similar incident was observed where a woman slapped a man who had squeezed her buttocks. In both of these incidents it appeared that the males had intended the overtures to be friendly or fun, but it is also possible that the males were taking advantage of the highly sexual and permissive environment to engage in some minor predatory sexual contact. The genuine apology and relatively high level of intoxication of the man in the above incident suggests that he was likely just trying to be funny and exceeded the boundaries that this woman was willing to tolerate. Judging by the high level of intoxication, it is possible that the man was more willing to risk making an invasive sexual gesture. The woman's level of intoxication was not rated as being high, but it is possible that the effects of alcohol led to a more aggressive response than would have occurred if she had been completely sober.

Aggression by third parties

As was apparent in several of the incidents described above, female targets of unwanted sexual/romantic overtures and aggression often appeared reluctant or unable to make a clear and direct refusal to the initiator. They, therefore, sometimes relied on friends to shield them from further pursuit or to intervene, as in incident 6, above, where the friend intervened nonaggressively to protect a woman from the increasingly aggressive pursuit of a man. In this way, third parties often serve the role as protectors (guardians) of targets. However, third parties can also become involved as aggressors, as in the following incident where a man became aggressive in response to his girlfriend being harassed.

10. INDISCRIMINATE SEXUAL OVERTURES LEAD TO THIRD PARTY AGGRESSION AND BRAWL *It was near closing with about 40-50 patrons in the bar, 10 of them dancing. A group of about 15 men (ratings of 7 and 8 for men in this group) walked into the bar and sat by the dance floor. They were eyeing all the women in the place and hitting on one woman after another in quick succession. Members of the group were taking turns holding a mini video camera filming each other as they were dancing while they motioned to the others on the dance floor to say "hi" for*

the camera. One woman (fo: 2, mo: 3) who had been approached spoke to a staff member (fo: 0, mo: 0) who went to the group apparently telling them to put the camera away. The group continued approaching women, making sexual movements toward them and looking back to see that their friends were watching. Just after closing, one of the group (fo: 7, mo: 4) motioned to a female patron (fo: 6, mo: 6) to come dance with him. She ignored him. Eventually he approached her, physically crowding her, while dancing and talking. The female appeared angry and offended as she pointed to her boyfriend, who was about 15 ft. away and who was looking in their direction. She then walked over to her boyfriend and started talking to him in a very agitated manner. The boyfriend (fo: 4, mo: 7) gave the first man the middle finger, and the man returned the gesture. Gestures were exchanged between the two males and the boyfriend walked to where the first man was standing. The group of 15 males surrounded the two men to act as backup for their friend. The boyfriend was heard to say "Fuck you, let's take this outside." The men were swearing at one another and eventually staff approached and told the men to "Take it outside!" Outside, the fight escalated to a brawl involving friends on both sides. At one point, a friend of the boyfriend lay on the edge of the sidewalk semi-conscious with an open wound on the back of his head, bloody nose and bleeding lip.

This incident illustrates a number of features of sexual/romantic overture-related aggression. First, the indiscriminate nature of the advances being made by the males and the extent that these advances were done partly for the entertainment of the other males in the group suggested that the overtures, if not intentionally predatory, had characteristics in common with predatory aggression as in incident 3 reported earlier in this article. However, fairly high intoxication ratings (7 out of 10 by the female observer) for men in the group that was causing the problems suggest that alcohol may well have played a role in enhancing the group focus (see Washburne, 1956) and increasing risk taking (including both reduced awareness of

impacts on others as well as less concern about possible consequences).

Second, although the men did not force the situation or persist unduly with any specific females, their persistence, generally, in making indiscriminate overtures was likely to lead to problems eventually. In this case, one of the targets became annoyed by one of the men's persistence and involved her boyfriend in the interaction. From here, the males engaged in aggressive posturing characteristic of typical male-to-male aggression in bars (Benson & Archer, 2002; Graham & Wells, 2003), and their behavior ultimately escalated into a dangerous brawl. This kind of macho posturing has been highly linked to the effects of alcohol in previous barroom aggression research, with one study participant describing alcohol as "testosterone by the glass" (Graham & Wells, 2003: 551).

