"We police it ourselves": Group processes in the escalation and regulation of violence in the

night-time economy

Abstract

The attempt to regenerate city centres has led to the creation of a 'night-time economy'

based around alcohol-led entertainment. This has been accompanied by an increase of violence.

Using insights from Social Identity research on collective action we argue that night-time

economy violence can be viewed as a group-level phenomenon. 20 focus-groups were

conducted with participants who socialise together (total number of participants=53).

Participants discussed their experiences of the night-time economy, including violence. A

thematic analysis of the transcripts drew out four ways in which night-time economy violence is

discussed in group terms: intergroup violence; intragroup violence; intragroup intervention

(escalation); and intragroup intervention (regulation). Analysis reveals that groups can have

both negative and positive roles in night-time economy violence, including regulating fellow

group members away from violence. In demonstrating the importance of intra-group regulation

of violence in the night–time economy, we extend social identity research beyond the focus on

intergroup crowd violence, and reveal the practical potential of harnessing such processes in

anti-violence interventions.

Key message: Groups have negative and positive roles in night-time economy violence,

including regulating fellow group members away from potential violence.

Key words: Alcohol, violence, group processes, bystander intervention.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades there has been a marked change in the political economies of

many British towns and cities (Hall & Hubbard, 1998). The attempt to regenerate city centres

following the decline of the industrial base has led to the creation of a 'night-time economy'

(NTE[1]: Bianchini, 1995; Hobbs, Lister, Hadfield, Winlow, & Hall, 2000; Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, &

Winlow, 2003; Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, & Winlow, 2005). The Faustian pact between urban

regeneration and alcohol which underpins the NTE has had a profound impact on communities

by being accompanied by a dramatic increase of violence in town and city centres – particularly

in the evening and at week-ends (Finney, 2004).

This increase in NTE violence has been mirrored by researchers investigating the

relationship between drinking, disorder and violent behaviour. It has quickly become clear that,

while alcohol is correlated with violent events, a straightforward, causal relationship between

the two appears unlikely (Graham & Homel, 2008; Marsh & Fox-Kibby, 1992; Navis, Brown &

Heim, 2008; Homel, Tomsen & Thommeny, 1992; Tomsen, 1997; Graham & Wells, 2003).

[1] NTE: Night-time economy

Researchers have argued that the relationship between alcohol and violence can be moderated by gender (Campbell, 1993; Archer, 1994; Graham & Wells, 2001), by social class (Tomsen, 1997; Day, Gough, & McFadden, 2003), and there is evidence that evolutionary aspects are important in this (McMurran, Jinks, Howells, & Howard, 2010). At the same time it can be mediated by quality of environment (Homel, Tomsen, & Thommeny, 1992; Marsh & Fox-Kibby, 1992; Graham & Wells, 2001), reputation management (Felson, 1982), levels of intoxication (Homel & Clark, 1994) and masculinity concerns (Tomsen, 1997; Whitehead, 2005), There is also a developing literature which identifies violence as a leisure pursuit in its own right. Using data from interviews with perpetrators of violence, several researchers document the phenomenon of recreational fighting and its place in the NTE (Tomsen, 1997; Marsh & Fox-Kibby, 1992; Graham & Wells, 2003; Winlow & Hall, 2006).

In addition to exploring the alcohol-violence relationship, researchers have begun to focus on the control of violence which, in the eyes of those affected, can sometimes be far from satisfying (e.g., Hadfield, Lister & Traynor 2009; Hobbs et al., 2000, 2003, 2005). At the heart of this concern is the belief that the social and personal controls which typically regulate an individuals' behaviour are weakened by the very nature of the NTE. The high numbers of strangers in the NTE mean that individuals are anonymous and not readily subject to the surveillance of those who can hold them to account. Additionally, consumption of alcohol may lead to disinhibition of personal control (e.g., Rossow et al., 1999), expanding tendencies of risk taking and impulsive behaviour (Graham et al., 1997) to bring about an increased likelihood of violence.

