

# 6

## A COVERT CASE STUDY OF BOUNCERS IN THE MANCHESTER NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY



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This chapter focuses on a covert retrospective participant observation case study of bouncers in the night-time economy of Manchester in the United Kingdom. I will discuss my case study, comparing it to the work of other researchers who have explored this specific area, as well as others who might echo my research journey.

## **6.1 Manchester as a case study: my biographical and experiential backyard**

The location of Manchester, the UK, for the case study, which is where I live and work, is highly strategic. The city is saturated in popular culture, being named Gunchester, Gangchester and Madchester in the past, and has been well documented by a range of popular journalists and commentators (Haslam, 1999; Swanton, 1997, 1998; Walsh, 2005; Wilson, 2002). The development of club cultures in Manchester has been specifically linked to urban regeneration (Lovatt, 1996). Namely, Manchester was promoted as a chic, vibrant, hedonistic and cosmopolitan place to come to ‘party’. Doing the doors in Manchester, despite the sentimentality and sensationalism in some of these accounts, was a challenging research adventure, not least as I had been studying, working and clubbing in the city since 1984. As I walked to the venue on the first night of my covert research as a fake bouncer, I was nervously filled with both apprehension and anticipation. Would I be found out within hours? Should I just not turn up? Could I pull it off? Could I sustain the deception? Was this too extreme?

Six months later, at the end of the fieldwork, after covertly passing at various venues, I had been accepted by the bouncers of the famous *Hacienda* nightclub as being in ‘the firm’, which is when I chose to finish the study. The Hacienda became an icon for clubbers; it was the pinnacle of the pecking order for doors. It has been the focus of attention for various journalists, academics and filmmakers over the years and was the subject of the popular film *24 hour Party People* (2006). The acceptance of me by the Hacienda door team, the highest status nightclub in Manchester, was like a ‘covert nirvana’. I had convinced them that I was ‘one of them’, had secured job offers from them, been vetted by them by doing fairground security work for them and then finished the study.

Manchester had become somewhat of a mecca, and still is, for hedonistic night-life, and thus was a very rich case study to explore. Hutton sums up the situation: ‘The right ingredients appeared to have come together just at the right time’ (2006: 3). It is in this context that I was ‘badged up’, to use the local argot, by completing my Door Safe short course in December 1995, which was jointly run by Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Police. After this, I spent six months from January to June in 1996 doing a range of different doors

in Manchester city centre covertly. I did not need to arrange gate-keeping access, retrospective debriefing or follow-up interviewing in any part of the study. This was a purist type of covert research.

As well as working on ten different doors, pubs and clubs, in my brief door career, I also actively hung around several other doors, in bouncer mode, throughout the six-month period of my nomadic ethnography, although I was not working these doors. This was artful and, at times, nerve-wrecking in terms of my cover being blown. A sort of ‘hanging out and hanging about’, as Kath Woodward (2008) usefully did in her overt ethnography of boxing gyms.

I kept mental notes and wrote up my field notes as I went along, aided by a hidden micro tape recorder taped inside my jacket for recording relevant conversations. This technology greatly intensified my fear of being caught. After all, the discovery of this was clear and unequivocal evidence of doing undercover work. The ethnographic push was always to capture naturally occurring data as best I could in the setting.

This nomadic strategy of working on different doors served a dual purpose. First, it was part of my practical risk management, in terms of dispersing the risk of being found out – a classic ‘getting to know them without them getting to know me’ tactic. Second, it was a way of capturing comparative observational data about different doors and the ordering of their hierarchy. Therefore, I would engineer appropriate exits around wages and hours as I manoeuvred around. It was not uncommon for doormen to have floating roles with various doors, although most wanted a more permanent and settled place in the same venue for as long as possible.

I would also sometimes socialize with the bouncers I was working with by having a few drinks after our door shift had finished at other venues, typically with free entry. Again, it was an important source of data as well as being useful in terms of networking in my nomadic ethnographic role as I moved around the hierarchy of doors from pubs to clubs. I was partly trying to build a picture of the door community. Building on Foot-Whyte’s (1943) famous study, it was a sort of ‘door corner society’. Hence, I had a more distant knowledge of some of the door community and a more intimate relationship to others. It was a classic combination of both friend and stranger roles so elegantly summed up by Agar (1980) as ‘the professional stranger’.

Prior to the study, I had clubbed in various spaces, with bouncers being a continued source of my sociological curiosity and imagination. This area was part of my biographical and experiential backyard, as my late father Pat Calvey had been a doorman in a Docker’s club in Greenock, Scotland, in his youth. I was intrigued by his stories about this world on the odd occasion that he recounted them. Bouncers are demonized figures of folklore and the standard icons of

masculinity (Calvey, 2000). For me, these mythologized and vilified figures of fear and fascination clearly required de-mystification and critical investigation. The analysis of popular culture, for me, had rightly shifted from the margins to the centre (O'Connor and Wynne, 1996).

Similar to Winlow (2001), in his covert study of bouncers in the Northeast of England, I am also 'a product of the very culture I attempt to describe' (2001: 5). For Winlow, due to his working-class upbringing, accent, age, bodily image and various biographical socializing experiences, the field was part of his cultural inheritance and not something distant and exotic. Hence, access was comparatively simple and straightforward. Winlow's ethnographic study of bouncing formed part of a much wider study of changing masculinities, entrepreneurial criminality, violence and the regulation of the night-time economy. For Winlow, contemporary bouncers usefully represent the changing nature of masculinities in a postmodern era and provide an urban career for some males who can legitimately use their bodily capital in certain ways.

I received some limited financial support in the form of teaching relief from the Sociology Department at Manchester University, where I was a temporary lecturer at the time. It is important to make clear that I did not receive formal grant funding for the project, although I received ethical approval from the department, hence I was not policy bound. Thus, this small-scale project effectively became self-funding and sustainable. More importantly, I was free to use what I considered to be an innovative methodological strategy of pure covert research.

## **6.2 Covert passing in a demonized subculture: body capital and interaction rituals**

Doormen are simultaneously 'men of honour' when on your side and 'heavies' when not. They are a deeply demonized subculture (Calvey, 2000; Hobbs et al., 2000, 2005, 2007; Monaghan, 2003, 2004, 2006). Bouncers can make or break your night out as the club or pub effectively becomes the bouncer's monopoly. They have been elegantly described as 'tuxedo warriors', which refers to an older dress code, by Cliff Twemlow (1980), in an early gritty practitioner account of the tales of a Mancunian bouncer.

I mostly worked with male door staff as at the time, there were fewer females doing door work. The gender composition has changed currently, although not radically, as most door people are male, and there has been more related research on gendering the security gaze (O'Brien, 2009), the gendered door (Hobbs, O'Brien and Westmarland, 2007) and violence and gender (O'Brien et al., 2008).

The analytic push was to investigate the everyday world of bouncers in a faithful (Bittner, 1973) manner, using thick description (Geertz, 1973) that attempts to

avoid glosses of their routine practices, practical accomplishments and mundane reasoning (Pollner, 1987; Watson, 2009). It is an attempt to explore the competent membership of bouncing through the 'lived experience' (Geertz, 1973) of doing the doors.