Discussion

This study identified five themes related to the process of sexual/romantic overture-related aggression in drinking establishments. First is greater clarification of the distinction between predatory and genuine sexual/romantic overtures. At least some sexual/romantic "overtures" are actually predatory sexual behaviors done in the guise of a social overture. That is, certain individuals take advantage of the open and permissive nature of the barroom environment to prey on vulnerable targets to meet their own needs for dominance and personal gratification at the expense of the target's discomfort. The predatory nature of the overture may be evident in the initial act (e.g., anonymous assaultive sexual contact) as well as in subsequent acts (e.g., incidents 2, 6). The nature of drinking environments as "open" places where people have the right to initiate social overtures and others must, to some degree, tolerate such overtures (Cavan, 1966) allows motivated persons to get away with predatory sexual behaviors that have the appearance of social overtures but are actually about dominance not sociability. The explicit sexual behavior observed in

many contemporary nightclubs and bars makes it especially easy for sexually invasive acts to be perpetrated with impunity, and for victims of such assaults to be reluctant to complain because of their perceived obligation to accept overtures and because of staff reluctance to intervene in these open social environments.

On the other hand, some initiator aggression occurs in the context of apparently genuine overtures. The examples described above provide some insight into the ways in which the social overture process may lead to aggression in situations where the initial overture is genuine not predatory but where the subsequent behaviors become predatory. For example, the persistent initiator who will not take “no” for an answer may not have intended any harm at the outset but eventually does intentional harm when he or she continues with the overture despite the visible discomfort or emotional upset of the target.

A second theme to emerge was the ambiguity of aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures. Although some sexual/romantic overtures were clearly predatory, the clear conceptual distinction between genuine social overtures and predatory behavior turns out to be a fuzzy distinction in practice. Some persons who push these boundaries may in fact be predators who enter this environment to exploit others; however, the majority are likely to be “situational offenders” as defined by situational crime prevention theory (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; 2003). In this context, the situational offender would be someone who normally would not engage in criminal/aggressive behavior but who responds to situational opportunities, especially when the environment is seen as one where the behavior is likely to be excused and the offender can feel relatively anonymous, such as occurs in crowded bars and clubs (Wells, et al., 2009). The permissive barroom environment is the ideal setting for such mild, opportunistic, aggressive behavior that may be perceived as permissible both by initiators, who in other settings would never dream of behaving in that manner, and by targets who may believe they must tolerate aggressive or invasive overtures.

Men who engage in aggressive or invasive overtures in these settings may also be adopting “moral neutralization techniques” (Sykes & Matza, 1957). In particular, some men may perceive that, because explicit sexual contact is common in certain bars and clubs, women who go to these places should expect to be the targets of sexually invasive behavior (especially if they are intoxicated), regardless of whether they would prefer to engage in such behavior only with individuals of their own choosing. That is, some of the old rape justification arguments and notions of intimate partner violence that are no longer deemed acceptable legally or morally in the world outside of bar settings (e.g., Sorenson & Taylor, 2005) may still be operating, at least at some level, in the traditional sex roles evident in contemporary barroom environments such as those included in the Toronto study (Purcell & Graham, 2005). At the same time, the boundaries for “time-out” drinking behaviors are not well-established and tend to vary from one culture and context to the next (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969). Thus, defining acceptable behaviors in settings such as bars and clubs is an evolving process and there will always be ambiguities.