This anxiety over the erosion of social and personal controls is compounded by a perceived failure of authorities to provide the resources to police the NTE appropriately. As Hobbs and colleagues (Hobbs et al., 2000, 2003, 2005) point out, while the numbers of people venturing out into the NTE have increased exponentially, the number of police officers available to local communities has remained stubbornly low. Hobbs et al. (2005) give the example of the city of Manchester, UK, where an average of 130,000 people may be out drinking on Friday and Saturday nights with approximately 40 police officers available to police these crowds. This handful of police officers is supplemented by around 1000 'bouncers' – comparatively poorly trained and weakly regulated private security staff who have license to 'police' the pubs and clubs they work in (though not the streets through which the drinkers travel on a 'circuit' of drinking establishments) and may themselves contribute to a sense of disorder by dealing in, and attempting to monopolise, violence and intimidation as a means of establishing control over the pubs and clubs in which they work (Hobbs et al., 2003: although the 2001 Private Security Industry Act introduced legislation and training tightening the regulation of bouncers' working practices; Fernie, 2011). From this viewpoint of limited law enforcement the NTE can appear to be what Hobbs and colleagues call an urban frontier in which behaviour is only weakly bound by social rules and where an individual is potentially ungovernable without the threat of 'privatised' violence.

In view of the observation that the relationship between alcohol, drunkenness and public space remains under theorised (Jayne, Holloway, & Valentine, 2006; Jayne, Valentine, & Holloway, 2008) this paper will test some of the assumptions about the absence of social and

personal controls over the behaviour of people in the NTE. More specifically, we raise the

possibility that, despite the incontrovertible evidence for the rise in NTE violence, important

social and psychological processes which derive from our membership of social groups and

serve to regulate an individual's behaviour remain in place. We suggest that groups can shape

the trajectory of violence in a way that brings a degree of informal regulation to behaviour in

the NTE.

Our approach is informed by insights from the social psychology of group processes – in

particular research in the social identity tradition (e.g., Tajfel, 1978, 1982), and extends this core

social psychological perspective into the domain of night-time economy violence. We draw

particularly from the work of Reicher and colleagues on the nature, form and function of

violence in intergroup conflicts. This research, which examines violent episodes during 'riots'

(Reicher, 1984), political activism (Drury & Reicher, 2000) and football matches (Stott & Reicher,

1998), suggests that the people involved in violence are acting in a way that reflects the norms

and values of their particular social group. For Reicher and colleagues, the nature of violent acts

is constrained by the limits of these social identities. People do not usually engage in violent acts

which run counter to the norms and values of their social identities – and if they do, other group

members may intervene to stop them. For example, in an ethnography of Scottish football

supporters during the World Cup in France in 1998, Stott (Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001)

describes an episode in which two Scottish fans begin a violent assault on a Tunisian fan during

an informal football match on a campsite. A large group of Scottish fans descend on the

altercation and drag the two Scottish protagonists away unceremoniously. Interviews with the

Scottish fans revealed that fellow Scots had a vision of themselves as fun loving and friendly, in contrast to English football fans who were constructed as racist and violent. The violent actions of the two Scots in the campsite threatened Scottish identity because it left them open to accusations that they were no better than the English- something which the Scots considered a fate worse than death! The wider community of Scottish fans had thus intervened in order to preserve the reputation of the group as a whole.

These ideas have been formulated into the Elaborated Social Identity Model of Crowd Behaviour (ESIM) (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000). ESIM has been used to explore and explain the occurrence of violence in crowd events including football matches (Stott & Reicher 1998; Stott, Hoggett & Pearson 2011), environmental campaigning (Drury & Reicher, 2000) and street demonstrations (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Drury, 2000). However, the main focus of this research has been on the role played by public order policing in shaping the social and psychological dynamics of these events. In this paper we propose to take some of the insights generated by these empirical studies by applying them to a context where (as we have demonstrated above) there is very little formal policing. We aim to explore the extent to which identity processes can regulate public order in the (relative) absence of formal control.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to bring together the social psychological literature on the informal regulation of violence in crowd events with the analysis of accounts of violent behaviour in the NTE. Before we can do so, it is important to establish that NTE violence is a

phenomenon which can be analysed in group terms. The common construction of NTE violence