In terms of body capital and image, I had trained in martial arts for several years and made contact with a local door agency by openly asking local doormen at several pubs and clubs for any work in Manchester city centre. I trained regularly and was clearly part of the 'monopoly of muscle' (Hobbs et al., 2003a: 234) that made the industry work. My fabricated bouncer habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990) was deliberate and wilful.

My covert role was deeply dramaturgical (Goffman, 1967) throughout and employed deliberate and sustained misrepresentations of self and a range of interaction rituals. Similar to Jacobs (1992), in his overt study of undercover narcotic agents, rehearsal, appearance manipulation, physical diversion and verbal diversion were all routinely used as tactics and moves.

A central part of the bouncer's management of the stigma and taint associated with the occupation such as violence and hyper-masculinity is the interactional mask they put on with others to practically do the job. Doing door work, for me, routinely used a series of physical and psychological deterrents. What I would characterize loosely as a form of choreographed bravado and machismo. The fear of violence, and not always the actuality of it, plays a part in this performance.

Part of my covert passing was the mimicry of their interaction rituals (Goffman, 1967), as I laughed along with racist and sexist jokes, physically horsed around on the door, made fun of some drunken customers and 'chatted up' female customers on a regular basis. I needed to fit in like any ordinary doorman doing the doors. Humour was also a distinctive way of developing bonds and dealing with the typical monotony and boredom in doing long shifts on the doors, particularly when it was quiet, much like the machine operators in Donald Roy's (1959) classic 'Banana Time' study of job satisfaction and informal interaction.

I did not find the door culture ideologically abhorrent, as say Fielding did on his study of the National Front (1981) or Schacht's survival tactics at his overwhelming feeling of self-estrangement in his study of the misogynist subculture of a male rugby club (1997), where he didn't partake in sexist songs or activities. However, I did have an ambivalent stance towards directly engaging in, as distinct from witnessing, violence on the door, which was part of their saturated occupational territory. I would do what was expected of me in supporting other doormen if there was a violent incident, but I was concerned about how far this would go, in the heat of the moment. I held a version of an active membership role where: 'researchers participate in the core activities in much the same way

as the members, yet they hold back from committing themselves to the goals and values of the members' (Adler and Adler, 1987: 35).

Such covert passing was similar to a sort that Forrest (1986), in her study of spiritual mediums, terms 'apprentice participation', as a way of 'becoming experientially and emotionally involved in the activities of the setting' (1986: 436) and 'absorbing the life view of the group' (1986: 442). Hence, I had 'gone native', not accidentally but deliberately. I began to see the world like a bouncer and act accordingly. I was acutely aware of my manufactured 'bouncer self'. Thus, I could not quite turn off what my partner called my 'bouncer head' when out socially during the fieldwork period. It was psychologically intense and I had a limited immersion life due to the risks of being discovered, the type of work it could be and ongoing guilt syndromes.

My ethnographic style was the 'art of purposeful hanging around'. When doing the role, I tried to stay at the physical periphery as much as possible and typically avoid confrontations with customers. This was a very fine balancing act, as I did not want to be perceived as being an untrustworthy colleague. What they called a 'bottler' who could not be relied on to pitch in to 'watch your back' (Thompson, 1994) if it 'kicked off'.

Credible passing was clearly essential in the setting. Put crudely, I had to sound like and look like a bouncer. Indeed, a *Times Higher Education* journalist, when interviewing me after my first publication, assumed I was a mature student who used to be a bouncer and based his postgraduate studies on it, which is not the case.

One of the methodological challenges in this type of covert fieldwork was managing the tension between instigation tactics and naturally occurring data throughout the fieldwork period. The latter is ideal, where the researcher captures ordinary and mundane cultural reality and the participants' routines as they naturally occur 'in flight' rather than reconstruct an exotic, ironic and caricatured picture of them. However, the reality of covert fieldwork can also involve several instigation tactics and moves. For example, I would regularly ask bouncers to repeat certain door stories, feigning a hearing problem, and I would always attempt to get more time during the night 'fronting the door' as I continually searched for 'where the action was' and could record talk without intrusive background music. I had to stay in character and did not have the luxury of formal interviewing to verify my understanding or to seek collaborative feedback, as overt researchers would typically do. I would take field notes after a night's shift as a reconstruction of my sense making and typical fieldwork aide-mémoire.

My autoethnography of bouncing, part of which was managing my 'secret self', was an actual lived field experience for me, with my fellow bouncers being

unwitting collaborators. My own self, biography and identity mediated my field experience in myriad and complex ways. My covert autoethnography presented here is deeply retrospective and experiential in character. In terms of autoethnographic authority (Buzard, 2003) and being there (Geertz, 1988), I feel that I have told an authentic tale of doing the doors, which is not romanticized, heroic or vanity-led.

### **6.3 The door order and door code: folklore, stories, trust, fictive kinship, masculinity, dirty work and private policing**

The burgeoning nature of the night-time economy and the leisure economies (Hobbs et al., 2003a) presents interesting issues around the regulation of violence in the liminal and commodified night-time economy (Hobbs et al., 2005). More generally, the night-time economy is an arena which has witnessed an increasing regulatory architecture (Hadfield et al., 2009) centred on various moral panics about new cultures of binge intoxication (Measham and Brain, 2005) and mob disorder as a spectacle (Hayward and Hobbs, 2007).

My research was prior to the establishment of the Security Industry Authority (SIA), the organization responsible for regulating the private security industry in the UK. The SIA reports to the Home Secretary and was established in 2003 under the terms of the Private Security Industry Act 2001. Doing the doors is now simply big business. Bouncers are generally seen to be less criminalized and more professional, but there are still links to past, with many bouncers trading on that criminal legacy. They are still a somewhat demonized occupational group, although they are now currently more diverse in terms of constitution (B. Sanders, 2005). Despite some attempts, they are not unionized, due to the temporary nature of the work, which makes them vulnerable and exploitable.

In terms of the structure of this type of work at the time, most of the door staff were employed by agencies providing private security in the sector. At the time of the study, it was firmly part of the informal and hidden economy, although this is changing. It was primarily work of a part-time, casual nature, done at the weekend, although more experienced door staff would get more nights. The payment was not standardized at the time and would vary according to the venue and experience of the door team. For example, when I was 'hanging around' the famous Hacienda nightclub, I witnessed wages being distributed to the door team by the late head doorman, who was from an infamous Manchester gangster family. The thickness of the wad of cash inside a set of sealed envelopes related to a status hierarchy amongst the doormen as well as the length of shifts performed. The Hacienda was known to pay very generously amongst the door community,

being the undisputed apex door in Manchester dance club land for a long time. The Hacienda is now a legendary part of club folklore.

As the night-time economy expanded and door work became more formalized, unionized and professionalized, such informal payments and practices have become a thing of the past. At the time of the study, recruitment was often by informal networking, where door staff would put forward credible friends and mates they could trust. In this way, doormen were pre-vetted. Formal recruitment processes were not part of this world.

I worked my way up the hierarchy of doors in my brief 'door career'. There was a working categorization and hierarchy of doors, from relatively 'easy' ones, such as student venues, to more 'heavy' ones, such as dance clubs, and the associated status and glamour that accompanied this. Thus, the doors worked, and hence door modes encountered, were diverse. Some generic features of door work can still be discerned but some aspects of door work were occasioned and hence related to the status of the specific 'door' you worked on.

