Embodying Gender, Work and Organization: Solidarity, Cool Loyalties and Contested Hierarchy in a Masculinist Occupation

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Despite a ‘somatic turn’ in the social sciences, there remains a dearth of theoretically informed research on male working bodies, the embodied doings of masculinities independent of biological sex and intra-gendered workplace relations. This is unfortunate because embodiment is thoroughly implicated in major social divisions, including gender domination in institutional contexts. Using an embodied sociological perspective and data generated during an ethnography of British nightclub and pub security work, this article goes some way towards embodying the social study of plural masculinities, work and organization. Exploring worker solidarity, cool loyalties and contested hierarchy in this risky masculinist occupation hopefully makes several contributions to the literature. Furthering the (theoretically informed) empirical study of masculinities and socially embedded bodies, the article sensitizes other researchers to gendered/embodied processes possibly taking a more diluted form in other work settings.

Keywords: masculinities, embodiment, violence, risk, ethnography

Introduction: working bodies and masculinities

Following the ‘somatic turn’ in the social sciences, there is a growing academic interest in the embodiment of gender, work and organization (McKie and Watson, 2000). Bodies, as maintained by this literature, really do matter; ‘they are substantively in play in [gendered] social practices such as labour’ (Connell, 1995, p. 58). Frank (1991), citing feminist insights into the embodiment of domination and social organization, similarly underscores...
the importance of bodies. Rather than viewing embodiment as a 'residual physiological constraint on social organization', it represents the political principle of major social divisions, including gender domination (Frank, 1991, p. 42).

While a growing literature deals both conceptually and substantively with embodiment, gender, work and organizations, there remains a dearth of theoretically informed research on male working bodies, the doings of masculinities independent of biological sex and gendered workplace relations. Certainly, plural masculinities (Connell, 1995) in institutional contexts are increasingly being subject to critical review but there remains precious few insights into the concrete incorporating practices and messy empirical realities of actual flesh and blood bodies (Wacquant, 1995). Using an embodied sociological perspective and data generated during an ethnography of nightclub and pub security work in Britain’s night-time economy (cf. Hobbs et al., 2000), this article offers unique insights into gendered ingroup workplace relations. Viewing the body as integral to the door supervisors' variable social relations, practices and identities, it attempts to embody the empirical study of plural masculinities, work and organization.

Exploring an under-researched occupation, besides empirically charting how gender relations operate in practice, connects with broader theoretical concerns in the sociology of embodiment, masculinities, violence, risk and work. Describing the construction and undermining of embodied solidarities among (predominantly male) doorstaff in their risk environment empirically informs theoretical discourses on the meanings and sometimes shocking doings of gendered, relational, working bodies. To this end, several questions run through the following ethnography. For instance, how and why do men (and a few women doing masculinist work in postmodern leisure settings) form allegiances and alliances and how are these embodied and enacted within and in relation to other groups? Can male solidarity, in a potentially dangerous working-class occupation, be taken for granted or do internal factions and 'cool loyalties' (comprising indifference, shallow ties and psychological distance — see Turner, 1998) present themselves? Are economic considerations central to gendered workplace relations or are other (embodied) factors significant in masculinist, hierarchical organizations? How do other social divisions, such as ethnicity and the binary coding of working bodies as either male or female, impact upon in-group working relations? And, can parallels be drawn between this fairly precise ethnography and studies of gendered relations in other organizations? In broaching such questions, this article draws on and contributes to a theoretically eclectic range of literature, including writings on affective or embodied solidarities (Maffesoli, 1996; Mellor and Shilling, 1997), the micro-level intrusion of power (Goffman, 1972), physical violence (Denzin, 1984; Katz, 1988; Messerschmidt, 1999), and masculinities and work (Connell, 1995; Kerfoot and Knights, 1996; Morgan, 1992).
Of course, as stated by Frank (1991, p. 38), the study of the body makes clear that social theorizing is partial and may be achieved only by neglecting certain generalizations and interconnections. Correspondingly, this article is not exhaustive and must be viewed as part of a larger project on doorwork, violence and risk in Britain’s night-time economy (similarly, see Hobbs et al., forthcoming). This project, in contrast to studies stressing the cognitive or disembodied preoccupations of workplace masculinities (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996, p. 87), is centrally concerned with material, discursive, emotional, ‘lived bodies’ (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Elsewhere I discuss, for example, the importance of bodily capital (comprising body build and acquired bodily techniques) in the social construction of doorstaff competence (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)). Worker typifications — relating to the bodily dimensions of situationally dominant masculinity and (in-)appropriate violence — also figure within intra- and inter-group doorstaff relations. It should be stressed, however, that this, and other embodied dimensions of doorwork, represent topics for detailed ethnographic analysis in their own right and are marginal to this article’s central concerns.

Data reporting and analysis are structured into two main sections. Attention first focuses upon the embodiment and enactment of worker solidarity in their risk environment. Hierarchy among doorstaff, comprising inequitable gender relations between head doormen and their charges, and formally equal security team members, is then explored. A central analytic theme, consonant with critical studies of masculinities, is that domination, discipline and violence are (re)produced in and through the relational doings of gendered, working bodies. First, however, an overview of the research.

The research: an embodied ethnography

While contact with certain key informants and research sites continues, most of this ethnography was undertaken between 1997 and 2001 in seven city-centre licensed premises in South-west Britain. Periods spent working at each site varied, ranging from one night to 14 months. Contingencies and personal circumstances interrupted fieldwork (no data were recorded in 1998, for example), but social access and re-entry were always facilitated given my links with a head doorman (who informally recruited doorstaff) and my ethnographic immersion in bodybuilding gyms (Monaghan, 2001). Indeed, commercial gyms, often serving as informal recruitment sites for doorstaff, were invaluable in allowing me access to this subterranean occupation. This, alongside Britain’s fast expanding night-time economy (Hobbs et al., 2000), provided me with invaluable research opportunities.

In ethnographic fieldwork the body is the primary research instrument (Goffman, 1989). As a gender-aware sociologist I am not presenting myself
here as a ‘macho’ researcher but, as a reflexive ethnographer, I know my male gender and bodily capital (muscular, weighing approximately 16½ stone at 6 foot), were resources for getting in and getting on with this study. Although I possess a non-violent self-image, my embodied social history consisting of lifting weights and boxing — practices contributing to my own habitus, cultural capital and dispositions (cf. Bourdieu, 1986) — rendered me willing and able to adopt the ‘risky’ role of a complete participant over a prolonged period. And, despite being open with inquisitive contacts about my academic status and research interests, I was primarily viewed as a working doorman. Similar to Winlow (2001), I became a ‘bouncer’ in order to research their world.

My cultural acceptance, which resulted in me experiencing the embodied or emotional dimensions of doorwork (e.g. solidarity, marginalization, physical insecurity, anxiety, boredom, excitement, irritation and frustration), was intimately related to what I did with my body. Following the phenomenology of embodiment, the body’s primary relationship to the world is practical (Merleau-Ponty, 1962): correspondingly, in working as a doorman, physically looking like one and in acquiring a degree of occupational competence, my academic status was never (at least within my presence) of open concern to others. In short, my own fieldwork encounters were framed by embodied ‘rules of irrelevance’ which filtered my known external occupational attributes (Goffman, 1961). Although some respondents may have concealed potentially useful information given my institutional affiliation (and there were definitely times when I was marginalized in particular door teams, reflecting and constituting my limited involvement in aspects of the cultural scene), I do not feel this ethnography lacks richness. Most of the time I was successful in using my body to research other bodies.

I use pseudonyms when describing sites and their inhabitants, and I have changed certain background details to preserve anonymity. These establishments varied in their size, appearance, mood, opening times and number of doorstaff employed. Uncle Sam’s, for example (where I spent my longest stint of fieldwork), was a ‘super-pub’ with a nightclub atmosphere. This branded American theme bar, which, similar to many British city-centre drinking venues, was part of a larger corporate chain, usually closed before midnight, accommodated up to 2000 people and employed up to ten doorstaff. All venues served a predominantly white, young (under 30), heterosexual clientele, though there was some inter- and intra-establishment variability. All but one site were located in the same city, employing a network of doormen and a few doorwomen who often knew or knew of each other. While an element of purposive sampling was introduced into the study (e.g. working different nights of the week and occasional days), sampling was largely opportunistic, capitalizing upon links and clustered employment opportunities within a specific urban locale. Reference to
ethnography conducted elsewhere in Britain (e.g. Hobbs et al., 2002; Winlow, 2001) and published insider accounts (e.g. Thompson, 2000) also lends greater external validity to knowledge claims made in this study.

