

'You're one up because you haven't had a drink': bar staff, intoxication and violence

The paper by Graham *et al.* (2005), a model of careful social investigation combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, teaches us something new and surprising in an important policy arena. It uncovers yet another J-shaped curve—actually, more a U-shaped curve, when intent is factored in. Bar staff in Toronto, in this systematic observational study, tend to be more aggressive in incidents when the bar patrons are quite aggressive, but they also tend to be more aggressive in incidents when the patrons are not aggressive. Why this should be so, and why the staff should be less aggressive in the in-between incidents when the patrons are minimally aggressive, is a puzzle for future investigation.

Much that is substantively important in this paper is disguised as preparatory methodological work. The list of behaviours in the papers' Table 1, behind which must lie long hours of painstaking development work, could serve as an outline for a syllabus for training bar staff. The discussion of aggressive intent and the extent to which it is open to inference by observation seems to me to begin on a long-overdue process of turning opaque legal concepts of intent into a subject of empirical study.

Intoxicated trouble and its control in the 'night-time economy' has blown up into a major political issue in recent weeks in Britain, attracting the attention even of *Time* magazine (Gerlin 2005). Before the public furor, the issue of the place of bouncers and other tavern staff in routine night-time violence had already drawn police and academic attention. An interesting study (Hobbs *et al.* 2003) reported on the attitudes and behaviours of British bouncers (one of those interviewed is quoted in the title above), and a Home Office study of a Cardiff crime prevention project, drawing on a database of nearly 5000 police and hospital emergency incident reports, noted that while there were 101 alleged assaults on pub and club door staff, there were 332 alleged assaults by door staff (Maguire & Nettleton 2003 : 40). Such studies have pointed to the potential of bouncers to increase rather than reduce the burden of harm related to intoxication.

One policy response in Britain has been the rolling introduction of training and licensing of 'door supervisors', with a licence required to work in all parts of England and Wales as of 11 April 2005 (Security Industry Authority 2004). Hobbs *et al.* (2003) investigated what this licensing process actually meant, at a stage in

the roll-out marked by considerable confusion. What they report of the actual training does not give much confidence that the result will be a minimization of violence.

The quote in the title above draws our attention to one aspect of violence between bouncer and patron that distinguishes it from the majority of other kinds of alcohol-involved violence: one of the parties is usually sober. This gives the incident some special qualities. One constant in the literature on alcohol and violence is that highly intoxicated people make easy victims in a violent incident (Room 1983). Furthermore, the intoxication tends to weaken the credibility of an injured party, shifting some of the blame to the victim in the eye of an observer (e.g. Aramburu & Leigh 1991). The left hook of Graham *et al.*'s curve may reflect patrons who are too drunk to be aggressive; such patrons may be magnets for rough handling by bouncers.

To understand the dynamics of interactions between bouncers and patrons, we need a better understanding of how the sober and the intoxicated 'handle' each other in the broader society. At a policy level, perhaps we need to re-examine hiring preferences and policies for door staff. I remember watching with admiration, some years ago in a bar on the square in Krakow, a diminutive female bartender subdue with sheer moral force a dozen large, intoxicated and truculent men. Those with experience in medical settings can surely tell similar stories of a female nurse's authority. Less testosterone in the door staff might be a good start on harm reduction in the pub and club environment.

ROBIN ROOM

Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs

Stockholm University

Sveaplán

106 91 Stockholm

Sweden

E-mail: robin.room@sorad.su.se

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