

## *Bouncers and Occupational Masculinity*

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On the evening of Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2004, high profile cricketer David Hookes died as result of an altercation with a bouncer at the Beaconsfield Hotel in the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda. Media reports suggested that the bouncer would be charged with manslaughter (*The Mercury* 22 January 2004:1). Other reports revealed that the bouncer had assault charges pending against him from an incident that took place at the Essendon Grand Hotel in December 2003 (*The Australian* 21 January 2004:1). It has taken the highly publicised death of David Hookes to bring public attention to a diverse range of problems associated with security work in licensed venues.

The circumstances surrounding this incident raise important questions about how security guards perceive their work and whether the training they receive is adequate to deal with the issue of violence in the night-time economy. To deal with these kinds of issues adequately, however, requires an appreciation of the social context and social factors pertaining to this kind of work. A recent study undertaken on security personnel in Hobart illustrates the contribution that a sociological approach can make to better understanding the working world of bouncers (Tomkins 2003).

In 2003 I undertook an ethnographic study in Hobart, Tasmania, which included interviews with 10 bouncers, 5 police officers, and 5 owners or managers of night-time establishments. This was supplemented by observations of the waterfront's licensed premises over a period of several weeks, usually on the weekends. The research centred on the construction of occupational masculinity and its affect on bouncers in licensed entertainment venues on Hobart's waterfront. A central concern was how different groups involved in the industry perceive what makes an effective bouncer. The research also evaluated statistics supplied by Tasmania Police on the number of call outs for assistance received by them to the licensed venues on the waterfront over a 12-month period from 2001 to 2002. The findings indicated that the occupation of security work in licensed venues influenced the perceptions of masculinity of bouncers and that this has important implications for the future training of security guards working in the industry. The research also suggests that the presence of bouncers could well have the potential to *increase* the incidence of violence occurring between bouncers and patrons in licensed venues, with devastating consequences.

### **The Night Time Economy**

In the post-industrial cities, there have been considerable social and economic changes in disused industrial areas over the last few decades (Hobbs et al 2000; Hollands 1995). Many of these changes have occurred on the periphery of central business districts, by re-zoning disused buildings into entertainment areas. In particular, old industrial buildings have been transformed into new licensed recreational and leisure venues. These transformations have seen a migration of young people to these sites on Friday and Saturday nights to engage in recreational and leisure activities, and correspondingly, there has been an increase in the incidence of interpersonal violence and social conflict (Hollands 1995).

It has become accepted that the night-time economy, through a serviced based economy such as bars, pubs, clubs and music venues, has an identifiable role to play in developing the old disused industrial centres into new systems of economic production. These new

economic centres, which are based on entertainment and the consumption of alcohol, are also advertised by city authorities and venue management promoting the vibrancy of their nightlife as a growing economic sector and a key indicator of a healthy economy (Hollands, Chatterton, Byrnes & Read 2002).

The night-time economy has become an important economic indicator for many local and state governments in Australia. In Tasmania, for example, the development of the entertainment industry coupled with increased tourism has seen a proliferation in the number of licensed venues in and around Hobart's waterfront, with continued development planned for the future. Both the Hobart City Council and the Tasmanian State Government use the historic waterfront of Salamanca Place's licensed venues to attract patrons. Coupled with these developments have been the state promoted and sanctioned use of Hobart's entertainment venues as a favoured port of call for US navy ships and cruise ships that dock in Hobart. For example, personnel from large US navy ships such as the Carl Vincent — which has a crew of 5000 — are the targets of many of the advertising campaigns.

The response by managers and owners of licensed venues to the increased numbers of patrons visiting the waterfront area and the risk of fights has been an increased use of private security guards or bouncers. These personnel are employed in an attempt to screen patrons perceived as a threat and to decrease the possibility of interpersonal violence occurring (Tomkins 2003). Traditionally, the role of night-time policing has been the domain of the state police (for discussion see, Hollands et al 2002; Hadfield et al 2002). However, with the increased numbers of entertainment venues and limited resources of state police services, many of the state functions in policing the night-time entertainment industry have been transferred to private security groups.