Regarding the characteristics of doorstaff — a misnomer in that working ‘on the doors’ often entails working away from building access points — most contacts were young men of working-class origin (cf. Winlow, 2001, p. 98). Ages ranged from 19 to 45. Most were in their late twenties/early thirties and white, though a few (N=10) were of ethnic minority status (e.g. Middle Eastern, African, Afro-Caribbean). Fieldwork stints, consisting of between one and five working visits per week, ranging between three and 14 hours per shift, brought me into contact with over 60 door supervisors. And while many contacts were fleeting (in an occupation with a high staff turnover), others were more prolonged and sustained. All contacts presented, in accord with ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1995), an image of heterosexuality, including the few doorwomen with whom I regularly talked (N=5). While a significant minority of contacts were ‘officially’ unemployed (especially doormen working midweek in a popular nightclub with a late licence), most combined part-time doorwork with full-time employment in the formal economy. Occupations included: tax inspector, fire fighter, sales person, scaffolder, gym owner, trainee accountant, Internet consultant, office clerk, karate instructor, chef, mechanic and aircraft engineer. All welcomed the extra cash earned through doorwork (paid at approximately £7.50 per hour, though head doormen, with additional responsibilities, earned higher rates). Other embodied/gendered factors also accounted for their ongoing involvement. Most enjoyed a sense of camaraderie with their colleagues and/or treated doorwork as an opportunity to meet women (Monaghan, 2002a). For some doorstaff, licensed premises were seductive and captivating ‘outlets’ where masculine-affirming violence could be realized (cf. Messerschmidt, 1999, p. 216).

A grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was adopted during concurrent data generation and analysis. It is worth noting that grounded theory does not bar the importation of concepts and analyses derived from other theoretical work. Grounded theory need not force researchers to wear ‘theoretical blinkers’ where the ethnographer ‘remain[s] unaffected by earlier ideas and information [since] grounded theorists can [among other things] use extant theories to sensitize them to certain issues and processes in their data’ (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001, p. 169). Using this approach to grounded theory, I read and re-read field notes. This led to the identification of emergent themes and the development of a flexible coding scheme which, in turn, strategically informed subsequent fieldwork visits. Importantly, the coding scheme also served as a basis for segmenting, grouping and indexing data which were then saved in computer-generated text files (Weaver and Atkinson, 1994). These data were then readily accessed for systematic inductive analysis.
Doorstaff solidarity

Workshop ethnographies, as reviewed by Morgan, provide a ‘familiar view of the development of patterns of male homosociability, the interplay between danger [and] solidarity working groups’ (1992, p. 73). While Morgan critiques various studies for not making gender and masculinity explicit, embodiment also appears to be a relatively neglected dimension. In discussing doorstaff solidarity, however, and the expression of male homosociability in an environment that typically fosters a blasé metropolis mentality (Simmel, 1971), embodiment must be made explicit.

Doorwork, which is crucially, perhaps critically structured around regulating consuming bodies in and around commercial space, is a potentially hazardous occupation (Monaghan, forthcoming (b)). Britain’s liminal night-time economy encourages the carnivalesque, mild transgression, effervescent sociality and sensual forms of embodiment among drinkers and (typically large, male) doorstaff are paid to privately police these potentially ‘unruly’ bodies (Monaghan, 2002b). Solidarity among doorstaff — who are often recruited through pre-existing networks of relationships and lines of trust (Winlow et al., 2001) — is functional in this context and is expressed in many masculinist ways. Greeting and departure rituals, such as the obligatory firm handshake, represent mundane manifestations of in-group ties while violence towards ‘problematic’ customers who physically assault doorstaff provides more spectacular yet shocking indications of ‘hot-thick’ commitment (Turner, 1998). Such masculinity displays are, of course, not only ‘a means of survival, in exploitative class relations, [but also] a means of asserting superiority over women’ (Connell, 1995, p. 55) and, perhaps most importantly, other men.

Within this working-class masculinist occupation, danger from without is an extremely important unifying factor and is implicated in dominating styles of body use (cf. Frank, 1991). Doorstaff, who may experience a sense of insecurity in their workplace and dissociation from their own masculine bodies (Frank, 1991, pp. 69–79), share a general perception that they face a potentially hostile outside world (cf. Tomsen, 1997). A myriad of work-related hazards, including personal bodily injury, police arrest and instant dismissal from managers who often treat security staff as disposable bodies, render in-group cohesion salient at practical, cognitive and emotional levels. Solidarity, in short, is related to personal and collective (physical, social and economic) survival, providing a sense of ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991) to workers who form trusting in-group relations. While certain factors militate against this, including a relatively high staff turnover and the often part-time nature of doorwork, parallels may be drawn between doorstaff and soldiers who foster trust and binding loyalty through survival ties and who comprise a ‘family’ on the battlefield (Karner, 1998; also, see Winlow et al., 2001, p. 542). Thompson, in his narrative of doorwork, writes: ‘your
work mates are no ordinary work mates, they are comrades. It can get so close that you want to be with them more than your family' (2000, pp. 325–6).

While workgroup cohesion is contingent and variable, and may at times be highly tentative and passive (in a manner that is analogous to social relations in the airport departure lounge — see Turner, 1998), doorstaff with whom I worked actively expressed their solidarity in various situations. As mentioned above, fiery expressions and physical enactments of commitment often figured in relation to unruly customers — typically young, working-class, male drinkers who, in protesting against authority and middle-class morality, derive a sense of release, group pleasure and masculinity (Tomsen, 1997). For doorstaff, the ever-present possibility and reality of physical violence from and between customers necessitate internal group strength and (at least in certain instances) domineering styles of body use for purposes of effective ‘risk management’. (See Taylor, 1999, on discourses of risk management in the market in social control.) There is a socially and economically sanctioned expectation that doorstaff, similar to members of traditional societies characterized by a rudimentary division of labour or ‘mechanical solidarity’ (Durkheim, 1964a), should sacrifice their own physical bodies to their collectivity. And, as observed by Morgan (1992, p. 90), the theme of self-sacrifice (whether for one’s actual family or work mates) is often seen as an important measure of working-class male respectability. This altruistic, masculinist and class-based expectation — which is independent of long-standing personal ties and familiarity as manifest within established door teams — is reassuring for doorstaff if risk suddenly becomes thematic. Here the vigilant and competent door team, in acting as a second protective skin, sets boundaries around uncertainty and is ‘good to think with’ (Bellaby, 1990, p. 468). Unsurprisingly, the expression of individualistic (non-masculine) sentiments within this culture of risk, as occurred below during a meeting between a door agency manager and a prospective door team, incited open disapproval. Here a dissenting doorman, who voiced organizationally plausible justifications or vocabularies of motive for violence, presented a social identity concordant with an embodied construction of masculinity; specifically, a willingness to risk his body in performance (Jefferson, 1998):

Nigel, facing an aggregate of 20 would-be doorstaff for a new pub, talked about how each worker should ‘look after number one’. He explained: ‘I’ve seen too many people get hurt in this game. Before doing anything think about yourself.’ This statement, although compatible with an individualistic concern for self-preservation, jarred with commonly expressed occupational norms. And, sure enough, one doorman felt strong enough to object: ‘I’m sorry but I just have to say that if another doorman was on the floor and several blokes were giving him a kicking then I wouldn’t think twice about myself. I’d just jump in and help him.’
Nigel, in attempting to save face, then qualified his remark: ‘Oh yeah. That’s different. You have to think about the team as well. But at the end of the day you’ve also got to think about yourself.’ (Thursday, 11 November 1999: Uncle Sam’s)

Doorstaff who openly value their own physical safety at work over and above the safety of their team, no doubt figure in an individualized, urban ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992). According to certain social theorists, commitment to social groups within post- or late modernity is typically less intensive in contrast to the hot-thick commitment demanded by traditional society (Turner, 1998). Certainly, as will emerge below when discussing internal hierarchy among doorstaff, group standing may enable certain individuals to protect themselves and members of their clique at the expense of other ‘team’ members. ‘The perilous landscape of masculinities’ (Courtenay, 2000, p. 1391) no doubt comprises intra-gender relations that effectively include and exclude different doorstaff embodying superordinate and subordinate masculinities (Connell, 1995). And, if certain workers operate with this definition of the situation — if there is real or imagined exclusion and inequitable ‘risk-positions’ (Beck, 1992) within their group — this is likely to undermine their own commitment and willingness to risk their own bodies in performance.