The door hierarchy was commonly linked to several factors. First, the level and nature of any gang activity connected to the door and hence your depth of working knowledge of them and your relationship to them. Second, the level of 'recreational dance drug' use at the club and your local knowledge of the dealers. Third, the image and reputation of the venue, although this was often a fast-moving issue of fashion. Fourth, the nature of typical incidents encountered. Fifth, the geographic location of the door, with the city centre being more prestigious. Finally, who was working on the door team and their track record, that is, who was 'fronting' it. Thus, several status designations and distinctions were made between doors. Nightclubs had more status and prestige than pubs. Thus, it was rare for initial door work to be at a club rather than pub, which was the case with my fieldwork.

For me, door work is a collaborative and collective accomplishment, a sort of ecology of door labour wherein tasks and associated roles and responsibilities are co-ordinated in and through a team. As a door person you knew the door code and geared towards it in an implicit way (Wieder, 1974). Namely, membership of the community equates to some sort of understanding of the door trade and requires no lengthy explanations of it (Rubenstein, 1973).

The strength of the collective bonds and camaraderie on the door was very clear. Sticking together as a form of fictive kinship (Dodson and Zincavage, 2007; Woodward and Jenkins, 2011) was part of a coping mechanism when doing the doors. There was also internal rivalry, disputes and clashes between the door team, particularly over the job of head doorperson, which was a supervisory role and paid more. To ignore this would paint an overly romantic picture of door work.

Similar to Colosi (2010b) in her ethnography of lap dancers, the strength of camaraderie and the specific 'codes of conduct' among the dancers parallels ideas of the bouncer code and membership of the door community. Colosi argues that economic needs do not fully explain the dancer's motivation. For her, lap dancing is also emotionally driven and dancers, like bouncers, enjoy the excitement, adventure and thrill-seeking it brings. Many dancers return to it, and leaving it is, as Colosi states, 'reminiscent of the emotional reactions produced after the breakdown of a close personal relationship' (2010b: 143). Lap dancers, like bouncers, are also a stigmatized and demonized group. Colosi is motivated to challenge the myth that portrays lap dancers as 'victim or villain, lost in a dark, shameful and dangerous world' (2010b: 6).

'Having a laugh', to adopt a common work phrase, in doing door work was an essential component of galvanizing group identity as well as being a coping mechanism for such emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). As Colosi cogently states: 'Having fun takes priority in the lap-dancing club, fuelling motivation, helping build social relationships, improving dancer status, and also how it plays an important role in dancer resistance, helping to shape lap-dancing as a form of anti-work' (2010b: 182).

Bill Sanders similarly captures the routinized character of door work in dealing with boredom:

The majority of the time working as a bouncer was spent standing around 'doing nothing' except watching the punters. Boredom was certainly a prominent feature of being a club security guard. ... While these guardians of club land might be seen as glamorous by punters, the job was marked by its routine banality, sparingly interrupted by unpleasantness. (2005: 243)

Various types of risk and danger formed part of the routine occupational territory that I was embedded in. Doing this type of work came with certain expectations and obligations. In this sense, and without turning door work into exotica, the research process and setting had a type of ambient danger (Brewer, 1993; Lee, 1995; Sluka, 1990; Yancey and Rainwater, 1970). For example, if the police inquired about any incidents, loyalty to a bouncer code (Wieder, 1974) was assumed and it was expected that I would not 'grass' to them and disclose any incriminating information. We stuck together, in a classic 'them and us' relationship. Although, we represented the pub or club, the door was our territory, our remit of control, our ghetto.

Although violence was not commonplace, it was an accepted and thus ambient part of the environment. The fear of violence rather than the actuality of it could then mediate the typical behaviour of door staff, which was mainly concerned with

deterrent work and the persona or mask required to do such deterrent work. Most of the violence I witnessed during the fieldwork was between customers, with bouncers often adjudicating between disputes and dispersing and de-escalating potential violence. Hence, the focus on conflict between bouncers and customers, for me, can be exaggerated and misplaced.

The bouncer subculture was very strongly a code that was demonstrated and displayed routinely in a telling and showing manner (Wieder, 1974). There was no written rule book but a set of relevancies and schemas, practical and symbolic, that I had to gear into and enact quickly. To a certain extent the setting was self-explicating (Pollner, 1979), but I had to learn the occupational ropes and rules on the job.

The collectivity of the door team is primary and honorific articulated in the cardinal door principle of 'watch my back'. On my first night on the door, the head doorman said to me 'Whatever you do, don't bottle it and run'. Accordingly, the door team is biographically discerned in terms of personalities, characteristics and bodily types which are translated into the broad categories of 'talkers' and 'fighters'. The overwhelming logic of door work worked on deterrent and needed both former categories to operate. Accordingly, Hobbs et al. (2003a) refer to their 'gambit of skills', including talking nicely, looking the part and fighting. Similarly, Rigakos (2008) refers to a combination of verbal skills as 'talking down' and physical skills as 'taking down', when necessary.

The door staff are the first people customers meet in pub and club land and hence initially represent the ethos of the setting. More specifically, they mediate the composition of the club by enforcing and controlling a door policy based on appearance, gender, age and ethnicity. This is a secondary and less influential type of selection as such settings are partly self-selecting (Thornton, 1995). The composition and hence type of 'night' were known, designated and oriented to by the door staff according to various factors. These included the location in the week, alcohol promotion, music policy and the expected level of recreational drug use in the venue. The night could clearly still hold surprises, but for most of the time it was utterly routine.

Door work was thus profoundly about trust (Watson, 2009). The mundane tasks and troubles (Zimmerman, 1969) in doing door work were embedded in such trust relationships. Despite individual diversity, a decisive working unity of purpose must underlie the door team. The implicit and cardinal rule was to 'stick together' and 'watch my back', to use the argot, in such high-risk work. Simultaneously, so as not to view this over romantically, the door team was fragmented by friendships bonds, past working relationships and, often, competition for the head doorman position, which had authority and status. To run or bottle it, or not get involved,

could involve the natural justice of the door team by giving the individual(s) concerned retributive punishment, namely, a 'good kicking'. I had not witnessed this but had been told by several doormen that it did occasionally occur.

While patrolling inside the premises you are routinely sensitized to both group interactions and spatial arrangements (exit doors, empty bottles, large groups of young men and women) via vantage points as well as general patrols. The idea is simultaneously to be seen and have a clear presence but not to continually intrude or intimidate. In that sense, the work is pro-active and reactive to situations wherein you learn, by experience, both when and how to enter a dispute.

Much of this work is vitally about, when necessary, controlling your own fear and adrenaline, particularly in confrontational situations. Therein, peripheral vision becomes an occupational prerequisite. Bouncers are thus involved in a particular type of surveillance, which requires both visibility and invisibility. You learn when to be seen and when not to be seen. Remembering that the optic of the nightclub is an interesting one, where people are watching each other for different purposes. Bouncers are clearly the few watching the many as well as the many watching them. What Rigakos (2008), in his three-year research on bouncers in four Canadian cities, elegantly calls a 'synoptic frenzy' and 'optic violence'. For Rigakos, bouncers are the vigilant and sometimes repressive 'central policing agents' (2008: 8) in the nightclub space. Many of the doormen here are either former or aspiring policeman, which is quite the opposite from the moral distancing from the police typically found in the United Kingdom.

