

# Securing Nightlife: Media Representations of Public and Private Policing

Phillip Wadds<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

There is ongoing ambivalence concerning door staff and crowd controllers in the night-time economy (NTE). Expanded private security is often acknowledged as a legitimate solution to the fear people experience in relation to urban night leisure. Yet there is significant official, media and public concern regarding the lack of regulation and governance over an industry still grounded in masculine aggression and with a long history of criminal association. Australian public and media concerns about 'bouncers' have grown dramatically in line with the expansion of night leisure, peaking after episodes such as the violent death of former cricketer David Hookey in 2004. This paper draws on the results of a fifteen-year archival search of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and other major Australian newspapers to analyse concerns regarding private security in a society that is increasingly anxious and sensitised to the risks associated with the city after dark.

## Introduction

This paper discusses media representations of the doorwork and venue control industry from 1995 to 2010, which was a period of increasing anxiety and sensitivity about the risks associated with the night-time economy (NTE). It draws on a media analysis of major Australian newspapers to argue that the salience given to certain types of crime in print media, particularly those involving interpersonal violence, have had significant influence on the beliefs of news consumers (Roshier 1973; Winkel and Vrij 1990; Williams and Dickinson 1993). In the case of public and private policing of the NTE, the Australian print media has played a critical role in shaping public ambivalence, fear and insecurity by representing the private security industry as inherently violent, unregulated and awash with criminality.

## Risk, Crime and Policing the Night-Time Economy

Wakefield (2003) suggests that the rapid rise in reported crime rates in many Western countries since the 1940s is attributable to increased opportunities for crime. Alongside this increase in criminality has been a rise in public anxiety and fear of crime (Ericson 2007; Lee 2007) commensurate with the focus on risk and risk management that has attended the emergence of neo-liberal discourse (Beck 1992; O'Malley 2004). Concern about the risks of criminal victimisation is a dominant feature of public discourse in the neo-liberal state (Garland 2001; Loader and Sparks 2002; Erikson 2007). Simultaneously, popular conceptions of the city after dark as a liminal, transgressive and exciting leisure environment are the basis of the commercial viability of the NTE (Presdee 2000; Hobbs et al 2000; Winlow and Hall 2006).

Bianchini (1995), the first advocate for the creation of NTEs, argued that the creation of vibrant, inclusive, and culturally diverse night-time entertainment precincts would offer the combined effect

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip Wadds is a HDR candidate from the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. His research concerns the policing of Sydney nightlife and is part of the ARC Discovery grant '*The City After Dark: The Governance and Lived Experience of Urban Night-Time Culture*'.

of providing a solution to issues of crime and personal safety as well as rejuvenating depressed city centres following the decline of heavy industry that had left many Western cities devoid of economic and social activity. However, in Australia and abroad, NTEs have come to be dominated by alcohol-leisure, something that has had significant ramifications for policing as well as public perceptions of safety in the city after dark.

In the NTE, the promise of a carnivalesque release from the routine of city life frequently resolves in alcohol-related violence and civil disturbance. Planning authorities have responded to these challenges through the increased regulation of NTE venues which have turned to the private security industry to prevent violence and to placate the concerns of authorities and local residents. Prenzler et al (2008:403) note that 'the private security industry is growing at a faster rate than both the Australian population and police, and is now larger in numbers than conventional police forces'. There is, however, significant ambivalence in the media surrounding private security and its role as the primary, or most common agent of control in nightlife precincts (Prenzler and Sarre 2008; Rigakos 2008). Allegations of violence and criminal association amongst private security firms in the media are supported by research which suggests that doorwork cultures place a high value on violent/physical reputation and behaviour (Winlow 2001). Public concern about private security in the NTE peaked following the violent death of David Hookes outside a Melbourne venue in 2004. While reform of the licensing, regulatory and training protocols of private security had previously been on the political agenda in Australia, Hookes' fatal injury by a 'bouncer' activated a flurry of media attention with evident effects on the governmental agenda and pressure for reform, culminating, in New South Wales, in the introduction of the *Security Industry Regulation Act 2007* (NSW).