‘Cool loyalties’ (Turner, 1998) and contested hierarchy may figure within doorwork culture but comradeship and solidarity enable many to ‘keep warm together’ (Mellor and Shilling, 1997) in an insecure world. Here bodily co-presence, shared experiences and group norms support (as opposed to guarantee) commitment to the team in an environment that often appears out of control and morally bankrupt. There is, of course, a shadow side among masculine workers typically conceived as non-emotional by academic researchers. Strong male-coded emotions emerging from doorstaff solidarities, such as anger, hatred and aggression, sometimes prompt ‘bloody revenge’ (Mellor and Shilling, 1997, p. 201). Doorstaff solidarity is therefore not simply discursive; it manifests itself physically in and through the gendered, emotional doings of actual flesh and blood bodies. Thompson, for example, writes: ‘you hit a doorman and, if the team is worth its salt, you’ll pay in blood. That’s the unwritten law’ (2000, p. 151). This bloody principle, representing a harsh bodily means of negating threat and contingency (Frank, 1991, p. 72) or ‘masculinity challenges’ (Messerschmidt, 1999), was observed in practice during a situation precipitated by managerial search for profit. Significantly, such retributive violence was framed by economic considerations, but a calculative search for monetary gain does not explain the spontaneous actions of embodied doormen who, in using ‘excessive’ violence, risked instant dismissal from the venue’s licensee:

It was the end of the night and many customers wanted to retrieve their coats from downstairs: an unusual situation that only occurred after the
management continued to store customer coats (for a cost) after the cloakroom was full. However, to limit the possibility of coats being stolen, the management restricted numbers of customers going downstairs at any one time. This aggrieved other customers who were eager to leave. Doorstaff were at the receiving end of the customers’ annoyance. In the ensuing commotion an aggrieved male customer ‘accidentally’ pushed a doorman down several stairs. A fight almost erupted; however, the customer held his hands in the air after being restrained in a corner by two other doormen: ‘I’m sorry. I don’t want to fight you!’ He complied with a doorman’s request to go back up the stairs and wait. Halfway up the stairs this customer suddenly threw an unprovoked punch that bloodied a doorman’s mouth. The customer had openly breached an unwritten rule: he’d attacked a doorman, working inside the club, in full view of his colleagues. Four doormen restrained the struggling customer and threw him to the ground. Several punches and kicks were thrown by both sides before a doorman grabbed hold of the customer’s legs and dragged him down the remaining six stairs. These doormen then carried the man to a fire escape like a sacrificial lamb. I didn’t witness any more, but one of the doormen later told me that the customer ‘had a right battering’ in the fire escape. (Sunday, 31 December 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Conflict between doorstaff and customers provides the conditions of possibility for the physical enactment of worker solidarity. Such confrontational interactions, in alcohol-oriented leisure/work settings (comprising a social audience of male peers who support violence in order to negate risks to gendered selfhood), figure in the defence of vulnerable working bodies and working-class male honour. Antagonistic relations between the police and doorstaff also enable survival ties and ‘subversive’ loyalties to emerge. (Drawing from political economy, Taylor, 1999, p. 217, states that private security, organized around minimizing commercial loss and powerful private interests, may conflict with the public police.) In the above instance the police soon arrived on the scene and approached doorstaff possessing ‘guilty knowledge’ (Morgan, 1992, p. 87). Similar to the Mafia — who are in the ‘business of private protection’ in societies where state-backed public authority is underdeveloped (Taylor, 1999, p. 210) — they practised evasion and engendered secrecy in response to supposedly ‘overarching forms of power’ (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 90). Sociologically, this hot–thick mode of attachment (Turner, 1998), in Britain’s privately policed night-time economy, was a way of constructing appropriate masculinity, confirming their collectivity and integrating members into their affinity group. The ‘unifying function of silence’ (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 91) within this ‘secret society’ (Simmel, 1950) was recurrent even when the cost of ‘doing’ solidarity was personally high. However, higher forms of self-sacrifice — which, as noted by body theorists, ‘stimulate social emotions [and] bind
individuals together’ (Shilling, 2001, p. 335) — are likely to be selective. Below specific allegiance was reportedly expressed towards a charismatic and physically tough head doorman who embodied a totemic or hegemonic position within his work group:

There was a violent incident in the club involving several doormen and customers. I arrived on the scene shortly after the violence had ceased. Nevertheless, and to my total surprise, a female customer involved in the fracas personally accused me of being ‘out of order’. Fred, the head doorman, later told me that she was accusing all of the doormen. Because the woman had left blood on my shirt after I assisted her to her feet, I expressed concern that it would be extremely easy to be arrested on the basis of circumstantial evidence and false accusations. Fred agreed and recounted the following: ‘I was working a few years ago at Thor’s [he was head doorman there too] and there was a fight. I hit this one boy from the side and blood went all over another doorman who was beside me. The police came and arrested him for it. I’d just got out of prison and was on probation for two years so … [LM: I guess he wouldn’t ‘grass’ on you anyway?] … Mmm, that’s right. Luckily, one week before the trial the charges were dropped.’ (Friday, 11 February 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Solidarity, within ‘neo-tribal’ (Maffesoli, 1996) doorwork teams, also emerged among doorstaff interacting with other powerful groups. Club managers, while sometimes fostering positive working relations with their security staff, exercise considerable power by hiring and firing workers as they please: an external socio-economic constraint that may undermine worker cohesion as they congregate in anticipation of their exit (cf. Turner, 1998). In an effort to resist management authority, doorstaff I worked among endeavoured to sustain ties with their (usually occupationally competent) peers. Fraught relationships between doorstaff and managers also resulted in the enactment of solidarity independent of internal, formalized divisions: it was not only head doormen who were protected under a sacred canopy. For instance, doorstaff sometimes collaboratively constructed a version of violent events or provided a cover story for an absent colleague when encountering antagonistic club managers.

In large urban settings, doorstaff often work for different security agencies. Economic rivalry for limited security contracts sometimes results in factions, conflict and violence between members of different door teams. Nevertheless, and for the most part, a sense of solidarity was evidenced among a network of doorstaff who worked in different licensed premises in my main research locale. This seems commonplace. As observed elsewhere in Britain, ‘bouncers would generally get into each other’s clubs for free, and would certainly never bother to queue’ (Winlow et al., 2001, p. 542). For many of my contacts, similar relationships were fostered by shared ‘body-oriented’ masculine interests such as sport and exercise. As evidenced
below, additional employment opportunities may ensue, rendering the active, sporting body a medium for sociality and ongoing economically productive relations:

Several doormen from *Latinos*, who are known by the door team at *Sunshine*, passed by on their way to work. A sense of camaraderie was evidenced among workers from both clubs. Ron, the head doorman at *Latinos*, for example, approached the *Sunshine* crew and shook their hands. Two minutes later Oxo, who works for Ron, walked by. Referring to the mind-numbing atmosphere at *Latinos*, he joked: ‘Oh no, I’m back there again! I’ve only got three brain cells left.’ Kara, from *Sunshine*, shouted after him: ‘You only had four to begin with!’ Finally, John, another doorman working at *Latinos* approached us. He stood with us for approximately ten minutes and talked to Odd Job about their respective bodybuilding competitions. John told Odd Job he had recently started working the doors to earn money for his pre-contest preparation. Fred, upon hearing this, approached John and offered him the possibility of working extra shifts at *Sunshine*, in addition to his weekend work at *Latinos*. (Saturday, 4 September 1999: *Sunshine*)

Such solidarity also manifests itself when (off-duty) doorstaff from other venues assist ‘associates’ in violent working situations (cf. Thompson, 2000, pp. 338–9). Here risk of personal bodily injury, and the absence of direct economic reward, are overshadowed by a male-coded, working-class expectation to offer help in difficult situations. Analytically, such consequential action — besides its sensual (non-economic) seductions for embodied social actors (Katz, 1988) — may enable security staff to obtain some of the moral benefits of heroic conduct, e.g. displaying adherence to regulatory norms and proving fundamental strength of character (Goffman, 1972; also, see Lyng, 1990, on voluntary risk-taking). Workers at several venues I researched were also in radio contact with others in adjoining pubs and clubs. If a particularly violent incident erupted at one site, door teams would sometimes ‘double up’ with the intention of quickly resolving the conflict and reducing the risk of occupational injury. The existence of a social network of doormen in this locality, and the perception that they formed a closed and tightly knit community, were also related to private, personal risks of a sexual and emotional nature:

A young doorman, while among several others, described how he tackled potential infidelities by his sexual partner. ‘I said to her: “Don’t forget. Doormen have got a thousand eyes.” She said: “What do you mean?” I said: “Well, all the boys in town. We all know each other. You know? The boys who work in *Light Years* know the boys from *The Beer Garden* and *Rock Bar* and everywhere else. If the boys know your missus and they see her with some other boy, they’ll say. And you could be in some quiet pub
somewhere. A doorman might be having a night off and a quiet drink.” She said: “That’s spying.” I said: “I know, but if you’re not seeing anybody else it doesn’t matter does it?” (Friday, 30 July 1999: Presentations)

Doorstaff solidarity was not only expressed and enacted in relation to ‘other’ groups and individuals (customers, police, club management, other door teams and partners). It also emerged during unfolding interactions within specific door teams. The light-hearted exchange of insults and jokes (Morgan, 1992, p. 92), sometimes at the expense of ‘feared others’, represent common ‘bonding strategies’ within masculine groups (Karner, 1998). Below the physical body, in a larger heterosexual matrix that ‘positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of gender hierarchy among men’ (Connell, 1995, p. 79), was a mediator of homosocial working relationships:

Four doormen stood at the club entrance. Mark limped to the front door. Fred told me that Mark, a bodybuilder, had a ‘bad jab’ [steroid injection] in his buttocks yesterday. Big K, spotting Mark’s painful walk, greeted him with: ‘You look like you’ve been shagging,’ Mark replied: ‘Aye, I’m always shagging.’ Big K then exclaimed: ‘Yeah, but it looks like someone’s been shagging you up the arse!’ Big K continued with his ‘greeting’: ‘Now, look at the state of you. [Rubbing the back of Mark’s freshly shaved head.] Who the fuck did that to you?’ Mark, with a slight grin, pushed his chest out, put his hands on his waist, and declared in a deep and confident voice: ‘Now, now! Don’t try to put me down, you know you can’t!’ The two doormen continued in this way for the next ten minutes, resulting in much laughter. (Wednesday, 19 January 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Playful violence among doorstaff — similar to the father who slaps his son on the back as a sign of affection or as a greeting — intends a double or meta-message (Denzin, 1984, p. 505). As with insults, playful violence by powerful bodies exercising self-restraint may serve to incorporate other members, representing an embodied ritual that delineates strong group boundaries. Customers, for example, did not receive the same treatment from Clayton as described below. Of course, as will be elaborated shortly, playful violence and insults also (re)created hierarchy within this bounded masculinist group:

According to several of the doormen, Clayton’s presence is one reason why there is hardly any trouble at this club. Clayton has a reputation as a hard man and the other doormen respect him for this. Often Clayton will ‘doof’ the other doormen; that is, he will playfully dig them in the ribs. Most of the security staff plead for mercy, or turn their backs, hoping that Clayton will cease his ‘attack’. I escaped a ‘doofing’ for several weeks. Taz would request Clayton to ‘doof’ me, but I would quickly say: ‘Oh, I’m only a YTS [novice] at the moment, you can’t do that.’ (Tuesday, 28 October 1997: Murphy’s)
Casual in-group talk about ‘deviant’ doorstaff also strengthened workplace relations. Following Durkheim (1964b), reference to known transgressions of normative expectations delineates group boundaries and reinforces internal solidarity. Such talk often relates to the body, including its violent (in)abilities (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)). Friendship ties, expressed through the giving of gifts such as embodied/masculine skills independent of direct economic return, were also salient. The following disapprobation of a cash-oriented doorman (who profited from his work mates independent of any personal skills) underscores the overt significance often attached to reciprocity and a willingness to help colleagues qua friends. Nonetheless, such talk from the head doorman (supported by a complicit colleague who enjoyed workplace autonomy by virtue of his alliance with the head) masked the fact that he also directly profited from his supposed mates:

Fred and Mark talked disparagingly about Odd Job, another doorman who reportedly earns a sizeable income selling computer hardware. Fred wanted a modem, but was surprised when Odd Job demanded more money for the item than he actually obtained it for. Fred added with indignation: ‘He’s so money oriented.’ Mark agreed: ‘See, I don’t see why he should be like that with his mates. He’s always saying how cheap he gets things for, so why should he make a profit off his mates?’ Fred then contrasted Odd Job’s actions with another doorman: ‘It’s like Jasper fitted my kitchen for me at home and didn’t want anything.’ (Wednesday, 19 January 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Finally, it is worth noting how social divisions, relating to the categorization and doings of racialized and feminized bodies, emerge within doorwork culture. No doubt, other (social structural and situational) sources of tension could be explored; for example, in ensuring adequate security cover, different security agencies sometimes simultaneously supply doorstaff to the same venue. These workers are likely to possess competing loyalties and conflicting conceptions of their own standing within male hierarchies — a potential source of intra-group violence. However, given exigencies of space and the exploration of male hierarchy shortly, other social divisions are discussed here.

Ethnic minority groups, stereotypically construed as manual labouring bodies, are disproportionately represented in lower status occupations. And, while this research was largely conducted in a geographical area with a large white ethnic majority, some doormen were of ethnic minority status. No doubt, racism is a feature of contemporary Britain that may undermine doorstaff in-group relations as well as being implicated in the social construction of white men’s masculinities (Connell, 1995, p. 75). Certainly, given a long (post-)colonial history of white fears of Black men’s violence, ethnicity (interacting with class, gendered bodily capital, occupational norms and organization) may facilitate positive working relations. Clayton,
quoted above, was Black and often received overt respect given his mythologized violent potential. (This full-time doorman, who was in his early forties, also acted as a head at several venues.) Nonetheless, some Black doormen (who were subordinate to Clayton in terms of physical presence, fighting ability, reputation, age, experience and position within the formal occupational hierarchy) reported animosity from their peers. One such contact claimed racism negated shared expectations of solidarity, mutual protection and obligation. Following this reported incident, he quit and obtained employment at a venue fostering ‘warmer’ (safer) modes of social attachment:

I talked with a young Black overseas student who supported himself at college by working as a part-time doorman. This was the first time I’d seen him at Sunshine. He said he was recently working elsewhere, but left because he believed his work mate was racist: ‘There was some trouble so I went to sort it out. Afterwards the manager asked the other doorman what happened. He told the manager that I did nothing. He told lies. I mean, if he doesn’t like Black people he . . . I think he was racist. Next time he may have told bigger lies or, even worse, if I was in trouble he may not have helped me. So I left.’ (Tuesday, 21 December 1999: Sunshine)

Fortunately, racist sentiments were seldom expressed among doorstaff I encountered. A small minority of white doorstaff made racist comments about other (absent) doorstaff and customers, but this was exceptional. Indeed, white doorstaff working with ethnic minorities were more likely to strongly object to racist sentiments, particularly if voiced by problematic customers (also see Thompson, 2000). Again, similar to the military, doorstaff in (potentially) violent situations often formed solidarities and brotherhoods that cut across boundaries that may otherwise have divided them (cf. Karner, 1998, p. 216). This, of course, is not to deny the social significance of ethnicity and its differential impact upon social organization, hierarchy and supposedly individualized ‘risk-positions’ (Beck, 1992). Undoubtedly, there are times — fateful and consequential ‘moments’ as lived by ‘co-mingling’ (Goffman, 1972) racialized bodies — where ethnicity is extremely salient. As above, racism is sometimes thematic, figuring ominously in the door supervisors’ variegated risk landscape.

Solidarity, a sense of mutual belonging, unity and protection, may be evidenced among doorstaff but other social divisions sometimes undermine group cohesion in a context of physical risk. Gender, which relates to the subordination and superordination of different masculinities (Connell, 1995), may also be an issue for doormen when talking about, and interacting with, doorwomen attempting to perform situationally dominant masculinity. As suggested below, positive relationships often exist among doormen but this solidarity may not necessarily extend to and incorporate physically smaller doorwomen who are considered incompetent in violent situations.
Here, from the perspective of a physically large doorman, a doorwoman’s ‘inferior’ bodily capital (including her fighting ability or bodily techniques), rendered her utility and membership questionable:

Big K, commenting upon a colleague, said: ‘I like Odd Job, he’s a good laugh, a good boy.’ He then added: ‘I can’t work with people I don’t like.’ I asked whether he disliked any doorstaff. He said: ‘No, not really. Well, Kara and me don’t get on. She’s more of a hindrance than anything. Like, before, when that lad [customer who attacked Big K] had hold of me by the neck. I couldn’t hit him because she was in the way. And she was there with her little rabbit punches. What good’s that?’ (Saturday, 21 August 1999: Sunshine)

Nonetheless, at other times, in other places, female doorstaff were incorporated into their nocturnal work group and afforded overt respect. Doormen working with Kara at Uncle Sam’s, for example, often complied with her supervisory requests. However, despite a degree of overt acceptance (buttressed in no small part by her sexual relationship with the head doorman), Kara was also reportedly the victim of playful violence. In the following narrative, two physically large doormen dramatically put Kara in a subordinate position. Group solidarity, in a context of physical risk and inequitable embodied relations, was clearly communicated: Kara’s life was, quite literally, in her male colleagues’ hands:

Tom told me about Doz and Jasper, two large doormen who were working last night: ‘They got hold of Kara, they each had hold of one leg, and dangled her over the banister there. [The upper level of the club is approximately fifteen feet above the ground floor.] She was screaming. She shit herself she did.’ (Friday, 24 December 1999: Uncle Sam’s)

In summary, in a context of externally imposed social, legal, economic and physical risks, the bounded culture of doorwork is (at least at certain moments) cohesive and unified. The existence of internal group solidarity among ‘bodies under siege’ may at times be problematic given individualistic tendencies, ‘cool loyalties’ (Turner, 1998) and the insecure/fragmented/temporary/part-time nature of doorwork, yet mutuality and protection were publicly advocated among these workers. No doubt, doorstaff solidarity is functional on symbolic, emotional, cognitive and practical levels: the possibility and actuality of collective risk management offer members real and imagined security. Worker solidarity, comprising emotive survival ties, enables doorstaff to ‘keep warm together’ (Mellor and Shilling, 1997) in a potentially ‘hostile and chaotic working milieu’ (Hobbs et al., 2002, p. 355). The above ethnography shows that group solidarity, both within and between door teams, is enacted in various ways and is accompanied by organizationally plausible justifications for violence. A willingness to risk one’s own ‘dominating body’ (Frank, 1991) for the collective good, bloody
revenge against violent customers, expressing allegiance to one’s team rather than outside authorities (the police, club management), observed positive relations between and within door teams, and the perception that workers belong to a supportive local network, are all indicative of group solidarity. Also, the expression of belonging within this masculinist working-class group takes the form of light-hearted banter and mutual insults alongside ‘playful violence’ (Denzin, 1984). Such integrating practices, while hierarchically ordering members and constructing gendered bodies and identities, also delineate external group boundaries. Within the micro-politics, rituals and ceremonial order of everyday life (Goffman, 1959), gendered bodily performances define members of the doorkin collectivity. However, various social factors may also undermine doorstaff solidarity and cohesion. Some of the micro-level tensions and fissures noted above are directly traceable to the larger social structure, including the impersonal cash nexus and inequitable ethnic and inter-gendered relations. As will emerge below, stratification within door teams — only partly related to a necessary if rudimentary division of labour — facilitates social organization but also institutionalizes a contested gender hierarchy that values and rewards the bodily performance of situationally dominant masculinity.