as predominantly 'stranger-on-stranger' violence (Finney, 2004) can lead to the

misapprehension that most of the fighting occurs between lone individuals in the absence of

others. However, as Felson (1982) points out, most violence occurs in the presence of others

and for the benefit of an audience. Although there is little systematic analysis of the

composition of the audience for NTE interactions, most commentators make reference to the

presence of others. Whilst there are some examples of institutional social groups are present in

the night-time economy (e.g., 'police') the majority of the actors are in friendship or

acquaintance groups, for example, Dyck (1980) talks about the relationship between 'scrappers

and their audience' and Homel et al. (1992) argue for an explicitly group level quality to night-

time interactions by suggesting that the presence of groups of male strangers is a key trigger for

NTE violence. Graham and Wells (2001) offer one of the few observational studies to record the

numbers of people present at an incident. Their study of bars in a town in Ontario in Canada

suggests that most incidents involve five or more participants and occur in locations where

there are more 'bystanders' present. Wells and Graham (1999) also document the frequency of

third party (defined as people not involved in instigating the incident) involvements in bar room

aggression. They suggest that almost half of incidents involve intervention by third parties.

While all this work points to the importance of group level analysis, and recognises that third

parties are actively involved in shaping the trajectory of violence, (as the authors themselves

acknowledge), it does not account for how and why third parties act in the way they do. More

specifically, it does not deal with the social relationships that might pertain between third

parties and protagonists, or amongst the third parties themselves which in view of the fact that

alcohol consumption in community spaces is often a group-based activity (Graves et al., 1982)

appears of utmost importance.

The extension of the social identity perspective into the informal group arena of the night-

time economy therefore extends the application of the social psychology of group relations

outside of its core setting of group processes and intergroup relations, and explores how the

principles of the social identity perspective shape everyday social encounters. In particular, the

current paper focuses on lay understandings of appropriate ingroup behaviour and regulation in

an everyday environment (the night-time economy) that is often not associated with the

institutional identities (e.g., political, national or workplace) that are most commonly used to

investigate social identity processes. Rather, following Turner et al. (1994) we consider how

social identity is a continuous and flexible motivation throughout human activity, not simply in

areas of institutional or bureaucratic identity labels.

With this in mind, we conducted an exploratory series of small group interviews designed to

elicit accounts of the experiences of those who drink together to explore the ways in which NTE

interactions might be subject to the informal regulation of group members. The focus group

methodology potentially offers an interesting insight into the group-based aspects of night-time

socialising. By getting groups who already socialise together to discuss their behaviours, the

participants interact with one another and test their own understandings and assumptions

about events that they have jointly experienced. Participants orientate to the group-based

aspects of these experiences, and often remove much of the work of the interviewer as they question and inform one another.

Any discussion-based methodology introduces some limitations to the claims that can be made for it (e.g., Sim, 1998). The focus-group discussions are accounts of participants' experiences and understandings of violence in the night-time economy, rather than direct recordings of behaviour. However, the differing accounts of violence and group behaviours provide access into the explicit norms that need to be considered by participants in the night-time economy. They also provide a level of detail and description of group relationships not available in observational studies of night-time economy violence (Forsyth & Lennox, 2010; Levine, Taylor, & Best, 2011), and have previously been used to examine social capital in the NTE (Demant & Järvinen, 2011).

Methodology

Participants

20 interviews were conducted with 53 participants (18 female, 35 male: age range 18-early 30s years old). Participants were recruited from friendship groups who socialised together in the NTE, and the interviews were conducted in these groups (mean group size= 2.65, one solo interview). Participants were recruited through 3 sources: university advertisement, direct approach by researchers, and through the probation service. 30 of the participants were

students at a university in the North West of England, 3 were currently under referral to the

probation service for NTE violence offences, and the others had a mix of manual and retail

occupations in three towns in the North West of England. Participants consented to be recorded

in discussion for the study, and were informed that they could withdraw at any time during the

focus groups. The study conformed to the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the British

Psychological Society (2009).