## The Media Analysis Study

This paper is based on a media analysis study of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and other major Australian newspapers from the period 1995 to 2010. The study aimed to analyse prominent themes relating to representations of the private security industry operating within nightlife precincts. A content and prominence analysis was undertaken using digital technologies including Factiva and Leximancer. By employing these digital systems, and grouping articles by prominence, subject matter and subject position, common themes and issues were identified. After establishing the most prominent themes, key articles were selected to best illustrate the emergent subject matter. The key findings from the study are presented below.

## Media Constructions of Night-Time Leisure and Private Security

In this study, the private security industry has been represented by the media as both a frequent cause and potential solution to the crises of personal safety and fear in the city after dark. In the analysis, two dominant and contradictory themes emerged. The first was that media representations reflected a strong demand for personal safety from the public as nightlife precincts were portrayed as sites of significant interpersonal risk; and the second is that employees working in door work and venue control, located in the NTE, had a disposition towards violent and dangerous behaviour.

In the sample of print media examined here, the night-time economy was frequently portrayed as a site of intense personal risk. Headlines reading '*Drunks Add to Social Fears*' (Narushima 2008), '*Violence is Everyone's Problem*' (*The Age* 18 July 2009:6), '*Never-Ending Violent Season Thrust Upon Us*' (Quigley 2007) communicate a heightened sense of risk, fear and victimisation by depicting nightlife precincts throughout Australia as 'hotspots' for crime, with particular reference to alcohol related violence and disorder. While it cannot be stated knowingly how an audience will respond to these media representations (Wilson 2009), the results of this media analysis, which has compared the number of recorded incidents of assaults around licensed venues (which have been stable over the last five years (Goh and Moffatt 2010)), and the number of articles produced around the themes of

violence, disorder, alcohol and licensed premises, show that the media is certainly over-representing the 'problem'. Online reports show a dramatic increase in media reporting on the topic of 'pubs and violence' between 2000 and 2010<sup>2</sup>. This relationship is certainly reflective of the media's increasing fascination with crime. Bayley and Shearing (1996:598-9) articulated this reality when they stated:

... [W]hatever happens to crime objectively, the public's fear of crime will certainly not decline. Because crime is fascinating, the media can be counted on to continue to exploit and exaggerate it ... Unfortunately, because there seems to be no economic incentive, or political one either, for pointing this out [the exaggeration of actual crime statistics], the public will continue to be terrorised by the exploitation of crime news.

Coinciding with media portrayals of nightlife as imbued with violence and disorder have been media suggestions that security and safety demands are not being satisfied by traditional, state-based policing services. Due to a lack of resources or manpower, public policing agencies are often depicted as being incapable of regulating the night within this media driven discourse. Articles such as '*Call in Clayton's Cops*' (Lamont 1999) and '*Thugs Lay it on the Line; Train Security is Being Fast-Tracked ... and Night Travellers Know Why*' (Walker 1999) reflect this sentiment. Both private and public policing bodies are portrayed as ineffective, a feeling that, according to this study, has been common around times of increased anxiety concerning public safety. The article titled '*Call in Clayton's Cops*' referred to the need for privatised security to be introduced because 'the police can't be everywhere and most government statutory authorities have a good reason to have [special constables]' (Lamont 1999).

These articles promote a sense of social vulnerability by highlighting the limited fiscal and corporeal resources of public policing agencies that are symptomatic of the nature of government in the neo-liberal state (Garland 1996). The focus here is on risk-based crime prevention in dealing with problems of crime and disorder. It also exemplifies how government strategies of economic rationality have manifested themselves in the current climate of policing and security. Here, privatised forms of security are seen as a legitimate solution to the fiscal crisis that grips many of the state governments across Australia. By encouraging private individuals to take up the mantle of security provision the state is acknowledging its inability to provide effective governance (Garland 1996).