The door code is oriented to in a taken-for-granted manner by competent members in that setting. Namely, the legitimation of the exercise of authority on the door by bouncers. The bouncer's sense of self is intimately tied up with such authority. Door work also has status, a type of street kudos; it is a way of giving privileges to certain customers, although this is changing as doors becomes more deskilled and doormen lose their autonomy and status.

A sedimented and tacit corpus of routine and mundane methods, procedures, rules and competencies are built up as part of the everyday work of bouncers. In many senses, it was a specific stock of knowledge (Schutz, 1973) that was gained in the doing of the work. Door work was deeply proactive rather than reactive in the sense that potential trouble is minimized by managing the door. Hence, the preferred solution was that trouble was sorted out at the door and not inside the venue. Generally, more status was gained and importance attached to the front-stage rather than back-stage work. Fronting the door was the priority. If confrontation was to happen, it was more likely to be at the door rather than inside, although both could happen. The logic ran 'run the door and run the club or pub'.

The entrance game and dealing with the barred becomes part of the everyday occupational toolkit of the door staff. This typically involves identifying customer

groups or types as troublesome or not and the consequent strategies one adopts on the door. The door team becomes very competent at reading people and situations so that incidents do not escalate too quickly. What I refer to as 'reading the queue', particularly when there are drunken customers or large gangs of males or females on stag or hen nights. The greeter on the door, if used, can play a supportive vetting role in this process. However, the door team could and would over-rule the greeter if they snubbed a known gang member, other door staff or a personal friend.

The queuing order exhibits various status designations and privileges as to who queues, pays and gets searched. Namely, 'who counts' in the door world. The door space, in effect, becomes the distinct ghetto of the door team and not management in a classic 'them and us' relationship. Thus, greater loyalty was shown to the door team and not to the management of the venue. In such work, memory and recall for faces and incidents develops fast as you identify troublemakers from the past. If you were new to the particular door, you would typically mainly work inside the venue and only temporarily front the door, mentored by a door person with more experience.

The entrance game could be artful, with the door staff using persuasion, tact, diplomacy and negotiation skills. This could involve a range of scripted refusals or 'knock backs'. Commonly, the customer appeals to other door staff to over-rule the previous decision, which is rarely done as a united front is vital. The door staff can use distancing strategies by shifting blame onto management as being responsible for a specific door policy. In a more technical sense, the authority of the door staff is legitimated by their employment by the licensee to keep order by 'reasonable force' if necessary. This involves boundary work as to what can be legally and morally sanctioned in the control of aggressive clientele by means of self-defence and/or protection of person and property. In interactional terms, it is based on the local, ongoing achievement of the situated door order.

The management of what the doormen often termed 'respect' is integral to the maintenance of a situated door order. What this amounts to is a type of pseudo honour borne out of a combination of fear and admiration, but it is a resource that is traded on in practically doing the doors. The interactional management of respect is a type of lay knowledge involving strategies and tactics of avoidance, humiliation, submission, reputation, deference, confrontation and structured escalation.

Door work, then, was a type of discretionary satisficing between what they formally can do and informally what they have to do. It is also a game of damage limitation in that the cardinal rule was getting the conflict outside the premises as swiftly and safely as possible. It then becomes the responsibility of the police as regards public disorder. The door order is classically a negotiated one (Strauss et al., 1963) between doormen, customers and management. It is one that is

displayed symbolically for relevant co-present audiences, be it other door staff, gang members, management or customers. Part of door work, then, involves reading and giving off signs that are self-explicating in that setting. You have to know when and how to both back down and stay your ground on the door when dealing with people. Staying calm, managing physical distance, eye contact and controlling the conversation are all part of the common-sense resources employed in that work. In this sense, it is integrally a matter of performance (Goffman, 1967).

Hobbs et al. (2002) list local knowledge, verbal skills, bodily capital and fighting ability as part of the 'door trade'. For them, the working practices and occupational culture of door staff constitute a 'door lore' that centres on 'the art and economics of intimidation' (Hobbs et al., 2002: 352). What Hobbs et al. describe as 'their own informal and pragmatic techniques of containment' (2002: 352).

Despite being a fragmented and rather nomadic occupation (B. Sanders, 2005), there was a strong sense of community among bouncers, displayed in part by interaction rituals including dress code, socializing habits, and argot and gestures, including appropriate hand-shakes. Such a community, although not formally or collectively unionized, was deeply 'symbolically constituted' (Delanty, 2003). What Fincham (2008), in his study of the blurring between work and leisure of bicycle messengers, usefully refers to as 'subcultural affiliation'. He argues that the strict binary divide between work and leisure cannot be easily applied to some occupations, with bouncers being clearly one of them.

It is commonly acknowledged that bouncers are doing a type of private policing and are the primary agents of social control in the night-time economy (Hadfield, 2002; Hobbs et al., 2000, 2002, 2003a; Lister, 2002; Lister et al., 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Winlow, 2001; Winlow et al., 2001). What Rigakos (2002) would refer to as a 'new para police'. Although bouncers are clear gate-keepers and regulators in the night-time economy spaces (Monaghan, 2006), they typically trade on an autonomous distinction and distance from the police and, for some, a pronounced cynical distrust of them.

Drawing on the famous work of the Chicago school sociologist E. C. Hughes, bouncing was centrally about the 'dirty work' of the night-time economy (Hughes, 1951, 1962, 1971). Dealing with intoxicated customers and all that that brings were routinely part of such work. E. C. Hughes wrote of the need to study: 'arrangements and devices by which men make their work tolerable, or even glorious to themselves and others' (1971: 342). Part of this was, for me, about the authority of the door staff in both admitting and refusing entry to the venue.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) suggest that 'dirty workers' use a variety of taint techniques to protect their identities from the threats posed by the stigma of their work, in particular, arguing that work-group cultures function as effective buffers,

providing ideologies which enable group members to make sense of their work in esteem-enhancing ways. This was very evident with bouncers. Hansen Lofstrand et al. (2016), in their comparative ethnographic study of private security officers in Sweden and the UK, explore how the workers manage and repair self-esteem and manage 'dirty work' designations in a very stigmatized industry around their sense of self-worth and occupational purpose.

Part of the private policing, and for some dirty work, was also dealing with the drug economies in the night-time economy as a rather saturated and expected part of door work, certainly in city centre nightclubs and some pubs, although not all venues. Viewing the bouncers as the dealers is far too crude and erroneous, but the question of collusion is a complex and important one. Part of the door code was also orienting to what some door staff called 'the score on the door', if working in a high-profile nightclub in the city. A significant feature of this was the extent of any gang affiliation to a particular door. This was not all the door team, but usually some particular members of the door staff. Senior gang figures, or what they call 'heads', become icons and mythical figures in bouncing folklore. You heard more about them than you actually saw of them in doing routine door work. Related to this was orienting to drug dealing in an appropriate way. That is, recognizing and not stopping designated dealers endorsed by a certain gang affiliation, including bluffs by various customers who claimed to be 'connected'.

Ultimately, the drug economy and drug culture at the large London nightclub Sanders investigated was 'self-contained, self-policed and self-sufficient' (B. Sanders, 2005: 253), with a relatively small number of bouncers involved and not all. Similarly, my experience was that drug dealing in some venues that I worked in was tolerated when discreetly operated, and only became significant if violent incidents escalated because of it. People were searched on entry to some high-profile nightclubs, but this was often a basic search and certainly not one of police standard. Generally, most of the clubs were seen to operate a 'no drugs policy' but not in any strict way. A very strict policy would have been swimming against the recreational tide of the times.