A third theme that emerged was the lack of clear communication by many of the targets of unwanted overtures. In some instances, aggressive persistence appeared to be at least partly attributable to the mixed and unclear signals given by the target. As shown in the incidents above, female targets of incidents tended to use body language and evasive actions to signal refusal. Often, they would politely tolerate the initial overture and then use indirect methods of discouragement, such as moving away, making a discouraging facial expression, or hiding among friends. Such indirect refusals may be too subtle in the barroom environment, particularly when the initiator is intoxicated. This lack of clear reactions by many targets to unwanted or even aggressive sexual/romantic overtures is not surprising given that research on interpersonal conflict has found that victims often suppress initial responses to conflict, responding only when the provocation accumulates (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). The target may also be reluctant

to make a direct refusal for fear of retaliation, as in incident 8 in which the female observer's refusal caused the initiator's friend to yell at her aggressively.

Gender differences in perspectives are a fourth theme in incidents where there is a male initiator and a female target. Although we use gender-neutral terms in much of the article, the drinking establishments in the present study were characterized by traditional gender roles where the males were the initiators and the females were the targets in most of the incidents that occurred. Research on intimate partner violence and stalking has demonstrated that males (who are often the perpetrators in these incidents) and females (who are typically the targets) may have very different perceptions of whether behavior is aggressive, harmful, or likely to cause fear (Follingstad, Helff, Binford, Runge, & White, 2004). Furthermore, results from surveys of stalking victims and college students have led to the suggestion that men and women may perceive intrusive and harassing behaviors differently (e.g., Budd, Matinson, & Myhill, 2000; Davis & Frieze, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Importantly, and relevant to intrusive sexual overtures in bars, findings such as these have raised concerns as to whether many of the perpetrators of these behaviors (who are typically male) even foresee that they will arouse fear or harm in their targets. Such gender differences in perceptions may also account for the lack of intervention by the male bar staff who may share the same perceptions as male patrons regarding the harmlessness of the behaviors.

The role of third parties is a fifth theme. Three types of third party roles appeared in the examples: (1) other patrons who joined the primary person in harassing targets (examples 3, 4, 5, 8); (2) friendly rescuers who helped targets to escape (example 6); and (3) other patrons who became aggressive toward the initiator (example 10). The first two roles likely reflect that "clubbing" or going to dance clubs is often done by groups of females and groups of males. The first role of "co-harasser" probably involves some group or "mob" pres-

sure that tend to help to neutralize the perception of wrongdoing, whereby those in the group help facilitate one another's "situational" offending. Intoxication may also serve to enhance group cohesion among the harassers thereby reinforcing their harassment (see Washburne, 1956).

In the second role of friendly rescuer, female friends of female targets often served the role of guardian, a role that might have been expected to be performed by bar staff (Graham, Bernards, Osgood, Homel, & Purcell, 2005). This strategy allowed many targets to avoid conflict, unpleasantness, or embarrassment that might have followed a direct refusal.

The third role of the aggressive third party was evident in incident 10 in which a fight occurred between the male initiator and a male third party. This aggression, egged on by the female target, is a classic example of male-to-male barroom aggression (Graham & Wells, 2003) where ego, face saving, and norms of masculinity require that the man respond aggressively in response to harassment of his girlfriend. On the part of the initiator, the refusal to back down or apologize was also described by participants in the Graham and Wells (2003) study, reflecting intoxication, ego concerns, and, sometimes, determination to cause trouble.

The influence
of alcohol
intoxication
and the
drinking
environment

As discussed in the introduction, intoxication and the drinking environment can influence whether social overtures lead to aggression by affecting the behavior of the initiator, the target, and/or third parties. In this section, we consider the examples provided above to identify patterns in the possible or probable effects of alcohol as well as whether incidents appear to be unique to barroom environments or might be expected to occur elsewhere, if not at a library (as suggested by one participant in the Wells et al., 2009 study), perhaps at other drinking events, such as a party.