While public policing agencies still occupy a significant position in protecting populations from the threat of crime, private security has taken up much work that police no longer have the resources or desire to do. This process of 'load shedding' (Button 2000) has seen private security take over roles such as doorwork and venue control-guarding duties that are beyond the scope of the public police to occupy. However, a number of high profile incidents involving private security employees have thrust the industry into the media and public spotlight and caused significant ruptures in public perceptions. The most notable of these incidents occurred in 2004 with the death of David Hookes.

Hookes was a former Australian cricketer who was known for his swashbuckling attitude on the pitch and his larrikin attitude off it. While socialising with current and former cricketers in 2004, Hookes became involved in a dispute with Zdravko Micevic, a 'bouncer' from the Melbourne nightclub where the group was drinking. The ensuing altercation resulted in Hookes being seriously injured and later dying in hospital. The subsequent media coverage was littered with opinion pieces vocalising disgust towards the state of the private security industry for its lack of regulation and the violent nature of its employees. The incident had an extremely high news value (Palmer 2000; Brighton and Foy 2007) and, accordingly, some 1200 related articles have been written since the event in 2004. Here, the social position and celebrity of Hookes as an Australian sporting icon and 'all-round larrikin' impacted on the reporting of the event. Representations of the event varied wildly with police reports often contradicting 'eyewitness' depictions, a fact that only exacerbated community confusion and further encouraged commonsense opinion to become the source of knowledge for many. The association of Hookes with highly prized conceptions of Anglo- Australian national and sporting identity positioned him at the very top of a hierarchy of legitimate victimhood

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<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <http://global.factiva.com.ezproxy.uws.edu.au/ha/default.aspx>

and media representations of his death certainly reflect this. Images of Hookes<sup>3</sup>, taken from various online news sources, capture the sentiment that pervaded the media following the incident in 2004. These images, compared with the images of the demonised Micevic<sup>4</sup> accentuate the way in which the media chose to represent the involved parties. While both sets of images depict the masculine identities of the two parties there is a marked contrast in the way in which these masculinities are presented. Hookes is represented as a young, good-looking, larrikin and a sporting icon loved by the masses. His captured persona is representative of many of the qualities associated with, as previously mentioned, highly prized conceptions of Anglo-Australian national and sporting identity. Comparably, and in quite stark contrast, Micevic is portrayed without emotion and showing little remorse for his actions. Also captured in the images, and related articles, is the strong emphasis that was placed on Micevic's amateur, and now professional, boxing career. Media reporting alluded to the 'bouncer's' fighting prowess which further contrasted the two masculine identities, adding to the negative image of Micevic. Hookes played cricket, historically seen as the gentleman's game (Stoddart and Sandiford 1998; Vamplew and Stoddart 2008), which places a high value on sportsmanship and proper sporting etiquette. Micevic was an amateur, and is now a professional, boxer. His training, and resulting body capital, being size, weight, muscle build and fighting techniques, make him dangerous and, as such, prompted the media to represent Micevic as unrestrained, highly volatile and dangerous.

One element of the media reporting that is not conveyed by these images is that of the foreign nature of Micevic's ethnicity. Given Hookes' positioning as a quintessential Australian, representations of Micevic's foreign ethnicity were imbued with undertones that suggested he had failed to understand Australian cultures of leisure and alcohol consumption. This lack of understanding, and the subsequent lack of bodily control, was often touted as the direct cause of Hookes' death. This media attention and the ensuing popular public reaction to Hookes' death eventually succeeded in producing legislative change relating to private security that continues to have significant ramifications within the doorwork and venue control profession.