Procedure

Semi-structured group interviews were conducted to elicit participants' own accounts of

their experiences of violence in the NTE. The discussion was organised around the theme of 'a

good night-out', with the opening question asking participants to describe the last time they

went out together. Further prompts asked participants about night-time venues they attend,

regularity of night-time socialising, and to recall specific times when the members of the focus

group had been out together. When participants referred to violence they were asked to expand

upon this topic.

The interviews were recorded and subsequently fully transcribed. Identifying

characteristics were anonymised. A thematic analysis (e.g., Davies, 1997) was conducted, in

which descriptions of individual accounts of acts of violence were examined for the

presence/absence of other actors; the inter- and intragroup relationships between those

present in a violence story; and the nature and quality of involvement in the action. Incidents

that were marked as 'reported events'- that is, events which were described by interviewees but at which they were not present- were excluded from this analysis.

Results

77 stories of violent incidents in which participants had been involved in directly were recorded. In 57 of the violent incidents in which interviewees were involved, they were involved as protagonists. In the remaining 20, they were involved as intervening third parties.

Given our interest in a group level analysis of these incidents, we explored how often our interviewees made reference to the presence of third parties. Of the 77 incidents, interviewees referred to the presence of others on 55 (71.4%) occasions. In the remaining 22 (28.6%) incidents, presence or absence of others was not specified. There were no incidents in which respondents referred directly to the absence of others. When the relationships between people present at an incident were analysed in more detail, on 31 (40.3%) occasions the third parties were known to the interviewee, in 21(27.3%) incidents third parties were known to the interviewee and to all parties involved in the conflict, and in 3 (3.9%) occasions the third parties were not known to the interviewee, but were known to at least one person involved in the incident. Only 5 (8.8 %) of the incidents where our interviewees were directly involved could be described as 'stranger' violence. In these cases the interviewees did not know the person who attacked them or who they attacked. In 28 (49.1%) the interviewee specified the nature of the relationship between them and the other person involved in the incident. In the remaining 24

(42%) incidents the relationship was unspecified. Thus while stranger-on-stranger attacks did

occur, they were far outnumbered by fights in which the protagonists know each other.

The following sections use interview extracts to illustrate the forms of group

relationships described by our participants in recounting NTE violence. These accounts

demonstrate that a group-based perspective can provide a valuable insight into the violence

associated with the NTE.

Intergroup violence

One of the frequent narratives to emerge from our interviews was the account of

violence at the intergroup level. In these accounts protagonists were described in terms of their

membership of social categories. While fighters could be strangers at an inter-personal personal

level, at a group level they were not. In other words, this was not classic 'stranger-on-stranger'

violence, but rather violence that was shaped by group level relationships.

Extract 1: Focus group number 3, two male construction workers

1. A: I've seen a lot of things like firsthand growing up living in [seaside town] a lot

2. of things especially when people come out of clubs and kebab places and things

3. like that

4. Int: Ok can you tell me about any of them? I mean have you known anybody for

5. example that's been

6. A: No it's more. Instead of single people, it's gangs of lads.

7. Int: Oh right

8. A: From different estates say, do you know what I mean, and things like that

9. which happens everywhere, doesn't it I suppose, but

10. B: There's a lot of trouble with the Polish as well

11. [...]

12. A: Yeah, as certain parts of [...] are just full of Polish, like migrant workers sort of

13. thing.

14. Int: I see.

15. B: And when they go to town they all go in groups so they clash with locals as

16. well you see after a few beers

Whilst the individuals who are involved may not personally know one another, the event is not framed by ignorance of one another, but is related to beliefs about the social group membership of others. Individuals categorised the social context in terms of own ingroup members and outgroup members. This outgroup 'other' is framed within group dimensions that ascribe a particularly meaning, often a threat, to the individuals involved in the confrontation. These can be local conflicts over 'turf' or reputation ("from different estates say") or wider conflicts with national 'strangers' ("there's a lot of trouble with the Polish as well"). The violence that results is described as being between groups who are fully immersed in their group identities ("instead of single people, it's gangs of lads").