**Internal hierarchy**

The following section first explores the embodied social relationships between head doormen and their charges. Undoubtedly, these intra-group power relations are highly variable both within and between different sites given group dynamics and other situational and/or social structural factors. Also, embodied solidarities often render these relationships positive and productive. Nonetheless, in concrete situations of everyday interaction, such relations are also often hierarchical and more or less exploitative.

Attention then shifts to the contested nature of group hierarchy among the larger body of doorstaff comprising particular security teams. Without formal rank, qualifications, institutional authority and other objective markers of occupational status (e.g. pay differentials, recognized office) the adoption and situational enactment of gendered hierarchy by one party may acutely undermine the masculinity, honour and reputation of another. Sometimes these public performances or authoritarian ‘degradation ceremonies’ (Garfinkel, 1956), while perhaps strengthening certain bonds and internal allegiances, strain particular relationships and provide the conditions of possibility for in-group conflict. Strategies employed by doorkin for mitigating or dealing with such conflict — ranging from humour to physical violence — are also described. Similar to the above, it will become clear that the gendered body is inescapable in the construction and lived realities of this masculinist and risky occupation.
Head doormen and their charges

Hierarchy is formalized within this occupation with the head doorman being given additional responsibilities by their employing agency and club management. While parameters and external power relations circumscribe the head doorman’s choices and actions, this individual has considerable discretion regarding whom he will recruit and retain. And, the body is central in these hierarchical relations which, in certain instances, entail ‘cooling-out’ the mark in the society of the bland sting (Goffman, 1962). Below a head doorman did ‘face work’ (Goffman, 1959) and expressed thin solidarity when dismissing a new recruit. (The rejected doorman was typified as ‘soft’ by his peers given his body composition (obese, not muscular) and unassuming (non-masculine) bodily comportment.) Sociologically, shared vocabularies of body idiom and bodily norms were implicated in maintaining the ‘dignity’ of the expendable other while also facilitating discrimination (cf. Shilling, 2001, p. 337):

It was early in the evening. I stood on the front door with Fred, who passed me his jacket before going inside for a quick break. He said: ‘Danny’s money is in the top pocket. If he comes, give it to him.’ I enquired why Danny wasn’t working. Fred replied: ‘I sacked him. He’s crap. I’ve got somebody else starting next week. He’s a good boy.’ Fred disappeared and Danny, as expected, showed up. Danny is very easy-going, but was slightly aggrieved and understandably so — he has no other work and must support three dependants: ‘I was offered work over the road [at another club] this morning but turned it down because I thought I was working here. Fred didn’t phone me until the afternoon. By then it was too late. I’ve lost a night’s wages now.’ When Fred re-appeared Danny quietly complained. Fred, smiling, ‘blamed’ the manager: ‘He decided he wants eight boys instead of ten from now on Saturdays ... It might change in a few weeks. I’ll give you a ring.’ Danny accepted this and left. (Saturday, 5 August 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Working relations between head doormen and their charges are characterized by large power differentials. No formal contract obliges head doormen to guarantee their charges a specified amount of work over a given period. Because doorwork is typically part of the informal economy, relations between head doormen and their subordinates are also highly informal (Winlow, 2001). Door teams, to borrow from Maffesoli (1996), are affectual tribes rather than contractual groups. And, as evidenced above, this may place door supervisors in an economically vulnerable position: Danny, for instance, was treated as a replaceable body to be employed only when better bodies were unavailable.

Other head doormen, without considering the material requirements of organic bodies (for example, their need for adequate sleep), make
impossible demands. This is more likely if the head is responsible for supplying security to several venues and/or lacks organizational skills. The young, part-time doorman below (Tom) reportedly resisted ‘unreasonable’ requests from his superior (Clayton), but other doormen comply in order to secure future work and income. Undoubtedly, economic considerations are important but exploitative in-group relations cannot be considered independently of plural masculinities (Connell, 1995). Clayton — in crudely doing gendered hierarchy — routinely presented himself as dominant and domineering, sometimes ‘unfairly’ dismissing non-complicit or subordinated masculinities in a very public and humiliating manner. For example, those who refused to work for him at a moment’s notice, or who challenged him when receiving their wages late, received a belligerent response and no further invitations to work. Clayton, whose embodied social identity was constructed relationally in the image of the ‘hard man’ (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)), was not exceptional; other heads I worked under dispensed with all courtesy when performing their managerial role:

I talked to Tom who expressed a common complaint about Clayton; namely, he was extremely disorganized and expected his ‘underlings’ to be available for work at a moment’s notice:

TOM: I asked Clayton for two nights a week at Sunshine. He said ‘OK’ and then just put me down in the rota for Friday night. He then phoned me on Sunday night and asked me if I could work at Murphy’s [Clayton combined work at both clubs]. I said ‘Oh, all right.’ The next night he phoned me up again for Murphy’s, and he did that every night of the week. I worked six nights. He’d just phone me up when other people had let him down.

LM: I remember he used to expect me to work at a moment’s notice.

TOM: Yeah, I know. He phoned me up at 11 o’clock at night once and said ‘Can you work tonight?’ I asked him why and he said ‘Come to Murphy’s.’ I asked him where he wanted me to work, and he said ‘Just come to Murphy’s.’ I eventually got it out of him. He wanted me to work at the Casino [closes at 4 a.m.]. I just told him I couldn’t work. Another night I was at Murphy’s and it was about 10 o’clock. He said to me: ‘Do you need much sleep?’ I asked why and he said: ‘Well, can you go to [town 45 miles away] and work at the Casino?’ That closes at half four in the morning, it’s an hour’s drive and I’ve got to get up for work [his full-time day job] at half five. I told him I wouldn’t get any sleep, and he had me down to work at Murphy’s the next night so I just couldn’t do it. (Saturday, 13 November 1999: Uncle Sam’s)

Given the head doorman’s ability to exercise considerable occupational power, and his sometimes protective role in an insecure risk environment
(Monaghan, forthcoming (b)), doorstaff are often careful not to jeopardize their personal/occupational relationship with him. An embodied obligation to present one’s working body when requested may be so strong that some will work even if immediate monetary rewards are minimal:

Fred is the head doorman at *Uncle Sam’s* (pub) and *Oceanic* (nightclub). This dual position is possible because *Oceanic* opens and closes at later times. Given this overlap, Nick, who was recently dismissed by the management at *Uncle Sam’s*, was offered some alternative doorwork by Fred. Today Nick told me that he asked Fred last night if he had any shifts at *Oceanic*: ‘He said he didn’t, so I went home. Later then I get a call asking if I could come in. I told him I’d been drinking but he was desperate and so I said I’d get a taxi: £20 it cost me!’ I knew that he’d barely earn more than £30 so I queried why he didn’t just make an excuse not to work; he replied: ‘Oh, his phone was switched off and I couldn’t get in touch.’ (Sunday, 10 December 2000: *Uncle Sam’s*)

Certainly, some resist this occupational power; though, as a qualification, this was easier among doorstaff forming long-standing friendships with their head. In an impersonal labour market, economic survival is facilitated through the mobilization of personal links (Connell, 1995, p. 97):

Trevor, who works as a salesman in the day, complained that he was unable to go to his recent office Christmas party because of his doorwork: ‘... they had free drinks on and everything, but I couldn’t go. Fred needed me to work here.’ Terry, who, in contrast to Trevor, has worked with Fred for many years and is considered a ‘mate’ by the head, commented: ‘Aghh, you should have just done what I do. I send a text message to Fred saying I can’t make it then switch my phone off. He tries to get in touch with me, he knows what I’ve done, but I just say the battery was flat.’ (Friday, 8 December 2000: *Uncle Sam’s*)

If heads do not offer particular team members regular work, then the latter may seek shifts elsewhere. As suggested by Maffesoli, neo-tribes such as door teams, ‘are unstable, since persons of which these tribes are constituted are free to move from one to the other’ (1996, p. 6). Such freedom, however, representing cool-thin modalities of social organization among individualized, mobile and transient urban workers (Turner, 1998), may be constrained by head doormen’s quasi-feudal expectations. Indeed, given some head doormen’s demands for hot loyalties (or, rather, a reserve army of labour in an extremely flexible night-time economy), entrepreneurial activity by ‘subordinates’ may result in divided loyalties, antagonism and loss of future employment opportunities:

I talked with Len, a doorman working his first night at *Uncle Sam’s*. He told me he had recently returned to the area after living elsewhere for...
twelve months. Capitalizing upon his local links, he immediately sought work as a doorman. His usual work was with Barry and Ron who had recently obtained security contracts for several city centre venues. However, Len was unsure whether he could rely upon them for more work:

LEN: I work Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and sometimes Saturday night for them. Not any more, I don’t think. I may end up here full-time after today. I wanted to work today but Barry and Ron didn’t tell me any work was available until yesterday. That was no good to me. They should have told me earlier in the week, say, on Tuesday or something. It was too late yesterday. I’d already spoken to Fred [head doorman at Uncle Sam’s] and he said, ‘Yeah, you can work here on Saturday.’ I told Ron when he phoned and he said, ‘No, you’re supposed to be working for us.’ He said, ‘You’re not having it off.’ Barry phoned me up and said the same thing. But I just turned round and said, ‘I can’t now. Fred was good enough to give me work. I can’t turn round and say I can’t do it now . . . you should have given me more notice.’ They weren’t happy. (Saturday, 5 February 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Hierarchical relationships between head doormen and their charges impact upon the latter’s working lives in many ways, including the subordinate’s ability to secure regular work, take leave or avoid working extra shifts. Other dimensions are also significant. For example, head doormen often allocate work-related tasks to their subordinates and, especially within larger door teams, delegate this authority to other doorstaff who enjoy greater autonomy. (Such delegation is discussed further below.) Another theme is the door supervisor’s trust in their head’s ability to recruit competent (hard, physically tough) workers thereby minimizing the physical risks of doorwork. Trevor claimed his head doorman, within what he considered a cliquey and internally divided group, was unconcerned about worker safety. In short, he complained that his head doorman and close allies expressed shallow or cool loyalty to a large segment of the team:

Trevor expressed his dissatisfaction with internal group relations. He was clearly unhappy about some of the ‘extra’ doormen Fred had recruited to supervise inside the club during the busy festive period: ‘Fred can’t get anybody to work down here so he’s got those useless cunts. I went to sort a bit of bother out and one of them just stood there like a cardboard cut out.’ The presence of these doormen seemed to support Trevor’s contention that Fred had little concern about the safety of doorstaff working inside the club: ‘He couldn’t give a fuck about us in here. He has his select few on the front door with him and, as far as he’s concerned, it’s “fuck the rest”. I know. I’ve been on the front door in the past and there’s been a 5/5 [security radio call] and he’s done nothing. Him and Terry won’t come in if there’s any trouble.’ (Saturday, 23 December 2000: Uncle Sam’s)
In sum, hierarchical relations between doorstaff, besides representing a discursive topic, are formalized, embodied and enacted by head doormen interacting with their charges. These hegemonic figures, as indicated, may exercise considerable occupationally and economically sanctioned power, which is intimately related to the doings of situationally dominant masculinity and modalities of social organization. Head doormen, in receiving greater remuneration than their subordinates, must strategically organize, recruit and retain a full door team. They are therefore privileged in the sense that they may exercise considerable autonomy when hiring, firing and delegating risk-related work tasks to their subordinates. In the absence of formal contracts, and flexible occupational arrangements, working relations for doorstaff may be extremely insecure. As observed, head doormen, when dismissing underlings, may use ‘cooling-out’ tactics (Goffman, 1962) which are mediated through the careful presentation of self (Goffman, 1959). Alternatively, some head doormen, at certain times, in certain places, with certain team members, crudely enact internal hierarchy; for example, by dispensing with all courtesy, making impossible demands and positioning their employees as reserve labour tied by quasi-feudal expectations. ‘Subordinated’ doorstaff I encountered sometimes resisted such gendered power (which could also be conceived as an affront to their own masculinity) but their desire to retain their work usually limited such resistance. Correspondingly, in forging appropriately masculine identities, doorstaff such as Trevor felt they could do little more than disparage their superordinate ‘behind his back’, even if the head was unconcerned about the physical safety of his larger body of workers.

Nonetheless, a high degree of reciprocity may also exist between head doormen and their charges. In an informal, flexible economy, the willingness to work at short notice and ‘help’ the head doorman out — even if negatively motivated by the desire to retain one’s job — often creates a degree of mutual obligation, even friendship. Indeed, head doormen (who must often meet the licensee’s hour-by-hour demand for labour) may maintain positive working relations between themselves and ‘competent’ doorstaff (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)) by granting concessions; for example, allowing valued workers to take (unplanned) leave. Of course, social capital or pre-existing friendships (alongside bodily capital) are often significant in such processes. In addition, because doorstaff may take their labouring bodies elsewhere during times of labour shortage and/or have other sources of income (thereby diminishing economic dependence upon a particular head doorman), heads may find it prudent to foster positive working relations. While these organizational considerations may temper vertical conflict, promote civility and bolster solidarity, they do not necessarily frame ‘horizontal’ interactions between other doorstaff endeavouring to present themselves as solidly masculine. Correspondingly, there is a greater potential for overt conflict and sometimes violence.
Contested hierarchy or ‘too many chiefs and not enough Indians’

While the head doorman’s authoritative position is formalized and enumerated, hierarchy among other doorstaff is often highly ambiguous. Correspondingly, it is far more likely to be internally contested in every-night work situations. Workers comprising the larger body of doorstaff, while perhaps being given internal supervisory responsibilities by the head, are not formally differentiated in the same manner as the public police, for example. Rates of pay typically remain the same and there is no institutionalization or symbolic representation of occupational rank. No doubt, in a male-dominated workgroup, with a rudimentary division of labour, the enactment of situational hegemony is more likely to be a function of gender construction — the ongoing bodily presentation of an appropriately masculine, powerful and commanding self — than specific enumerated tasks intrinsic to the organization and execution of doorwork. And, without formal hierarchy, doorstaff may ask in respect of their colleagues: ‘Who are they to give me orders?’

During fieldwork the occurrence of doorstaff assuming, rather than being assigned, an internal supervisory role was sufficiently common within and across venues for there to be a shared expression: ‘There’s too many chiefs and not enough Indians.’ Ethnography undertaken at geographically dispersed sites suggests such tensions are not simply local in character. And, in accord with Connell’s (1995, p. 84) observations on the modern gender order, such data illustrate the degree to which ‘violence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection [because a] thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate’.

While talking with Len inside the club, Wayne approached us and, adopting what appeared to be a supervisory role, advised Len about what he should do during the day: ‘Go from one position [surveillance point] to the next. Don’t hang around in each position with other doormen and talk. Obviously have a little chat, but if you see the manager, stop . . .’ After Wayne left, Len asked me whether this doorman was ‘in charge’ inside the club. I was unsure whether he had been assigned this role. Len, with a peeved expression, complained: ‘Yeah, well I think there’s too many Chiefs and not enough Indians in this place.’ Doormen in [another city] made a similar remark during a recent stint of fieldwork. I knew that unwelcome ‘advice’ delivered in an authoritative manner by doormen whose authority was not considered legitimate by others could fray tempers and result in intra-group violence. (Saturday, 5 February 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Although contested hierarchy and intra-group conflict were observed at various sites, this was particularly acute at Uncle Sam’s during the head doorman’s protracted absence. (His application to renew his licence, and
thus his ability to continue working legally, was delayed following objections from the local police to the licensing authority — see Lister et al., 2001, on occupational licensing in the night-time security industry.) Because the head was not present in the flesh, some doorstaff assumed a supervisory role while others claimed they were assigned this role. Much tension, intimately related to the doings of competing masculinities in an honour-based culture, ensued:

Half of the door team [five] were on the front door by 18.55hrs, ready for the start of their shift. Paul appeared from inside the club with record sheets, which are used to note the numbers of customers entering and leaving the premises. Paul placed this material on the side and instructed Tom to fill them in. Tom, surprised with this display of authority, immediately quipped: ‘What? Do you think I work here, do you?’ Several other doormen laughed. Paul, without comment, re-entered the pub. Big K commented that he did not like Paul, indicating that his ‘head doorman routine’ was unwarranted. Tom added: ‘I know. He’s a cheeky fucker. I’ve been working on the doors for two years and he comes up to me inside the club giving me advice.’ Mark then arrived. As he approached, Big K, in a sardonic tone, said to him: ‘Oh, I’m glad you’re here. I don’t know what to do, see. Can you tell me where to stand, how to do this and how to do that, ‘cause I’ve been working for over five years as a doorman and I haven’t got a clue? And what with Kara and Wayne and Paul and everybody else telling me what to do I get awfully confused.’ Mark, with a smile, informed the other doormen that Fred had asked him to act as head doorman. This seemed to be accepted by the others. Paul then re-appeared, and Mark said to him: ‘I’m not a boss man, not in the slightest. But I have been asked by Fred to run the front door. So, I’ll put everybody in their positions. Paul, you can act as a floater and wander around the top [of the pub] …’ As Mark instructed Paul where to go, Big K gave me a knowing wink. The other doormen smiled, clearly amused by the reversal of hierarchy. Paul took his ‘orders’ quietly, though he did say ironically: ‘Oh, that’s kind of you’ after Mark authoritatively said: ‘… in making you a floater that means that you can basically come and go as you want and be your own man. You will have to listen to Kara though. I’ve got three stripes and she’s got two.’ (Saturday, 11 March 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Interestingly, a ‘subordinated’ yet highly reflexive doorman commented upon the above incident. Through joking, Tom displayed his own ironic, cool allegiance (cf. Turner, 1998, pp. 14–15) and masculine astuteness, albeit to a smaller audience:

I entered the club and chatted with Tom. He laughed at the previous episode then said: ‘There’s one oar and five steering. An Irish hierarchy.
You know in most jobs you have a pyramid with a main manager at the top and then more and more people as you go down? Well, here, it’s the other way round. The pyramid is upside down. Everybody is telling everybody else what to do.’ (Saturday, 11 March 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

The contested hierarchy at Uncle Sam’s is worth focusing upon as a microcosm — the small-scale realization of a larger inequitable gender order — where workers competed to assert their own masculine valour and worth. Here various group members, independent of their biological sex and financial remuneration, attempted to establish themselves as the type of person who gives rather than takes orders: to be masculine and controlling of others rather than to be controlled by others doing situationally dominant masculinity. Even if the head doorman supported such enactments by particular workers, not all members accepted this delegated authority. Paul, a full-time doorman who welcomed and zealously executed his managerial role, was often disparaged in his absence. Here social capital, in the absence of requisite bodily capital, was begrudgingly invoked to explain his supervisory position:

At the end of the night Wayne talked disparagingly about Paul to two other doormen. Wayne doubted Paul’s physical abilities as a doorman but attributed his position at Uncle Sam’s to a long-standing friendship with Fred: ‘they used to work together at Star Bright, going back a few years, and I think he’s let their friendship go to his head. There’s nothing to him though. [Tongue in cheek] If you see him get into some trouble, let him get a bit of a kicking before going in to help!’ (Saturday, 11 March 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Trevor, a part-time doorman who, in his early forties, was the oldest doorman at this venue, often complained about Paul’s non-egalitarian managerial style. During an informal ethnographic interview, Trevor reported openly challenging Paul’s hierarchical posturing and unreasonable commands in a working context populated by vibrant, effervescent bodies. Here ‘masculine subjects […] constitute the organizational and managerial world as a series of discrete challenges, in order to rise above them’ (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996, p. 91). Irrespective of the validity of his account, Trevor’s story casts him in the masculine role of the ‘sensible’ hero who put his domineering colleague in his ‘proper’ place. Such ironic talk is also suggestive of the ways in which a neo-tribal mentality among certain doormen may spill over into fascism (cf. Turner, 1998, p. 16):

Trevor complained about Paul: ‘He takes it way too seriously. He loves it. He’s like a little Hitler! I don’t mind being told to go from one part of the club to another, but there’s some things I won’t do.’ Trevor recounted instances when Paul instructed him to ‘throw’ people out of the club when force was unwarranted: ‘There was this one boy, jumping about,
and Paul goes, “Chuck him out, he’s a nuisance.” I was like, “What?” He wasn’t doing anything different from anybody else. Everybody was jumping about. Am I supposed to throw everybody out, am I? I just told Paul to stop being so bloody stupid.’ (Saturday, 23 September 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

As noted, antagonisms between doorstaff sometimes resulted in overt conflict. Within a context of hierarchical relations, power was exercised and resisted despite the possibility of displeasing the head and instant dismissal. As evidenced below, the contradictory practice of doorwork may provide the interactive basis for masculine identity while fostering ingroup relations that challenge gendered selfhood. And, as noted by Messerschmidt (1999), violence or the threat of violence may represent a male-coded, working-class bodily strategy for correcting subordinating social situations:

Fred told me about some conflict occurring last night between two doormen — Mark and Paul — which almost resulted in them being dismissed. Apparently, Mark took offence because Paul adopted an authoritative position inside the club and issued him with instructions. Fred said Mark and Paul were almost fighting: ‘I asked Mark what the fuck was wrong. If he was working in a factory he’d have to take orders from a supervisor so what’s the difference? He said he’s not taking orders off Paul. I told ‘em that neither of them are floating [supervising] inside and if there’s any more trouble they’re both sacked.’ Later that evening I asked both Mark and Paul, on separate occasions, about their reported conflict. Both confirmed Fred’s story, but provided slightly different accounts. Mark told me he took exception to Paul giving him orders and, when he told him how he felt, was ‘pissed off to find out that Paul had gone running to Fred and was telling tales … I told him if he had a problem to talk to me about it. Not Fred. I said if he’s gonna do that then we can step out into the car park and sort our troubles out that way.’ Later, I asked Paul about the incident. Paul looked exasperated and exclaimed: ‘Oh, I can’t be doing with it! He wanted to fight me, he wanted a fight in the car park! What’s the point?’ (Saturday, 15 July 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

Non-confrontational strategies were also employed as a means of resistance. Such efforts were especially politic when the head doorman had delegated authority to specific team members. Kara, similar to Paul, worked only as a door supervisor and exercised her supervisory role with tremendous enthusiasm. As indicated below, the private disparagement of Kara by others (who had other, full-time jobs) was one strategy among others for saving face. Such performances, which were implicated in the construction of appropriate masculinities in relation to a working female body, contrast with more confrontational enactments that could have threatened these
doormen’s nocturnal employment and (perhaps more importantly) their standing in male hierarchies:

There seems to be a degree of jostling among certain doorstaff for a position of authority. Kara, in particular, often takes control of situations and enjoys giving orders. Her enactment of situationally dominant masculinity is particularly surprising given her sex, bodily size and relative youth (twenty-two). At the start of the night I observed her give Mark (an older, physically larger doorman) a hand-held ‘clicker’ — which is used to keep a record of numbers of customers entering the premises — before instructing him to go inside and find out how many customers were in the club. After pausing and taking stock, Mark replied: ‘Oh, we should just guess. I’d say there was about 100 in there.’ The social dynamics between Kara and the other doormen were beyond my field of observation for the rest of the evening. However, at the end of the night Big K, looking somewhat disgruntled, said to me: ‘That Kara is too bossy.’ I remember Wayne, looking equally peeved, expressed a similar sentiment last week. (Friday, 10 March 2000: *Uncle Sam’s*).

Humour and the public exchange of insults, in situations where work and leisure intersect, were another strategy employed by doorstaff for resisting assumed or assigned authority and constructing gendered identities. During the following heterosexist denunciation, Wayne accuses Paul (who had recurrent back problems and was deemed to be a liability by others) of being a passive homosexual. This crude ‘body talk’ — which embarrassed Paul as evidenced through blushing — reiterates a previous point concerning the subordination of homosexual masculinities in male hierarchies and the fact that physical impairments render the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance highly vulnerable (Connell, 1995, p. 54):

At the end of the shift all ten doorstaff sat at two tables with their complementary drink. They chatted among themselves in smaller groups of threes and fours. Even so, there was much bantering and an exchange of ‘light-hearted’ insults between groups. Wayne, for example, recounted how a foreign customer, who was escorted out of the club via the fire escape, made an unusual request. This then provided ammunition for insults: ‘He asked to be searched for drugs. He said he’d take his underpants off and crouch down if we wanted. Aye, Paul, maybe he’s met you in the past and he thinks that’s normal.’ Several laughed. Paul, looking embarrassed, retorted ‘Fuck off!’ Wayne continued: ‘Or maybe it’s you that takes it from behind. You’re the one that crouches over! Aye, is that why you’ve always got a bad back?’ Paul, looking extremely red in the face, repeated his previous response. (Thursday, 23 March 2000: *Uncle Sam’s*).

Finally, internal group hierarchy was contested through playful violence and talk about such violence. Again, the following excerpt refers to Paul,
who left Uncle Sam’s shortly after this reported incident. Significantly, the doorstaff recounting the incident disparaged Paul not least because his ‘failure’ to police himself for weakness (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996, p. 92) belied his long-standing masculine enactments. Analytically, it is important to stress that male hierarchy is never static nor guaranteed; it is processual, contested and requires the continual bodily (re)production of situational dominance, authority and subordination. Masculinity is very precarious and, especially in working-class male peer groups, may be forcefully usurped in a public and humiliating manner:

Terry told me about Paul’s tearful reaction after several doormen ‘took the piss’. According to Terry he left Uncle Sam’s on Saturday night then started his shift at Oceanic. Paul appeared at the club entrance with the in-group expectation that he wouldn’t need to queue and would be granted free access: ‘Phil who was on the front door, only messing like, told Paul “no chance”. Paul asked Phil to radio me, so he did, and I said “Who? Aghh, Tell him to fuck off!” Nick [another doorman] then grappled with him and gave him a little dig in the ribs. Honestly, we were all just messing like. Next thing, he starts crying. We couldn’t believe it!’ Lisa, who also works at Oceanic, overheard the latter part of the conversation. She confirmed Terry’s story, laughed, and said: ‘Yeah, I was there. I was calling him puppy-eyed Paul after that!’ Terry added: ‘He even came for a drink with us afterwards! [Tongue in cheek.] If it was me who burst out crying in front of the boys I would have gone straight home.’ (Thursday, 23 November 2000: Uncle Sam’s)