Although officially regulated by licensing police, the occupational locale of door staff is a semi-supervised territory that provides employees with a reasonable amount of discretion in the performance of their duties. Monaghan (2008) notes the importance that a hyper-masculine nature and significant 'body capital' have to door staff and speaks of their role in inculcating a fear among patrons of the ramifications of their non-conformity to the rules of the house. Conformity, though, especially when alcohol is involved, is not always so easy to achieve. Winlow (2001; see also Winlow and Hall 2006) noted the precarious environments of drinking establishments and the clash of masculinities that occurs between (usually young) males and venue security staff. This realm of embodied risk often produces significantly heightened perceptions of personal danger both among security staff and patrons. Media attention since the death of Hookes has been predominately negative in its portrayal of private security employees in doorwork and venue control. This media analysis study clearly showed a rise in the media's representation of negatively-driven subject matter regarding the private security industry since the death of David Hookes in 2004.

As previously mentioned, the second key theme to emerge from the media study is that of the violent predisposition of many industry employees. Particular focus has been given to the lack of regulation and training that industry employees are subject to prior to being granted the license required to operate as security in and around licensed venues. Images of heavily tattooed, hyper-masculine bouncers recklessly injuring patrons have been frequently presented throughout media outlets over the course of the media study. According to this study, the most frequently reported topic in relation to bouncers is that of the violent and criminal predisposition of many of the

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<sup>3</sup> Images of Hookes accessed online at: <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/11/15/1100384470331.html?from=storylhs>>; <<http://www.espnricinfo.com/ci/content/image/159584.html>>; <<http://www.gettyimages.com.au/detail/95685748/Bob-Thomas-Sports-Photography>>.

<sup>4</sup> Images of Micevic accessed online at: <<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/micevic-a-hit-with-crowd/story-e6frf7kx-111113340910>> ; <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/bouncer-cleared-of-killing-hookes/2005/09/12/1126377250670.html>>; <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/hooks-was-toppled-like-a-tree/2005/08/22/1124562804902.html>>

industry's employees. This can be seen in headlines such as 'Bouncer Regulations Inadequate, Says Professor, as Tragedy Sparks Call for Industry Crackdown' (Jacobsen 2004), 'Security Bounced From Cross Clubs' (Kennedy 2009), 'High Risk People in Security Industry' (Dasey 2000) and 'Pub Violence Caused This-Bouncer Justice ... and the Real Law is Unmoved' (Davies 2008). However, the heavy media attention given to the negative side of the industry has had a considerable effect on the industry by inspiring legislative change, something that has, in New South Wales, taken the form of the *Security Industry Regulation Act (NSW)* in 2007. The changes introduced by the new legislation have increased the number of probity and background checks to ensure that those persons with a recorded history of violence or criminal association cannot enter the industry. Licensing processes have also been significantly altered making training programs more demanding. A probation period of one year has also been introduced to ensure that those with no experience in the industry are subject to more rigorous operating standards.

## Conclusion

The 'risky' environment of the city after dark is a constant focus of news and current affairs programs and both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. They continually place a high news value on the presentation of graphic images and texts concerning the volatile and violent personalities that frequent urban nightlife hotspots. Interpersonal violence and threats to one's personal safety are presented as random and spread over class, age, gender and race. However, statistics indicate that victimisation in sites of night leisure is very specific to certain groups (Potter and Kappeler 2006:35). For example, young males are far more likely to be exposed to violence and abuse, as both victims and perpetrators, in the city after dark (BOCSAR 2009). This reality, rarely acknowledged in prevailing media discourse, appears to have little bearing on the experience of fear and anxiety that is widespread.

While security is demanded to combat widespread anxieties concerning the perceived threat of interpersonal violence associated with the night-time economy, the discretionary nature of private security and the perceived lack of regulation and governance of its employees continues to cause public concern. With prevailing media representations reinforcing societal concerns relating to urban night-time leisure and the private security companies and employees who regulate it, there continues to be a strong sense of ambivalence concerning the industry's position as key agents in the provision of personal safety and security in the city after dark.

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