There is a practitioner literature from working bouncers, including their emotional and gritty 'warts and all' memoirs, guides and manuals about door work (Barratt, 2004; Carson, 2005; Currie and Davies, 2003; Emburgh, 2010; Gadsden, 2006; Hammer, 2014; Holiday, 2011; Knapp, 2007; Lee, 2013; Marlow 2011; O'Keefe, 1997; Quinn, 1990; Stylianou, 2012; Thompson, 1994, 1999, 2001/2009; Trifari, 2008; Twemlow, 1980; Watts, 2005). Despite obvious problems with sensationalism and sentimentality, this is a rich source of insider lay accounts of doing door work and the biographical and experiential realities of being a bouncer.

This diverse range of door stories from current or former bouncers is a useful source of alternative data on door work. This literature is not fully engaged

by the various researchers on door work, yet it is a practical literature that is consumed by bouncers for different reasons. There is a close and clear parallel here to football hooligan memoirs and self-confessionals. Redhead argues that such accounts can be partial and distorted but can and should act as a useful supplement and 'rough popular memory' (2009: 29) and certainly not be ignored or glossed over. Pearson, in his review of this genre, sensibly states: 'the "hit and tell" memoirs reveal a world of identity, local pride, camaraderie and humour' (2011: 14).

Door narratives, or the telling of bouncers' stories, are therefore an important and rich constitutive part of the subculture of door work and the identity of the bouncer self. Much of the time spent on the door was dedicated to both telling and listening to war stories, which were often highly humorous. It is a normalized part of the setting. In this sense, narratives are 'intrinsically collective acts' (Maines, 1993: 32). As Gergen and Gergen acutely observe: 'we live by stories – both in the telling and the doing of self' (1988: 18). 'War stories' also function as 'morality plays' (Toch, 1993), wherein the demanding emotional work of bouncing is valued by its participants. The question here is not about the detailed factual accuracy of the story but what it demonstrates about their world.

Heroic accounts in door stories, often told humorously, would typically glamorize the bouncer's involvement with gang members and exaggerate their valiant role in violent encounters. Door stories were a shifting mixture of reality, rumour, gossip and fabrications. What Monaghan (2002d) usefully described as 'in-group banter', which could be highly sexualized. I did not want to alert any suspicion by being too timid to tell or share 'door stories' and jokes, so I would laugh along initially and then tell my own later down the line. I often had to fabricate that I knew characters from the door world in the early days so as to fit in.

Bouncing credibility is often embellished with war stories, particularly where they have interacted with gang leaders or 'heads' – a sort of heroic 'lived to tell the tale' logic. Clearly, they are linked with typical views of bouncers as displaying forms of hyper-masculinity. War stories, as in other occupations, are part and parcel of the work they explicate rather than being separate from it. They constitute the classic 'shop talk' of the occupation, and humour played a large part in recounting incidents. Much of this talk, importantly, values the occupational worth of being a door person. Door stories serve various functions then, including explicating a door career, being instructive about the actual work and developing occupational camaraderie. In such stories, being a competent member of the door team requires that you speak the language or argot. It is not to suggest that this was a private language of the door staff, but it was an entitlement display, along with other aspects, of competent membership as a bouncer.

## 6.4 Managing situated 'ethical moments' on the door

The question of ethical parameters and limits plagued my mind throughout the fieldwork in a convoluted series of 'what if scenarios'. What if I witnessed serious injury or a serious crime, what would I do? What if restraint blurred into assault with a customer? What is reasonable force, if I came under attack with adrenaline flowing? Throughout the fieldwork, I was concerned with the tension between what I was occupationally expected to do as a bouncer, being paid for that duty, and my personal ethical and moral perception of harm and violence. I am convinced that I would have fully informed the police and hence blown my cover if there had been a serious incident, but fortunately this did not happen. In the latter parts of the fieldwork, as I had developed rapport with my fellow doormen, my 'what if scenarios' centred on What if I was found out?

I tried to abstain from making any value judgements throughout my analysis and my participation in the setting became part of my ongoing and varied 'guilty knowledge' (Adler, 1985; Becker, 1963; Carey, 1972; Polsky, 1967). The main problem around my duality was the problem of participation in any deviant activities. I attempted to be a 'credible witness' (Atkinson, 1990) and a 'marginal native' (Armstrong, 1998) in my embedded ethnography, but I was obligated to do what was normal, accepted and expected in most situations.

I was 'native among the natives' (Zaman, 2008). Effectively, I was conducting a sort of 'fingers crossed ethnography' where I was concerned about my luck abruptly running out. In particular, I had a broad moral compass on the amount of controlled restraint I would use, if it was necessary. However, if violent situations emerged, I could not easily adopt a proxy role. My fellow bouncers had expectations of my conduct, and when adrenaline flows, such bracketing becomes blurred and difficult to maintain. This was a continual source of anxiety throughout the fieldwork.

Kate O'Brien (2009), in her semi-covert role as a female bouncer, reflects cogently on the ethical dilemmas of being a feminist researcher and squaring this with dealing with complex issues regarding the protection of vulnerable young women, in her fieldwork period. Role differentiation becomes quite blurred and challenging in practice. This is what O'Brien (2009) refers to as 'gendering the security gaze', which is a neglected and under-researched topic as most accounts trade on ideas of forms of hyper-masculinity. More inside accounts from feminist researchers is certainly called for in this area.

The brief vignettes that follow involve situational decisions and scenarios which display 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) for me. This is not to paint a romantic or heroic picture of the research, but rather a realistic one, warts and all. This is a world where you are presented with various

ethical dilemmas that are worked out and managed, not solved, in the setting (Calvey, 2008). Ethical dilemmas, then, become a series of situated 'doings' and not only theoretical and idealized concepts.

### Being recognized and managing denial

When a former student recognized me on the door, I had to assertively deny all knowledge of her. Because of her sustained insistence on knowing me, she was then refused entry to the premises and left with some friends feeling very bewildered. I felt guilty about this, but there seemed to be no other option at the time, particularly as it was very early on in the study.

### Witnessing violence

I had witnessed a gang leader smash a bottle on a young customer's head. I had stopped him doing further damage by restraining him. I was on my own at this busy city-centre pub and managed to verbally calm them down without being attacked. After threatening me, they left the pub and violently wreaked havoc across the road at our sister venue, hospitalized a doorman, and randomly assaulted several customers. The riot police were eventually called to the premises and the gang, later identified as 'the Salford', fled, without any arrests being made. I had established my credibility in 'standing up to them' and 'showing my balls', but I severely doubted carrying on with the ethnography.

I became a witness to violence on several occasions. I did not intervene when a door was breached by a local gang from Cheetham Hill and a doorman was assaulted inside the club in front of me. I was warned it was personal and accordingly stood back. Another incident was when I witnessed a doorman physically assault a customer, followed by a group of doormen assaulting the same doorman by throwing him into a canal from a significant height. I helped fish the doorman out of the canal and told the police, who had been called by customers, that I had 'seen nothing'. This was at the request of the doorman, who did not want to be seen as 'a grass' and did not press any charges, despite several customer witness statements to the contrary and his self-evident broken nose. Thankfully, the doorman suffered superficial damage and no police action followed. These are clear complex moral compass issues where my personal version of morals can be at odds with what I am witnessing. In this way, covert participation is not endorsement of a value or belied system that is being researched.