Intragroup violence

Within intergroup situations, the justification for the violence may be intergroup competition at an abstract level such as territory or difference. Violence also occurs between people who have either gone out socialising together or see themselves sharing an alternative common ingroup relationship. However, just because there is no outgroup, it does not mean that this violence should be seen as interpersonal. Participants in the interviews frequently introduce situations in which interpersonal conflicts developed through the common relations of ingroup membership, and the ensuing violence is influenced by their common relations, whilst being explained in the accounts as interpersonal. In extract 2, for example, the violence described has a clear limit, remains at a relatively low level and de-escalates rapidly.

Extract 2: Focus group number 7, three non-students, mixed gender group

1. C: Maybe just because I go out in [rural market town] more, but when you have a

2. fight it's between groups of people who have come out with each other that night,

3. like when they fall out with each other. That often happens.

4. Int: Right

5. D: Yeah that happens a lot actually

6. C: So not necessarily strangers fighting, but often it's friends fighting. They have

7. a quick punch and then about half an hour later they are having a drink together

8. D: Two of the lads I hang about with, I mean, when was it? It was around

9. Christmas time and one of the lads was being an idiot and like smacking people in

10. the face with this bit of holly (laughs), just messing about like. He did it to me and

11. it quite hurt actually but one of the lads doesn't take, he doesn't have anything

12. like that. He did to him and next thing they were out in the street rolling about

13. like a couple of idiots. They weren't actually hitting each other they were just

14. swearing and rolling about, then they were both absolutely knackered, out of

15. breath after it like ((mimics panting "sorry mate")) Then they were back in the

16. pub drinking (laughs)

The next extract offers an alternative perspective towards intragroup violence. Whilst extract 2 proposes how a shared relationship can limit the violence that occurs, the two participants in 3 elaborate on how that shared relationship can itself foster conflict:

Extract 3: Focus group number 19, four male students

1. E: In groups I think you can know people too well. You can do a thing where,

2. because he's your mate and because you're drunk then you get aggressive with

3. each other and you might think or know that you could have them for example.

4. And because you know that, because they're not a stranger as such, there's less,

5. it's easier to have a fight, almost

6. F: There's less real risk and you can assess it differently so you might push them

7. further than usual and if you go a bit too far then (pause). Also if you are with a

8. group of friends that you know you can really put a scathing insult in because

9. you'll know something that will really twist that, really push them. Like saying

10. "Ah you dickhead" isn't going to have too big a response at all, but if someone's

11. got a deep dark history secret they don't want people to know and you know it

12. can really ….

13. E: You react in the wrong way and just snap

Both interviewees agree that knowing the other person means that you are better able to assess the risk to yourself, and therefore may be more willing to enter a violent exchange (e.g., "and you might think or know that you could have them for example"). It is also suggested that having personal knowledge of the other individual means that there are greater opportunities to offend him and for a verbal exchange to shift into violence; a generic insult such as "dickhead" may not offend, but the use of someone's "deep dark history" is likely to make them "just snap".

Intragroup intervention – escalation

In addition to examining inter- and intragroup forms of NTE violence, we explored how accounts of third party behaviour might interact with the different kinds of group violence. What becomes clear immediately is that there is very little intervention by third parties in violence where the protagonists can be clearly identified as strangers. In our data there were 20 incidents where our interviewees described engaging in act of intervention. Only 3 (15%) were

interventions where the protagonists were strangers to the interviewee. Of the remaining

stories, 10 (50%) were episodes where interviewees explicitly outlined the nature of the

relationship between them and the protagonists. In the remaining 7 cases (35%) the relationship

was unspecified.

In particular interviewees described a strong orientation towards intervening on behalf

of friends:

Extract 4: Focus group number eight, three males, non-students

1. Int: Oh, I see. So, you say some of your experiences have been helping him out.

2. What do you mean by that?

3. G: Well he's another good person for getting himself into scrapes, isn't he really?

4. H: A lot of trouble.

5. G: Say, when we were younger and we all went out you could bound to say that

6. somebody would get in trouble. I can't stand back and watch a mate if he's having

7. bother. None of you lot can really, so. [...] You just end up getting involved in it

8. and then once you step over and help your mate, their mates step over and it sort

9. of escalates.