The first incident (the anonymous bum grab) is not necessarily associated with intoxication or barroom settings, although

several such incidents were observed in this and previous research (Graham & Wells, 2001). Thus, the crowded environment, the likelihood that consequences would not be severe if the initiator was caught, and possibly the enhanced willingness to take risks caused by alcohol likely had a role in this aggression. Similarly, the man in the second incident whose persistent and invasive overtures reflected a lack of concern for the target may have been exploiting the permissive situation of the bar as well as being more willing to take risks due to the effects of alcohol. The fact that he was able to engage in this behavior without incurring any sanctions suggests that risk taking may not have needed much assistance from alcohol. Although his behavior would not likely be tolerated in other sober environments, it might well be seen as acceptable at parties and other drinking occasions involving large numbers of young adults.

The next three incidents all involved playful, but mildly aggressive, sexual/romantic overtures. The initiators in two of these incidents were fairly intoxicated and in all incidents group dynamics were involved; that is, part of what made the acts aggressive were that they were done for the amusement of a friend or friends while disregarding the impact on the targets. These are very typical of barroom settings because these settings are usually characterized by a "license to play" (Graham & Homel, 2008: 19) and expectations that individuals in these settings will not be held to usual standards of acceptable behavior (Cavan, 1966). As noted above, alcohol likely affected the initiators' judgment, increased their willingness to take social risks, and made them less aware of the negative reaction of the targets. The role of friends also suggests that alcohol may have facilitated group responses and reduced awareness of personal values or goals as noted by Washburne (1956). There was no evidence that alcohol played a role in the behavior of the targets. In sum, while some of these acts may occur in other social environments (even without alcohol), they are generally tolerated in the time-out bar-

room environment, unless somebody complains. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine the same behavior being considered acceptable, even by the men themselves, if it were done while sober in a nondrinking social setting such as a university lounge or coffee shop.

Incidents 6 and 7 involved aggressive persistence by initiators. In one case, the initiator was rated as moderately intoxicated (5) while in the other, the initiator was rated as only 3 on the intoxication scale. Although the initiators were not so intoxicated that they could have missed the refusal cues by the targets, especially in incident 7, it is possible that alcohol may have blurred their awareness that the targets were not interested in being with them, especially given that the females appeared to accept the overtures originally. The seeming lack of discrimination of the very drunken female target in incident 6 (the observers saw her kissing at least three other men during the night) may also have made the initiator feel that his persistence was appropriate. These incidents perhaps best reflect the notion of alcohol myopia (especially incident 6) in which the initiator becomes fixated on the attractiveness of one particular woman. The behavior of the initiator in incident 6 would likely not be tolerated in any other environment (drinking or nondrinking). The initiator's noninvasive persistence in incident 7, on the other hand, seemed to be more about inept social skills than related to the permissive or normative barroom environment.

Incident 8 is interesting because it highlights the face-saving issues that are likely to be involved for the initiator of sexual/romantic overtures (Berk, 1977), the importance of an audience (Felson, 1978), and the importance in the barroom environment of defending a buddy (Graham & Wells, 2003)—issues that do not emerge explicitly in other incidents. Many barroom settings still operate with traditional gender roles (Purcell & Graham, 2005), and men are generally expected to be the ones who initiate the sexual/romantic interaction (Traeen, Hovland, & Odegard, 1998). Enhanced concerns about per-

sonal power and ego due to alcohol, as well as alcohol myopia, may well have affected the aggressive behavior of the men in the incident, especially the second man.

Incident 9, which involved an aggressive response by the target, seemed to be largely due to the intoxication of the initiator, causing him to misjudge what others would consider appropriate playfulness. It is difficult to assess whether the target's aggressive response was partly attributable to alcohol; however, the incident seems unlikely to occur in a nondrinking environment, although such incidents might be expected to occur (possibly with similar reactions by targets) at other social drinking events such as parties.