Partly in recognition of the increasing importance of private policing in Tasmania, bouncers have now been regulated by legislation which is designed to standardise the way crowd controllers control Hobart's licensed entertainment venues (see for examples, *Tasmanian Crowd Controller Act 1999*, *Tasmanian Crowd Controllers Regulations 2000*). The new regulations codify what bouncers' legal obligations are to patrons, to venue owners and managers, and to the state. The development of the legislation has also been coupled with new training standards within the TAFE educational structure to ensure that all bouncers receive suitable training (see *Tasmanian Crowd Controllers Regulations 2000*). The new training package has been granted national recognition by the National Training Authority, which allows for the qualifications gained in Tasmania to be transferred to other states.

## **Masculinity and Violence**

The private security industry — dominated by males — coupled with the expansion of the night-time economy, raises important issues pertaining to the use of coercive violence by security guards and the construction of masculinities in licensed entertainment venues. While the discourses of masculinity affect all men, the realities of the interaction between work and class result in the formation of particular class styles of masculinity (Scourfield & Drakeford 2001:8–10). As a result, working-class masculinity tends to compensate for the lack of political or economic power by taking up the more immediate aggressive style of working-class 'machismo' (Scourfield & Drakeford 2001:10). Consequently, '... in stereotypical terms, a "working class" male might construe masculinity in terms of brute strength, physical attributes, competency in using one's body and machines (such as cars), and peer group solidarity' (Cunneen & White 1996:3).

The physicality of the male body becomes central in discussing the concept of *occupational masculinity*. Occupational masculinity, as Game and Pringle (1983:14) suggest, '... is fundamental to the way work is organised and work is central in the social construction of gender'. Harris, Lea and Foster (1995) argue that:

Work defines men. When young boys are asked the question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?', the answer is not a general statement like 'loving person', but rather a job title like 'an engineer', 'a pilot', 'a policeman', or a 'businessman'. When asked, 'Who are you?' a man will respond, 'I am a carpenter or...' (Harris et al 1995:73, cited in Goodwin 1999)

White (1997/98) observes that traditionally, working class labour involved performing physical tasks to generate income. For instance, many of the occupations that working class males have performed have been physically demanding such as mining, construction and factory work. It is the physical prowess of working class males that becomes central in developing male identity, and '... translates into forms of aggressive masculinity which celebrates strength, speed, agility...' (White 1997/98:10). The strength, speed and agility celebrated by working class males become an important attribute that is valued by the night-time economy. In particular, with the large population of young people on the streets and an expanding night-time economy, avenues for working class males to legitimately use physical violence as bouncers have increased.

Many masculine characteristics are evident in licensed premises when male dominated groups of bouncers begin work. Bouncers begin their work in Hobart usually late in the night (10.00pm through to 3-4.00am) with the prospect that some stage of the working night will involve the application of physical violence. For example, in the event of an altercation between patrons and bar staff or other patrons, bouncers can respond by physically removing the offending patron from the premises. Moreover, the opportunity for the removal of patrons has increased with the large influx of people into the small geographic areas where many licensed entertainment venues are centred (see for example, Corbin, Bernat, Calhoun, McNair & Seals 2001; MCM Research 1990; Marsh & Kibby 1992; Tomsen 1997).

Bouncers are tasked to defend the entertainment space from patrons who may engage in interpersonal violence or other behaviours that are deemed unwanted by the owners or managers of the venue. The increase in the possibility of violence between bouncers and male patrons suggests the existence of face-saving or status protecting violence by male patrons (see Toch 1969; Polk 1994). The triggers of face-saving or status protecting violence may include such factors as the assertion of masculine identity, and the protection of a masculine image and honour, to name a few. Tedeschi and Felson (1994:250) for example, make the distinction between *assertive* and *protective male* violence. Assertive manifestations of violence are attempts to establish a particular masculine social identity and tend to be predatory in nature. Protective manifestations of violence are face-saving actions and behaviours performed when men feel that their identity as a male had been insulted in some way. These factors are particularly relevant in discussions of young men's perceptions of their role in society (see Cunneen & White 1996:6-7). For many male patrons the challenge to their maleness by the presence of male bouncers can result in face-saving violent retaliations.