### Forcing entry to another door

When socializing with a group of doormen after a shift, and after excessive drinking and free entry into different nightclubs in the city centre, we tried to force

entry into an expensive, ticketed dance event at the Manchester Evening News Arena late in the evening. I was caught up in the concerted push on the door and was in the crossfire of aggressive arguments between door staff and Arena staff. The police attended and issued a final warning that we would all be arrested and put in the ‘fucking van’. We then wandered off laughing and shouting insults at both the police and venue staff.

### Police surveillance and stab vests

One night, we were locked in the cellar of a nightclub after two young men approached the door after it had just closed, supposedly carrying guns. After watching CCTV footage it turned out they were carrying umbrellas because of the rainy weather. The nightclub had been the object of take-over bids by rival gangs having turf wars over selling recreational drugs in the venue. It was under police surveillance, hence we wore stab vests. Panic erupted, the staff were locked in the cellar and the police were called. Being under brief police surveillance whilst I had the bouncers under my surveillance was ironic. I nervously walked home and again doubted whether I should be doing this fieldwork.

### Mistaken identity

I suffered from mistaken identity when, on entering a nightclub off duty for research purposes, I was stopped at the door by a well-known and very intimidating doorman from an infamous Manchester criminal family, who was eventually murdered. My heart stopped as I thought he had discovered my true research purposes and was going to get some retribution for this deception. But I was mistaken for somebody else and let in. Paranoia had got the better of me. I didn’t spend long in the venue that evening and could not fully concentrate on observational matters.

### Faking gang knowledge

On several occasions, customers would demand free entry and claim to be ‘connected’ to notorious gangs or leading criminal figures. If refused, threats were commonplace. Working out the real and bogus claims comes with the territory and was a stressful part of the job, particularly in the early days when I had little such local knowledge and regularly faked that I had much more. When I fronted the dance nightclub that was under police scrutiny due to gang problems, I falsely assured the head doorman that I could recognize all the ‘heads’ or local gang leaders on an important re-opening night at a club. The fact that the police gave us staff jackets to wear and were involved in undercover surveillance work themselves at the club that night made me

very nervous. A local gang member threatened the door team later that night, causing the head doorman to resign on the spot and not return to that door. I followed his lead and, after the night's shift had ended, did not return either, much to my relief.

### Turning the tape recorder off syndrome

A very different ethical moment is what I call 'turning the tape recorder off syndrome'. This occurred when a young doorman opened up to me about his longer term future, what you might call the brutalization of this type of work and the potential effects on his new-born son. I was drinking alone with him, at his invitation, and when I got the next round in, I quickly went to the toilet and turned the tape off. For me, this was a way of managing what I perceived as a type of ethical dilemma. I perceived continuing to tape record our conversation where he confided in me intimately about this 'shit work as a bouncer' as an invasion of his personal privacy and went beyond the remit of the study. Others might feel this is utterly hypocritical and a contradictory abandonment of realism.

This incident clearly points to the emotionally demanding nature of covert work. What I have loosely characterized as being part of a covert condition. Ethical decision-making then becomes a situated matter of judgement and not a prescriptive research manual right or wrong. Obviously, I continued to take mental notes and reflect on the situation, rather than decide not to publish the material in any way. Hence, there is contradiction and blurring here with situated ethical-decision making which is fascinating to further expose, dissect and unpack. There were other instances of this syndrome throughout the fieldwork that I had to manage. It is a type of situational ethical decision-making when a range of personal and private information was revealed to me about doormen and their lives outside their occupation, which is inevitable.

### Dealing with the dealers

Whilst working on a busy nightclub in Manchester city centre at the weekend, I was informed by an experienced doorman to let two young rather trendy looking females into the venue without queuing or being searched. What he described as 'no questions asked' policy. On quizzing him further, he said that they worked for a well-known criminal drug dealer in the area and they were 'his girls'. Clearly the consequences of stopping them in their work was not on the agenda as they were very protected. Apparently, we were one club amongst several that they visited regularly. He joked about the girls going under the police radar for years. This was a type of guilty and potentially incriminating knowledge that I had to repress and go along with in the setting for obvious reasons.

This is not a definitive or exhaustive taxonomy of my experiences but a diverse range of fieldwork scenarios. There are no methodological strictly right or wrong answers here, but rather it is a demonstration of my covert condition. Tunnell reflects on the liberation of confessing and ‘coming clean’ in his research on property offenders and violent criminals: ‘The methodologies of “muddy boots” and “grubby hands” implicitly mean taking sides, recognizing the politics of one’s research, engaging in impression management and hedging the truth’ (1998: 208).

I have attempted here to ‘resurrect the ethical off-cuts’ that are often sanitized out of published accounts and left on the ‘cutting-room floor’ (Smart, 2010). It has been a temporary immersion into the everyday life-world of some bouncers. What I hope to have presented is some dynamic ‘ethically important moments’ (Guilleman and Gillam, 2004) rather than a simplistic treatise on ethics or a step-by-step guide on ethical decision-making. It has been a reflexive exploration of a set of scenarios, from which to exercise your own moral and ethical imagination.

## 6.5 An optic on violence

In my case, by doing this covert type of fieldwork I clearly opened myself up to the problem of being a witness to activities that I might not personally agree with and might want to morally distance myself from. My logic was generally not to intervene, which would alter the course of what was naturally occurring. Moreover, essentially, I am not making moral judgements on the setting or the actions of the participants. In this sense, it was important for me to try to suspend my feelings, although sustaining this was difficult and challenging. I want to resist painting an exotic picture of doorman, which builds on their demonization. Part of this is getting a proportionate picture of violence in their world and not crudely falling into the trap of building an overly violent depiction of it. Dealing with violence or, in some cases, the fear of violence, was part of the occupational territory but not to the extent that it was ‘all day, everyday’. Much of the conflict and potential episodes of violence were between intoxicated customers, with the bouncers typically defusing the situation, rather than violence between bouncers and customers, although this was also part of the game. To use visceral terms, I witnessed more vomit than blood during my six-month fieldwork period.

Monaghan (2003, 2004, 2006) in his study of bouncers also reflects on the ‘personal turmoil’ and sources of ‘personal anxiety’ in his ethnography, including his accounting of the use of force to the police. Indeed, for Monaghan, the territory of door work is saturated in legal risks, which doormen on the whole manage to skilfully navigate in ambiguous and difficult contexts.

Researchers can and do decide to conceal data, as not everything is revealed. Thus, research gets sanitized. This is particularly compounded by a covert role in terms of what is witnessed and revealed. Some incidents in my bouncer study I have deliberately decided to exclude from my account due to certain sensitivities.

When there were critical incidents of violence, not saturated, or more realistically episodes of anticipating violence, when doing the doors, it was very difficult to manage adrenaline in such situations. Effectively, the fear of violence was often the driver rather than the actuality of it. Gary Armstrong (1998), in his study of the Sheffield United football supporters, although his research was overt, was not as fortunate and on two occasions he was involved in minor physical confrontations. Ayres and Treadwell comment, on their overt ethnographic study of alcohol, cocaine use and violence in the night-time economy among English football firms, that many incidents are effectively normalized in the setting and hence are 'frequently unreported to the police' (2011: 88).