Incident 10 demonstrates how involvement of third parties in sexual/romantic overtures can escalate the incident to dangerous and injurious levels. The exchange of aggressive gestures between the two men followed by escalation fits well the pattern of male-to-male bar violence described by Graham and Wells (2003), in which men described situations where had they been sober they would have apologized and backed down. Instead, the incident became no longer about initiating a sexual/romantic overture but about defending turf and saving face—leading ultimately to the brawl. Many effects of alcohol are likely to be implicated in the behavior of the initiator, target, and third parties, including increased risk taking, poor judgment, alcohol myopia, and increased emotionality and power concerns. It is difficult to imagine an incident such as this occurring in nondrinking environments. A similar incident might occur at parties, although some evidence suggests that friends might be more likely to stop the fight rather than escalate it in social settings where there are no professional staff whose job it is to stop violence (Levine, 2002).

In sum, it is easy to see how alcohol might lead to misperceptions in the social overture process. The intoxicated initiator is focused on his or her desires and not likely to pick up on subtle cues of rejection. Alcohol likely plays a role in predatory

overtures as well. Although a few individuals may come to the bar setting with the plan of sexually assaulting someone, most of the “predatory” aggression done in the guise of sexual/romantic overtures appeared to be situational offending with ordinary people caught up in the moment, such as the large group of men who were harassing female patrons. In these instances, alcohol and the setting likely both played a role, with alcohol serving to embolden the initiators and focus their attention on the group and the moment, while the norms of the setting conveyed the message that what they were doing was not really wrong. Intoxication might also make the initiator bolder in pressing the issue and less likely to worry about the long-term consequences of going too far. The targets may also be affected by alcohol both in being less skilled at problem solving in order to end the overture tactfully and, when very intoxicated, more vulnerable and simply less able to protect themselves. Finally, as described above, third parties, especially the male third parties in incident 10, appeared to be playing out highly scripted roles involving both intoxication and environmental expectations.

In terms of the barroom environment, gender roles and norms underlie much of the sexual/romantic overture-related aggression that occurs in bars and clubs, reinforced by the traditional sex roles and sexism that is part of the barroom environment. Despite progress in gender equity and the recent increase in the patronage of women in public drinking establishments, particularly in dance clubs (Grazian, 2008; Hadfield, 2006), one might argue that the bar remains largely a man’s world (Hey, 1986; Pettigrew, 2006; Single, 1985; Spradley & Mann, 1975; Sulkunen, Alasuutari, Natkin, & Kinnunen, 1985). Traditional forms of masculinity are the norm, men are generally expected to initiate sexual/romantic overtures (Traeen et al., 1998), and public displays of macho behavior such as aggressive horseplay and physical fighting are seen as normal and acceptable (Campbell, 2000; Graham & Wells, 2003). These male concerns are reflected in many of the incidents described in this article.

In addition to excitement, dominance, and power that are the likely rewards for predatory aggressors, recent focus groups among males provide some insight into issues that determine how and why men behave as they do in bars (Wells et al., 2009). In an environment where “every male is your competition,” male identity issues are likely to be involved in at least two ways. First, rejections may be especially humiliating in such an environment, so men may be motivated to press very hard for compliance. Second, even if the female target is not likely to respond favorably to the overture, being able to demonstrate dominance may be as important as actually getting the girl. Consistent with this interpretation, Grazian (2007) found that the process of trying to meet women in bars (denoted as the “girl hunt”) was seen as a collective activity that involves men performing not only for women but also for other men to demonstrate their masculinity and dominance over women. In his study, men engaged in “girl watching” as a collective activity; that is, they arrived together and searched for women “as a pack,” and when a man in the group made an advance toward a woman, the others would look on.

The male-dominated barroom environment (especially where it is male security staff who set the standards for allowable behavior) may explain, in part, why women appear unable to openly reject unwanted sexual advances and tend to adopt a generally submissive female role. However, these roles may well be changing. For example, there is growing evidence that female bar patrons in the United Kingdom are becoming increasingly aggressive and adopting many of the behaviors previously enacted primarily by men in drinking establishments (Day, Gough, & McFadden, 2003; Forsyth & Lennox, 2009; Hobbs, O’Brien, & Westmarland, 2007). It is yet to be seen whether this trend toward gender “equity” in aggression will result in lower rates of predatory and aggressive sexual/romantic overtures by men toward women, or whether it will simply increase the overall rate of aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures due to the increase in aggression generally by female initiators and targets.