This extract typically describes a situation of escalation, suggesting the power of the

duty to back up one's mates (or at least to produce this discourse during an interview situation

where such violence is being discussed, as rhetorically asked by another participant: "you're not just going to leave your mate are you?"). These interventions are seen as unproblematic and can often contribute to a clear process of escalation. One of the group members was described as being "bound to [...] get in trouble" and none of the individuals in the group could "stand back and watch a mate if he's having trouble". This rapidly leads to more violence as it is expected that the same behaviour would be seen from the friends of the other combatant: "then once you step over and help your mate, their mates step over and it sort of escalates".

Intragroup intervention - regulation

The previous extracts have challenged the predominant conception of stranger-upon-stranger violence in the NTE, by demonstrating the value of considering the violence that occurs through group perspectives. In the above examples the group membership of individuals alters their accounts of behaviour in potentially violent situations, and in the case of intergroup violence may be the primary justification for the behaviour.

However, this is not to say that group processes should only be considered from the perspective of their propensity to support violence. During the interviews, participants also talked about the ways that groups regulated violence. In the following account the interviewees contrast the presence of other group members when violence occurs with the absence of police:

Extract 5: Focus group number 7, three non-students, mixed gender group

1. J: [Y]ou very rarely, well I've never seen any police involvement to break it up.

2. Int: Ok

3. K: Umm

4. J: I've seen other people step in to break stuff up

5. K: Yeah

6. J: and take one person over to one side and another person off to another

7. K: That's what it is, it's kind of like (pause), well how would you say it, we police

8. it ourselves sort of thing.

9. Int: Right

10. K: Obviously if there's something seriously bad happening nobody is going to

11. stand there

12. Int: No

13. K: and let it happen they'll split it up

The responsibility of the policing does not necessarily rest lightly with group members. In the following extract two of the group of interviewees discuss how their evenings involve aspects of care and responsibility for another group member ('N', also present at the interview) who drinks more than his fellow group members, and how that care can play on their minds during a night out:

Extract 6: Focus group number eight, three males, non-students

1. M: Because I've to like step in for him so many times it's like, sort of, I do go out

2. and I feel apprehensive when I see him gulp his beers because I know what can

3. happen.[...] I don't know, it doesn't make me not want to go out with him but

4. sometimes

5. N: Cheers (laughs)

6. M: No, but it does, when you do go out sometimes you're constantly saying to

7. yourself "oh, he's drinking too fast". And you tell him "chill out man, drink

8. slowly", but then glug, glug, glug.

9. O: It's like a parent to you, isn't it?

10. M: You do get a bit worried about. It's quite a relief sometimes when you get

11. home and nothing's happened. You think "phew". But (pause) it's like, you know,

12. don't you that whatever has happened I'd always be in there like, sticking up for

13. him. I'd tend not to wade in fighting or anything, but I'm always in there splitting

14. it up.

15. O: Keeping him out of trouble, baby sitting him.

The rate at which N drinks alcohol is a concern for the other group members and they do not discuss the experience in comfortable terms. S describes it as "baby sitting" and discusses enjoying himself as being an effortful activity under these circumstances: "you try and have a good night and stuff but you see if he makes it a bit rowdy you try and chill him out a bit and

stuff, but sometimes it's harder you know". For M, accepting his role as peacemaker makes him

"apprehensive", and this apprehension may only be relieved when the evening is over and he

has not had to become involved: "It's quite a relief sometimes when you get home and

nothing's happened. You think 'phew'."

Even non-intervention in a violent encounter does not necessarily mean that the social

group is not actively watching over its members. One form of watching may even be to allow

individuals to learn from their own mistakes. Prior to the following account the participants

justify non-intervention as a valid form of supporting a mate, even when the friend is on the

receiving end of a fight; 'P' justifies this with an example:

Extract 7: Focus group number 19, four male students

1. Int: How would you feel if someone started a fight and you didn't think it was

2. justified? Would you be willing to let him carry on?

3. P: Yeah. I'd just see what happens

4. Q: Spectator you mean

5. P: Yeah pretty much. Basically I've got an idiot at home who just loves to go

6. round starting fights and he's quite a small guy and he's got a chip on his shoulder

7. Int: Right

8. P: And we just let him get beaten up because next time he's not quite as willing to

9. start a fight.