My investigative logic, not the situation, here is partly reminiscent of Steven Taylor's problems of observing abuse in a mental health institution. Part of his gate-keeping arrangements for gaining access for his participant observation study was that he had 'promised to maintain confidentiality and refrain from interfering in institutional activities' (Taylor, 1987: 289). Do the means justify the ends? It certainly does if routine abuse is uncovered and then investigated.

Taylor spent most of his time on a ward for what he termed the 'mentally retarded', where he witnessed the routine control of the vulnerable patients by abusive tactics by the guards. This practically translated into standing by as a witness while some patients were physically and emotionally abused. It presented an uncomfortable ethical dilemma for him throughout his fieldwork as these were, for him, 'immoral acts observed in the field' (Taylor, 1987: 380). These immoral acts included slapping patients, making them perform sexual acts and, with one, making a patient eat burning cigarettes. Taylor argues that abstract moral codes are difficult to apply in the field, particularly where the moral parameters are utterly alien to you. On his personal trauma, he states 'people who cannot deal with moral ambiguity probably should not do fieldwork' (Taylor, 1987: 294). For Taylor, researching abuse was ultimately more useful than direct intervention in a setting.

Bill Sanders (2005), in his study of bouncing culture in a large London nightclub, builds a proportionate and sensible picture of violence and door work, which I would endorse. Sanders accurately claims: 'However, given the thousands of punters who attended each weekend, violent incidents in the club involving bouncers were relatively infrequent. Furthermore, in the main, punters on the receiving end of bouncers' violence were not "innocent"' (2005: 252).

Silverstone, who investigated the rave culture in a London nightclub by working initially as a member of the bar staff and then as part of the security team,

sensibly states on this: ‘In terms of policing these spaces, violence was a rarity, as a working drug market did not want the police attention that might come with routine violence’ (2006: 148). Silverstone is keen to distinguish between different types of night-time economies – pub space and urban spaces – which have different types of policing and incidences of violence in them. He refers to doormen as being ‘part of the genealogy of working class muscle’ (2006: 148) and accurately stresses that ‘for the British government, bouncers have been the folk devil of choice’ (2006: 149).

Violence and masculinity, particularly machismo and hyper forms of bravado on the door, provide both the cause and condition of the bouncer self. What I loosely describe as a ‘choreography of bravado’ that plays out in the doing of door work. Ultimately, some of the participants live up to the traditional label, while others resist it, which can serve to trap some of them in self-defeating cycles. Thus, everyday clichés and stereotypes residually group and classify what ‘everybody knows about them’ and in turn demonizes, vilifies and maligns them. Thus, the topic has a sort of intriguing ‘armchair value’. If these men are typically ‘the lads’ of the counter-school culture (Willis, 1977), then they have grown up and are now doing doors.

The majority of the door teams were masculine. I worked with only one female door member, who, as pointed out by Hobbs et al. (2007) and O’Brien et al. (2008) in their two-year ethnographic study of female door work, seemed to perform a more gender specialist role in defusing aggressive females, as well as some gender transgression and mimicry, which ultimately results in ‘reinforcing gendered codes that underpin violence work’ (O’Brien et al., 2008: 170).

We must continually question and challenge the typical stereotypes about bouncers, which tend to crudely lump them together homogeneously as ultimately all about hyper-masculinity, which is a dangerous and crude generalization to make. Understanding the versions of masculinity that bouncers perform in complex ways is tied up with their ideas of credible bodily self-images and their enacted types of physicality and violence (Monaghan and Atkinson, 2014).

My witnessing of violence, and more generally being a participant observer in this context, has some parallels to Westmarland’s innovative overt study of gender and policing. She usefully describes her feelings of angst about whistleblowing as ‘encounters with ambiguity’ (2001: 531), particularly on the blurring between violence, excessive and reasonable force. She did not view herself as any sort of ‘ethnographic referee’ as she tried to understand the ‘world view’ of a particular occupational group. She does acknowledge that her ‘thoughts were not of how to stop the violence or to report it, but to concentrate on watching it develop in order to record the reactions of those involved’ (2001: 532). Similar to my own research, she ‘raises a number of difficult ethical scenarios which do not have

a coherent or uniform solution for ethnographers' (2001: 533), which become discretionary and situated personal judgements.

## **6.6 Emotionality, embodiment and risk-taking in ethnography**

This ethnography was of a sensual and embodied kind. It was the voluntary and deliberate experience of risk-taking and edgework (Lyng, 1990, 2005). At times, I felt I was at the limits of my deception and doubted how long I could sustain this role. Within edgework, risk becomes intimately part of the phenomenological experience. For me, this was 'the buzz' of doing doors, which was an intoxicating mixture of pleasure, thrill and adrenaline alongside stress, fear, anxiety and apprehension.

Lee Monaghan (2003, 2004, 2006) conducted an 'embodied ethnography' in his study of the occupational subculture of nightclub and pub security staff or doormen in Southwest Britain from 1997 to 2001. Monaghan describes his role as adopting 'an active membership role' (2004: 455) as a doorman in seven city-centre licensed premises over fourteen months. Part of his contact was also socializing with them in both nightclubs after work, as I did. Monaghan had contact with around sixty doormen, some of whom he interviewed in the latter stages of his fieldwork.

An interesting point is that Monaghan's methodological approach was not covert but his normalization in the setting was vital. For Monaghan, his fieldwork role was intimately linked to his bodily capital and bodily co-presence, which in his case was a history of boxing and weight-lifting. Although the customers would not have known about his study, Monaghan is clear about his overt stance to his door colleagues: 'I divulged information about my academic interests and affiliation to most door staff with whom I regularly worked' (2004: 455–456).

For Monaghan, in doing such fieldwork, 'the multidimensional body becomes a topic of, and resource in, ethnographic fieldwork' (2006: 238). For Monaghan, such risky fieldwork is clearly embodied and emotional edgework. As he reflects: 'using my body to research "other bodies" in a risk environment was sociologically valuable but also personally troublesome' (2006: 226).

My research also has some parallels with Diphooorn (2013), in her overt ethnography of private policing in Durban, South Africa. For her the 'emotionality of participation' is imperative for the analysis of the research setting, which involved the management of violence with armed response units. For her, participation in such a research setting is not a fixed state but involves active, reluctant and passive modes. For Diphooorn, one needs to 'further understand the dialectic between emotion and method' (2013: 222).

I genuinely felt that I had gained an understanding of being a bouncer as a ‘lived experience’ by covert means that I could not have achieved overtly. In the latter stages, I strongly wanted to reveal my true identity to the door community I worked with but due to a combination of guilt and risk management I left by not turning up for my shift, binning my mobile phone and avoiding the venues where I had worked. This sort of ‘disappearing act’ was my fieldwork exit strategy, but I felt that I had empathetically got ‘under their skin’ and ‘walked in their shoes’ for a brief time. I felt that I had earned some entitlement to talk about the bouncer’s world in an authentic way, which was not a belligerent hit-and-run proxy version of it.