The Hobart research supports Tedeschi and Felson's (1994) argument that male aggression can be placed into two main categories of assertive and protective violence. Many of the male bouncers relied on the position that if you allowed male patrons to get away with too much there would be collective misbehaviour by the other patrons in the

venue. This appears to suggest that bouncers had the perception that other patrons will not respect the authority of the bouncer. However, bouncers were acutely attuned to male patrons challenging the bouncer's masculinity within the venue.

There appears to be a correlation between how bouncers negotiate their perceptions of male identity with other manifestations of masculinity, and the incidence of violence within licensed venues (see for example, Campbell 2000; Cameron 2000; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2001).

## Hegemonic and Subordinate Masculinities

Connell (1995:77) suggests that hegemonic masculinity can be described as the culturally acceptable form of dominant masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not suggest that there is one form of masculinity, but implies that masculinity is historically mobile. In other words, within the configuration of social gender practices one particular form of masculinity will become dominant and others subordinate in social contexts (1995:77). For example, Connell (1995:76) notes that: 'There are, after all, gay black men and effeminate factory hands, not to mention middle-class rapists and cross-dressing bourgeois'. In occupations, as in institutions, which rely particularly on physicality, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' provides a useful analytical tool in understanding why some men identify as a hegemonic group, in opposition to and dominant over women, but also subordinating other males (for discussion see, Connell 2002).

Ethnographic research by Monaghan (2000:6) found that the hegemonic masculinity of bouncers marginalises perceived subordinate masculinities of not only non-security staff and patrons but also other bouncers. Bouncers who were perceived to be less physically able to deal with violent patrons or who were reluctant to engage in interpersonal violence within the workplace were considered 'muppets'; a disparaging term used to describe bouncers that do not measure up to the perceptions of what a bouncer should be i.e. physically large, mentally tough, and willing to risk bodily injury (Monaghan 2000:9). Moreover, the use of violence by bouncers is seen a valued asset by other bouncers within the job (Monaghan 2000:25). The ability to use violence, the willingness to risk bodily injury, and the need to regulate large hedonistic groups '...legitimizes their use of sometimes injurious "sovereign power"' (Monaghan 2000:25). The Hobart findings also support Monaghan's (2000) contention that the occupational culture surrounding the night-time security industry has developed dominant and subordinate styles of masculinities of security workers in the entertainment industry (Tomkins 2003). This is particularly relevant when considering the training of new bouncers and the styles of intervention utilised by bouncers when at work.

The styles of intervention and the potential to engage in violence is perceived as crucial to maintain non-violent control strategies in licensed venues, and astute bouncers are aware of the potency in controlling patrons, by presenting on the door an image of masculinity that is in '...some way removed from the norm' (Hobbs & Hall, 2000:6). Observations made on Hobart's waterfront of the placement of bouncers certainly support Hobbs and Hall's (2000) contention that the image of physically large males on the entrances to the venues is used as a deterrent to potentially violent male patrons (Tomkins 2003). However, the finding from the research conducted in Hobart indicates that the presence of physically large males at the entrance of licensed premises can also actually *increase* the possibility of interpersonal violence (Tomkins 2003).

## Gender Differences

The Hobart study also highlighted gender differences similar to the findings of Monaghan (2000). Monaghan's (2000) investigation into door staff in England found the occupation is dominated by males. However, as in Hobart, Monaghan's (2000:11) research also found that the small numbers of female bouncers were ostensibly used to control female customers but also had to deal with male patrons. In Hobart some of the female bouncers were called upon to control male patrons who were intoxicated and misbehaving with very little need to resort to violence (Tomkins 2003).

For female bouncers, the class background of male patrons appears to negate potentially violent incidents. For example, both the police and female bouncers in Hobart felt that the working class ethos of 'real men don't hit women' is used by certain male patrons when female bouncers negotiate compliance issues to house rules. However, this appears only to be relevant in the public sphere and may not transfer over into the private sphere (see for example the literature on domestic violence). This was also reflected in the way that male bouncers view female patrons. Many of the male bouncers viewed female patrons as non-threatening or at the most as an annoyance.

The way in which male bouncers are socialised includes not only institutions such as family, school and sporting systems but also an occupation itself. How private security work is perceived and socially constructed is a major factor in the way male bouncers behave and carry out their duties. The expression of superior technical expertise, the ability to exercise control over others in the workplace, and the ability to display physical prowess are important occupational influences on males in the private security industry. For female bouncers, however, the occupation appears to be about employment and they do not generally immerse themselves too deeply into the masculine occupational culture.