10. Int: Ok

11. P: But I mean obviously if he gets in serious trouble and a guy is absolutely

12. nailing him then get him we drag them both apart and then leave them. But I think

13. if you just drag them apart all the time then they just get bigger and bigger egos,

14. which is part of the problem as well.

Whilst M repeats the familiar trope of supporting your mates by repeating that if the trouble was particularly serious (e.g., if he "gets in serious trouble" or "the guy is just giving him brain damage") he would intervene, he limits the utility of this approach. Indeed over time then this tactic itself is seen to be escalatory: "I think if you just drag them apart all the time then they just get bigger and bigger egos, which is part of the problem as well." Thus, whilst the short term outcome will involve his friend being beaten up, in the longer term the friend's advantage is served as "he's not quite as willing to start a fight".

Discussion

The Night-time economy: Beyond a "society of strangers"

The data analysis of the current study has been used for exploratory and illustrative purposes; it has considered whether there is evidence for the role of group processes within both the escalation and de-escalation of violence in the NTE, and the potential value of further exploration of this topic from a group perspective. Our emphasis on group perspectives

challenges a straightforward relationship between the individual, their alcohol consumption,

and the occurrence of violence.

Although previous research has considered the difficulties of policing the NTE, including

factors such as anonymity, disinhibition and impulsivity of individuals (e.g., Hadfield, Lister, &

Traynor, 2009; Hobbs et al., 2005; Rossow, Pape, & Wichstrom, 1999; Graham, Wells, & West,

1997) the majority of discussions of violence in the current study did not describe simple

stranger-on-stranger violence. Rather the notion of a 'stranger' is mediated by relationships

arising out of group categorisations alongside personal recognition (e.g., Tajfel, 1978; Levine,

Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005). This suggests that the justification for violence between people

who do not know one another may not be their anonymity; rather than an absence of identity

they are labelled by the identity of the group they belonged to.

Whilst stranger violence does of course occur, it must also be recognised that this is only

one facet of violence within the NTE, the basis of which is socialising over (alcoholic) drinks.

Therefore it is to be expected that, alongside strangers, there are many individuals who know

one another within the night-time society. The degree of familiarity with others can even be

increased in the economies of small and medium-sized towns and villages rather than in large

cities. In these locations it can be expected that a high degree of familiarity is likely to exist

between many of the actors in the NTE. In larger locations where a more anonymous clientele

might be expected, much of the evening's activity still occurs within groups of individuals who

know one another and will influence one another's behaviour, even if this occurs against a

backdrop of strangers (who likewise will be in their own groups).

Furthermore, whilst a suspicion of strangers and wariness of conflicts with unknown

individuals runs through the interviews, a similar level of concern was not shown for known

individuals, particularly in friendship groups. Whilst this was discussed as a strategy for avoiding

the most potentially dangerous situations, it also meant that the majority of violent incidents

described during the interviews do not fit into the 'society of strangers' paradigm.

Behavioural inhibition in the Night-time Economy

The theme of behavioural disinhibition through the influence of alcohol runs through

discussion of the NTE, including in the current set of interviews. However, parallel to the

discussions of being rowdy (e.g., extract 7) or fighting 'after a few beers' (extract 1) run

alternative themes of inhibition and regulation. During the focus groups, participants speak of

paying attention to their own behaviour and of the behaviour of those around them, in order to

limit the possible negative consequences of socialising in the NTE.

The concern with stranger violence is discussed as a limit to the behaviours that can be

expressed, even whilst 'under the influence' of alcohol. As 'C' describes in extract 3, the process

of 'assessing' the threat of violence remains making an active discrimination between behaviour

towards known individuals and towards strangers. Therefore the presentation of a disinhibited

behaviour (being louder and more aggressive towards people that you know) co-occurs with an

inhibition of the same behaviours toward strangers.

Whilst the inhibition of actions towards strangers was commonly presented as an avoidance of intergroup violence, this was seen alongside a greater propensity towards intragroup conflict.However, the threat posed by intragroup conflict was presented as inherently limited by the social relations between the actors:

'They have a quick punch and then about half an hour later they are having a drink together' (extract 2).