My fieldwork was partly a type of embodied activity, in a disguised format, which was performatively intense. As Coffey puts it: ‘Fieldwork is necessarily an embodied activity. Our body and the bodies of others are central to the practical accomplishment of fieldwork’ (1999: 59). My covert presentation involved an engineering of my physical self, similar to Daniels (1983), as she deliberately lost weight and cultivated certain aspects of femininity in her investigation of military psychiatry. Part of what Daniels (1980) elegantly titled her book chapter as ‘Getting In and Getting On: The Sociology of Infiltration and Ingratiation’.

I am partly inspired by Wacquant’s famous study of boxing (1992, 1995, 2000, 2005), particularly his seminal book *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2000), which shifted from covert to overt over his three-year fieldwork period. His embodied approach has clear parallels to bouncing, with his passionate drive to inhabit their craft and habitus. Body image and bodily capital are the keys to a more intimate and nuanced understanding of bouncer work as a craft to a certain extent.

For Wacquant, boxing, which is widely demonized and vilified, is a visceral pursuit and in order to understand it, put basically, the researcher had to try the ‘sensuous pizzazz’ (Wacquant, 2005: 464) for themselves. The central argument of his book is about entering the boxers’ bodies as they collectively learn their trade in order to understand meaning-making. For Wacquant, his apprentice membership was an ‘invaluable methodological springboard’ (2005: 462). Like Wacquant, I similarly felt that I had entered a distinctive subculture and habitus, with its own rules, rituals and social logic, in which I could only stay for a temporary period. What I previously describe as a form of ‘sub-aqua ethnography’ (Calvey, 2000).

As Palmer similarly reflected on the risk and dilemmas of her overt fieldwork on alcohol-based sporting subcultures: ‘the nature of my fieldwork required a particular kind of image management. ... This meant letting dangerous behaviour such as heavy drinking, physical horseplay and banter unfold unbridled by researcher intervention’ (2010: 435).

The covert research role I deliberately chose clearly was a type of high-risk methodology (Wolf, 1991). Jacob-Pandian states that the ethnographer: ‘does not

become a native but is forever in the process of becoming a native' (1975: 170). I was deliberately attempting to become a type of intimate insider but on a faked basis. Ironically, genuine friendships did also develop from this faked position. Doing covert work is thus not devoid of ethicality but displays different, subtle forms of it in a situated manner (Calvey, 2008).

Similar to Pearson (2009), in his covert study of football hooliganism, I was walking a legal tightrope in doing such a study. My participant observation, like his, meant breaking the law in certain situations, not in a cavalier, belligerent or romantic sense, but in a situational one. Hence, my ethnography at the edge, which involved certain aspects of illegality and criminality, was a 'lived intensity' (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998) and 'experiential immersion' (Ferrell, 1998).

## **6.7 Conclusions: the post-fieldwork self in a study that never quite finishes**

The idea of the post-field self was a significant one for me. The nature of the covert fieldwork was psychologically intense and emotionally demanding. What I previously referred to as a form of nomadic 'sub-aqua ethnography' (Calvey, 2000). Despite my previous wording of a book chapter entitled 'Getting on the Door and Staying There' (2000), I also faced similar exit problems to Ditton (1977), in his study of fiddling and pilferage in a bakery. Hence, Ditton states: 'In fact (and this, I suggest, is perhaps the mark of the truly accepted observer) I had far greater problems in getting out' (1977: 5). Managing my exit process became more delicate and complicated than I anticipated. I had finished the study when a senior doorman at the Hacienda nightclub confirmed that I was 'in the firm', and I did not want that association to negatively follow me around in my private life. Being in their 'firm' might have consequences, which I wanted to avoid at all costs. It was time to leave the field.

Ward (2008), in her experiential study of drug sellers in London, experienced problems of distancing with her study and felt a sense of betrayal of the friendships she had used to do her study. I can fully empathize with her ambivalent position. I had 'surrendered' (Wolff, 1964) to the setting culturally and psychologically, accepting certain rules, mores and activities, which had to be emotionally managed, both during and after the fieldwork period.

So on several occasions after I had left the field, when I was recognized by various bouncers, I felt that I had to sustain my door identity and, what I loosely call, 'go back into character', making fabricated jokes about early retirement, low wages and personality clashes with pushy managers. Most of the door staff assumed I was still working on the doors and had just moved around a few of

them. On some occasions, I would purposively let them think this if it was more expedient in the situation. Sometimes, this resulted in free entry to the club and not queuing, as I did not want to offend them. While inside the club, I felt like and partly acted like I was still on duty as a doorman having some leisure time, classically like the policeman who is never off duty. It was like being stuck in an incessant research project that never quite finished.

I hope to have presented door work not as exotica or crude subjugation but as a particular type of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). I have attempted to present a brief glimpse of the reality which engages bouncers in their own terms. The bouncers in the research are, if unwittingly, genuine collaborators in the project to whom I am indebted in many ways. The field experience of getting on, staying on and leaving the door has been a powerful one that is not wiped away by another project, and nor should it be. It has reminded me of the need to record people's lives, in all their richness, more creatively, honestly and modestly. I enjoyed what one doorman called the 'buzz' from working on doors from 'the inside'. Indeed, it is an addictive one. However, I was simultaneously relieved to have eventually melted back into the anonymous crowd.

My ethnography attempts to be a realistic 'warts and all' navigation of this peculiar covert journey. This is a strong and sustained push for understanding bouncing and their everyday world as a lived experience. It has parallels with Ferrell and Hamm's description of criminological *Verstehen*, based on Weber. Ferrell and Hamm argue: 'to explore the lived politics of pleasure and pain, fear and excitement; to think with the body as well as the mind' (1998: 14).

The irony of some of these 'faked friendships' was that they formed the basis of some genuine, if temporary, affections, bonds and trust I developed with the door team. I look back fondly on some of those memories. I managed my dual identity as best I could. It is cogently summed up by the seminal anthropologist Evans-Pritchard: 'One becomes, at least temporarily, a sort of double marginal man, alienated from both worlds' (1976: 24).

My research generated some press interest, which included an interview titled 'Drugs, guns and fights: all in a night's work' for the *Times Higher Education* by Adam James in February 2001, a short piece in *The Guardian* by David Ward in December 2000 provocatively titled 'I don't want to get no bullet over no bullshit', and a televised interview with Nick Higham as part of the Festival of Science, broadcast on *BBC News 24* in October 2006. The local press were far more sensationalist in their coverage, including 'Bouncers in world of guns and drugs' on the front page of *Manchester Evening News*, followed by 'The danger on the doors' in the *Manchester Metro* and, finally, 'Bouncer revelation man leaves the country',

*Manchester Evening News*, all in early December 2000 by journalist Ed Swinden. Clearly, such public coverage is beneficial in terms of public dissemination, but it glamorizes and stereotypes the topic, which was the opposite of my intentions in doing the research project.

## 6.8 Learning exercise

Examine the different ‘ethical moments’ discussed in section 6.4 above and reflect on them in the following ways:

1. If you witnessed violence in a covert fieldwork setting, would you feel the need to whistleblow to the police?
2. Would you prefer to have a key informant or gate-keeper in doing dangerous covert fieldwork? Explain your decision.
3. If your moral compass and sensibilities are different from those you study, could you still undertake your research?
4. Would you feel guilty in doing covert fieldwork? If so, how would you manage it?