Problems related to sexual/romantic overtures are likely to always be a part of the barroom environment. This is partly due to the central role of sexual/romantic encounters in commercial drinking establishments, to alcohol's role as both a social lubricant and a social impairment, to the time out nature of the barroom environment, and to the general ambiguity of many of these social encounters. However, as described in the next section, it may be possible to reduce the frequency and severity of aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures.

Implications for prevention

In a bar setting, the threshold for reacting to unwanted overtures is likely higher than in other settings due, at least in part, to the open social environment. Thus, consistent with routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), the context of the bar sets up the classic opportunity for crime (in this case, both predatory aggression done in the guise of a social overture and aggressive persistence even when the overture is genuine). In particular, in terms of sexual/romantic overture-related aggression, the essential elements include: a willing or motivated offender (aided by the effects of alcohol and the perceived acceptability of the behavior); a suitable target (i.e., targets who feel compelled to tolerate even very invasive social overtures due to the open and permissive context); and a lack of prevention by a guardian (e.g., someone whose presence prevents persons from being victimized), a handler (e.g., a friend or other person who dissuades the predator from such acts) (Felson, Baccaglini, & Gmelch, 1986), or a place manager (e.g., staff who prevent predators from entering the environment in the first place) (Eck & Weisburd, 1995). Therefore, prevention can focus on each of these components (offender, target, guardian/handler) in order to reduce the frequency and severity of sexual/romantic overture-related aggression.

The first focus might be on enhancing the guardianship role of staff and management of drinking establishments. As has been noted elsewhere (Fox & Sobol, 2000; Graham & Homel, 2008), there is a high tolerance for predatory sexual aggression in commercial drinking establishments. Behavior that

would cause a person to be arrested in most other locations (such as some of the examples above) rarely provokes much reaction in most bars, pubs, and clubs. Victims of sexual aggression rarely complain and, if they do, perpetrators are almost never ejected. At least part of the reason for the lack of staff intervention in predatory behavior that takes the form of sexual/romantic overtures is the ambiguity of the situation which may make the situation unclear for staff, targets, and sometimes the initiators themselves. This ambiguity also makes it difficult to establish policies for preventing such aggression. However, the discomfort and other harms caused to targets in the above examples were clearly evident to the researcher-observers; therefore, it should be possible for management and staff to recognize and limit such behaviors. Moreover, in many instances, the problem is not the lack of recognition of the aggressiveness of behaviors but rather the lack of will to intervene. For example, staff intervened when sexually invasive acts were committed by women in incident 4; however, the substantially larger number of similar incidents where men were the perpetrators typically resulted in no intervention from staff or onlookers. Therefore, programs and policies are needed that make staff and patrons more proactive in recognizing *and* discouraging predatory incidents of social overture-related aggression. While the bar can be a place for sexual and romantic encounters, it does not have to be a place where some patrons have to accept aggressive and predatory sexually invasive and assaultive behavior.

Staff training and management practices can be particularly important in defining boundaries for appropriate sexual/romantic overtures. Because bars are a traditionally male domain run by male managers with rules enforced by male security staff, staff training and policy development within the hospitality industry should have an enhanced focus on preventing sexual aggression. Recent ethnographic and interview research from the United Kingdom suggests that security staff operate within a strong culture of masculinity and violence (Hobbs et al., 2002; 2007; Lister et al., 2000; Winlow, 2001).