Whilst this may be a particularly optimistic and underplayed view of street violence, it presents a clear alternative to the presentation of the uncontrollable urges of indiscriminate disinhibition. Whilst street violence is a very visible aspect of the NTE, the regulation of violence is an invisible counter to its occurrence. The reports above suggest that violence is limited through the watchfulness of group members and the responsibility felt by one individual to her or his other group members.

The discussion of ingroup regulation in the current study parallels and extends that discussed in social identity critiques of apparent antisocial behaviour (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) and its juxtapositions: helping behaviour (Levine, Cassidy, Brazier & Reicher, 2002; Levine et al., 2005) and self-policing (Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott et al, 2007) . The randomness of violent behaviour in situations such as political demonstrations or soccer matches is typically exaggerated in common accounts of these events. Rather action occurs in prescribed ways, with limitations to acceptable behaviour and acceptable targets (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott &

Drury, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998). Similarly, literature on the role of social group membership

on bystander intervention (e.g., Levine et al., 2002, 2005; Levine & Crowther, 2008)

demonstrates how perceived shared group membership encourages individuals to engage in

pro-social behaviour towards fellow group members in distress.

In terms of contribution to social psychological theory, the analysis also reveals how

identity processes can structure behaviour (in particular the emergence and extinction of

violence) even in the absence of formal intergroup contexts. More specifically, the traditional

approach of the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) (because of the contexts in which it has

been applied) tends to show how identity processes structure behaviour in contexts which

involve formal policing. Here we reveal that there is an implicit sense in which participants in the

night-time economy understand the social context in intergroup terms (even in the absence of

formal policing) and can act to regulate behaviour accordingly.

Group-level analysis: a valuable insight into night-time economy violence

Group processes are integral to understanding the presentation and regulation of

violence in the NTE. Whilst there are undoubtedly events that occur between strangers in

interpersonal settings (and thus fit the 'society of strangers' model of minimal social regulation

between unknown individuals), this is only one element of violence in the NTE. It also seems a

misrepresentation of the wider social milieu of the NTE; rather than a society of strangers the

extracts suggest a combination of intra- and intergroup connections alongside the apparent

anonymity of the environment. In this way our analysis replicates the criticism of work on

crowds which suggests that the notion of anonymity is an illusion of perspective; the analyst's external perspective prevents her/him from seeing the relations between individuals carried between contexts, and instead they see an apparently undifferentiated and unknown collection of individuals/strangers (Reicher, 1996).

This research complements recent observational work focussing upon alcohol-based violence (e.g., Forsyth & Lennox, 2010; Graham & Homel, 2008). Forsyth and Lennox's study of violence in Glasgow's nightclubs observed differing patterns of male and female violence, and very few instances of inter-gender conflict. With a focus upon group norms and maintenance of appropriate social behaviour tied to social identity, the current study offers a social psychological mechanism by which violence is regulated, including differences in the manifestation of inter- and intragroup violence. This approach has been extended to consider the social significance of the role of gender in NTE violence (e.g. Lowe, Levine, Best, & Heim, 2012).

The group-level perspective therefore supports the possibility for interventions to limit NTE violence. Where groups have appeared in the literature previously, the analytic focus has been upon their propensity to cause or escalate violent encounters. Whilst both of these features are described above, a further influence of groups is described: that of self-regulation. Throughout the study, participants described actively watching out for their social group members during the whole of the evening. Levels of drink were being monitored and potentially harmful situations were being observed and often navigated around. In the case of non-

intervention (extract 7) we even see a case where violence is claimed to be its own regulatory action; in allowing a group member to be beaten up in this instance, it will lower the chances of conflicts in the future. Future work should examine how the concepts of self-regulation gleaned in this focus group study are seen behaviourally in the NTE. The influence of group regulation is already seen in Levine et al. (2011), in which group intervention appears to de-escalate the outcome of night-time altercations.

Recognising the analytical potential of group processes in the night-time economy, and gaining a greater understanding of how they operate will support the harnessing of such processes in developing anti-violence interventions. The current data suggest both the possibilities and the potential limits to NTE revellers 'policing themselves'.

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