For male bouncers, the answer to the question 'why did you become a bouncer?' implied that males entering the occupation saw it as a testing ground for other masculine indicators such as a martial arts prowess. However, other findings in the Hobart study indicated that a perceived benefit for male bouncers was the attention that this occupation attracts from female patrons. Indeed, the police suggested that the attraction of females and the ability to test physical strength and fighting prowess were important reasons why this occupation attracts males (Tomkins 2003).

The Hobart research found that, although many male bouncers consider female bouncers an asset in the venue, they are only there to assist with problem female patrons. Many of the male bouncers suggested that female patrons are not worthy of the attention of male bouncers and that their time and expertise would be better utilised in the more demanding role of coping with the male patrons. Both the police and male bouncers expressed the view that females would not be able to cope with the physical rigours of dealing with aggressive male patrons.

## Environmental Dynamics

In general, the way in which a bouncer 'does the job' can be viewed as a complex myriad of individual and collective processes. In the working environment that bouncers operate in, violence is an important tool that they have to rely on to achieve a safe and secure space for the mass of patrons. The application of physical force is an everyday occurrence in the entertainment industry. However, the issue here is to what degree should physical force be used when subduing patrons who have broken house rules? For example, the physical restraint techniques used by bouncers when removing a patron can have very serious

consequences for the patron, bouncer, and owner or manager as demonstrated in the case of David Hookes. How the bouncers react to situations can inflate the conflict to violence that is even more destructive. The Hobart research also indicated that the nature of fashion, music and atmosphere in the clubs and pubs that surround the waterfront, influence behaviours (see also Chatterton & Hollands 2003).

The point being made here is that the night-time leisure activities of licensed entertainment venues promote and require, for commercial reasons, methods of attracting young people to the venue. The methods used are twofold: the first is to attract young males by advertising that young females frequent the venue. This is particularly evident when there are naval personnel visiting Hobart. Secondly, by advertising that the venue is *the* place to be on a Friday and Saturday night for young women to attract young men also creates particular styles of venues. Particular styles then need systems of exclusion to ensure that the styled identity adopted by the management is not compromised by allowing patrons who do not project the styled identity into the venue.

Once bouncers are introduced into the entertainment venues, the venue dynamics can change. On one hand, many of the young male patrons see the introduction of security guards as an intrusion into their social space and as a challenge to their male identity. On the other hand, the bouncers are there in an employment capacity, and have numerous obligations to fulfil. This is reflected in the way in which bouncers perceive their technical expertise. Many of the bouncers feel that the public do not understand the realities of security work in the entertainment industry.

Overall, the Hobart research indicated that bouncers construct masculinity through a complex combination of social background and occupational cultural factors. Male bouncers, in particular, rely on and reinforce a dominant form of masculine identity by subordinating other male identities that do not measure up to perceptions of physical prowess, legal technical ability, and a willingness to risk bodily injury. The assertion that male bouncers, in particular, help create and indeed maintain levels of violence in the night-time economy is supported by the Hobart investigation (Tomkins 2003). This can certainly be linked with the dominant ideals of what bouncers believe are the major attributes of this occupation. In Germany, one club has used naked female bouncers to reduce violence. One of the club patrons stated 'it makes standing in the queue a lot more fun ... It takes your mind off everything else' (Ananova 2003). But the Hobart findings also suggest that female bouncers could be generally more effective in dealing with patron's compliance to house rules.

The way in which bouncers do the job requires further investigation. In particular, more research is needed to consider and investigate the social setting of licensed entertainment venues and how patrons negotiate their social positions within these spaces. Furthermore, bouncers who work in licensed venues also need to be given the tools to defuse incidents before they erupt into violent confrontation. State policing services and governments at all levels also need to take an active role in the health of the licensed entertainment industries in their communities to insure that patrons, security personnel, owners, and managers feel safe and are without fear. However, it is also very important to screen potential applicants for security work for violent histories, which currently does not happen in Tasmania. Finally, more research is needed on the effectiveness of the training received by bouncers.

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## **Legislation**

*Tasmanian Government Crowd Controllers Act 1999.*

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