Changes need to be made to this culture through training, hiring practices, and enforcement to reduce sexual aggression, and aggression generally. Even managers may be unaware of the extent that sexual aggression is normative. An example of this lack of awareness occurred during one debriefing session we held with bar staff and management during the development of the *Safer Bars* program. When we asked whether sexual harassment was a problem for the bar, all the female staff responded that it was while the male staff and management indicated the opposite and appeared quite surprised by the affirmative response of the female staff. This gendered pattern among staff suggests that staff meetings and discussions about strategies for lowering aggression might have a substantial impact on raising awareness about sexual aggression and how to prevent it. Management also needs to be made aware that sexual aggression is likely to be bad for business because many women are reluctant to go to bars where aggressive and invasive sexual/romantic overtures are tolerated.

The examples given in this article provide additional directions for using barroom policies and practices to reduce aggression related to sexual/romantic overtures. The first instance of the anonymous bum grab might be hard to spot, but the observers saw it so presumably staff might also as well. Once identified, the individual could be taken quietly aside and either given a warning or perhaps asked to leave. The harassment activities in incidents 3, 4, 5 and 10 could have been easily put to an end by staff. Had staff done so in incident 10, the brawl might have been prevented.

Sexual/romantic overtures that persist and ultimately lead to aggression (as in incidents 2, 6 and 7) pose a more difficult problem in terms of identification and intervention, possibly especially for male staff, because these often involve picking up cues that the target is unwilling or feels uncomfortable. Therefore, it might be an important role for female servers and other female staff, who are often marginalized from rule enforcement in many contemporary bar settings (see Graham

& Homel, 2008), to intervene by chatting with the female target to ascertain whether she would like some help in discouraging the overture. Staff intervention in enforcing clearer boundaries for acceptable sexual/romantic overtures may also help initiators avoid inadvertent aggression when their use of alcohol, for the purpose of reducing social anxieties, has also decreased their ability to detect subtle refusal cues and develop graceful withdrawal strategies.

Bar policies and staff practices might also attempt to enhance the guardian and handler roles of third parties, that is, friends of the initiators and targets. Female friends already come into play as guardians of one another, and this role could be supported by staff rather than ignored. With regard to male friends, although male friends in the incidents described above tended to increase the level of aggressiveness or become aggressive themselves, there are examples in the literature (see Graham & Homel, 2008) of staff asking friends of an aggressor to bring him or her under control with consequences for the group (e.g. the group being no longer permitted to remain in the bar) if this does not happen. This strategy might be especially effective for sexual/romantic overture-related aggression because it (a) may allow the aggressor to save face through the subtle intervention by friends rather than being chastised directly by staff, and (b) helps the entire group become aware of the boundaries for acceptable behavior.

Another direction for the prevention of social, overture-related aggression would be to focus on potential offenders and targets. For example, educational programs could be developed to teach adolescent males and females (i.e., future bargoers) how to respond to unwanted advances in a clear but tactful way, how to make appropriate overtures and how to recognize when their overtures are unwanted. Such programs might also focus on young men's concerns with masculinity and conformity to traditional masculine norms in the setting of the bar. Given that incidents of male-to-female sexual victimization in the present study were done in the presence,

and sometimes with the encouragement of male peers, such programs might challenge traditional gender role stereotypes and provide young men with strategies for showing disapproval of male peers who sexually degrade and objectify women (see Crooks, Goodall, Hughes, Jaffe, & Baker, 2007; Katz, 2006).

As noted in the introduction to this article, people go to bars and clubs partly because they are open settings where it is possible to connect with sexual and romantic partners, and the “time out” permissive atmosphere is an important component of this social function. The large majority of bar patrons meet sexual/romantic partners in safe, respectful, and presumably mutually satisfying ways. Predatory behaviors, in particular, tend to be done by a very small minority, although the effects can be far reaching, because predators can affect multiple targets over the course of a single evening. Our analysis of sexual/romantic, overture-related aggression suggests that setting firm policies to prevent predatory behavior and better patron and staff skills in handling aggression arising out of these sensitive social processes can be accomplished while retaining the exciting sexual and social environment sought by bar and club-goers of both genders.

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