In summary, assumed and assigned hierarchy between the larger body of doorstaff may be particularly problematic not least because it is enacted in the absence of formal rank, office, qualifications and pay differentials. Embodied distinctions between doorstaff in terms of occupational competence may be culturally constructed, recognized and rewarded (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)) but most of these workers — with the exception of the head doorman — are formally of equal standing. Certainly, head doormen may delegate some internal authority to specific workers, thereby buttressing their sense of masculinity, but no specific occupational markers legitimate this supervisory position. Interestingly, in a masculinist occupation that values the cultivation of honour and reputation, a proportion of workers will be sufficiently motivated to adopt authoritarian or dominating styles of body use (Frank, 1991) in relation to their colleagues independent of financial remuneration or endorsement from their head. (Because such gendered enactments could result in instant dismissal, economic motivation may, in specific situations, be irrelevant to the embodiment of gender, work and organization.) During this ethnography, the initiation of such posturing was more acute among full-time members, such as Paul, who had no other form of masculine validation. (Paul, who was in his thirties and single, had
no children, lived with his grandmother and had little prospect of meaningful work in the formal economy.) What therefore appeared to be at stake, among certain doorstaff I encountered, was the successful presentation or bodily performance of situationally dominant masculinity in a context of in-group power relations. Within a competitive, heterosexist, masculinist occupation which values the exercise of dominance, discipline and control by appropriately gendered bodies, a proportion of doorstaff enacted hegemony within their peer groups and/or resisted power exercised by their formally equal colleagues. As observed, such resistance consisted of private disparagement or psychological distance (Turner, 1998), the public exchange of insults and humour, overt conflict and sometimes physical violence. Whether this ‘horizontal’ violence was serious or playful, it challenged, reversed and/or (re)produced informal hierarchy among embodied, emotional workers constituting a tightly bounded yet unstable masculinist occupation.

Conclusion

Connell (1995), in his body-aware study of masculinities, underscores the importance of concrete study rather than a priori theorizing. Similarly, Frank’s (1991) work on the body notes the importance of research when grappling theoretically with messy empirical realities. Nonetheless, relatively little social scientific work systematically explores the embodied worlds of actual flesh and blood bodies (Wacquant, 1995). Using an embodied sociological perspective and ethnography on masculinist/embodied in-group workplace relations, this article goes some way towards redressing this lacuna. In short, it contributes to the theoretically informed empirical study of gendered bodies, work and organization.

Consonant with workshop ethnographies, this article first explored worker solidarity. Relevant questions included: how and why do workers, doing masculinist work, form allegiances and how is this embodied and enacted in relation to other groups? And, are economic considerations central in such processes? As observed, occupational risks in Britain’s fast-expanding liminal night-time economy (Hobbs et al., 2000) (e.g. violence from customers, police arrest, instant dismissal), render doorwork (at least at particular moments) ‘hot’ and ‘thick’ (Turner, 1998) in its mode of social organization. A sense of unity within and between ‘neo-tribal’ (Maffesoli, 1996) door teams, while containing an important expressive dimension, is instrumental in providing workers with real and imagined protection from externally imposed risk. For predominantly young, working-class men who are often recruited informally to doorwork through pre-existing relationships and lines of trust (Winlow et al., 2001), ‘social relations are [typically] bifurcated around the contrast between friend/enemy […] the political is
defined by the violence between insiders/outiders, a conflict that makes political life moral and meaningful’ (Turner, 1998, p. 13). Given the possibility of negative sanctions and other dangers from without (Monaghan, forthcoming (b)), it may be situationally appropriate and a matter of self-preservation for these ‘vulnerable’ and often disposable working bodies to establish and present themselves as members of a mutually supportive group or network. The law of secrecy or ‘guilty knowledge’ (Morgan, 1992), for example, and domineering styles of body use (Frank, 1991) against threatening customers, position these workers against established powers while also uniting them with their work mates in a non-accidental, structurally effective way (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 91).

Economic concerns are, of course, important in market societies (Taylor, 1999) and require further attention. Undoubtedly, subterranean visceral formations such as doorwork, while offending dominant bourgeois morality and infracting legal precepts, are integral to capital accumulation and income generation. In the ‘frontier’ of Britain’s fast expanding night-time economy, violence has been described as an economic resource and marketable asset (Hobbs et al., 2002). Indeed, violence can be considered a means of claiming or defending a myriad of privileges, including material rewards (Connell, 2002) which, for private security personnel themselves, are often minimal (Winlow, 2001). Yet, while economic considerations may be more or less significant at various (macro-, meso- and micro-) levels of social analysis, a central argument in this article is that routine and routinized workplace relations must be more closely viewed as embodied/gendered practical accomplishments. ‘Sensual solidarities’ (Mellor and Shilling, 1997), the ‘sensual seductions’ of illicit social action (Katz, 1988), alongside the defence of male honour, reputation and material bodies through male-coded violence (Messerschmidt, 1999), all indicate that doorstaff cannot be adequately characterized as disembodied or cold-blooded rational/economic actors. Similar to others labouring under exploitative class relations, doorstaff may be ‘economic bodies’ engaged in a calculative search for monetary gain, but they are also much more — they are gendered, emotional, ‘lived bodies’ (Williams and Bendelow, 1998) embroiled in rich, complex social relationships.

Of course, it was noted that even within this often cohesive masculinist occupation, wider social structures and sources of inequality are embodied and enacted. Ethnicity and gender are pervasive social divisions and sources of material disadvantage. For some, although by no means all, ethnic minority doorstaff contacted during this ethnography, their assigned inferiority and ‘illegitimate’ membership resulted in lack of support within supposedly unified, bounded (predominantly white) door teams. In-group antagonisms, indicating that worker solidarity cannot be taken for granted, also emerged given the internal formation of masculine cliques and fragmented loyalties independent of racially differentiated bodies. The forging
of alliances, and the exclusion of certain workers embodying subordinate masculinities, were certainly observed during fieldwork. And, in illustrating the point that bodies are vehicles of gendered power (Connell, 1995), it was noted that physically large doormen may place doorwomen on the boundaries of inclusion (and even on the boundary between life and death, e.g. Kara who was reportedly held over a banister by two doormen). Such physical and discursive practices, in a context of differentially valued bodily capital (Monaghan, forthcoming (a)), buttressed social ties between certain workers while simultaneously reproducing gendered hierarchy and social risk positions.

Internal hierarchy was explored further in the latter half of the article. Here attention focused upon embodied power relations between head doormen and their charges as well as the larger body of formally equal doorstaff. Despite the importance of group solidarity, workplace relations (re)produced a contested gender order. During this ethnography, observed hierarchical relations between head doormen and their workers were sometimes positive and productive but they were also more or less exploitative. Certainly, these inequitable power relations were often circumscribed by various concerns (e.g. economic interdependence and reciprocity) that possibly promoted (though never guaranteed) civility and mutual respect. However, hierarchical workplace relations between other doorstaff embodying plural masculinities were not necessarily tempered by such considerations, indicating the degree to which gender (a pervasive social division and structure of sometimes violent social relations) is not epiphenomenal to organizational and economic life (Connell, 2002). It was claimed that the potential for intra-group conflict and violence, which is a component of domination but also a measure of imperfection in gendered hierarchies (Connell, 1995, p. 84), was greater among the larger body of door supervisors. Given a rudimentary division of labour and the absence of official rank, doorstaff contacted during fieldwork had few formal means to distinguish themselves from their fellow team members. And, for those whose gendered identities were intimately associated with being socially dominant and domineering in relation to their peers (e.g. full-time workers with few sources of masculine validation), selfhood and hierarchical organization were precarious ongoing practical accomplishments. As indicated, strategies employed by ‘subordinated’ doorstaff for resisting and subverting their colleagues’ commonly assumed or assigned dominance ranged from humour or ‘ironic coolness’ (Turner, 1998) to physical violence. And, as suggested by Connell (1995, 2002), the body is thoroughly implicated in these gendered processes.

Most door teams, most of the time, exhibit a high degree of internal pacification. At least, this is the understanding derived from the present study despite occasional observations of intra-group conflict and violence. Even so, the culture of doorwork, similar to the larger ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992)
to which it belongs, is a highly gendered and stratified domain where allegiances and alliances are formed alongside the enactment of intra- and inter-group exclusion and subordination. Arguably, the sometimes crude enactment of competing and plural masculinities in this working-class occupation provides a useful microcosm for exploring the unattractive doings of gender, work and organization more generally. Indeed, if masculinity is characterized in terms of a desire to control (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996), then doorwork is an exemplary masculinist occupation, possibly facilitating analyses of gendered power relations in other workplace settings. No doubt, the physical and discursive enactments of gender in supposedly more civilized and ‘dis-embodied’ institutions such as higher education will take more slick and subtle forms. Yet, according to emergent studies, similar gendered processes are evidenced in disparate contexts largely populated by middle-class professionals (Prichard, 1996). Indeed, organizational research is increasingly drawing academic and policy attention to the social consequences of male-coded behaviour, which is never the exclusive province of male bodies (Collinson and Hearn, 1996). Workplace bullying, for instance, is a particularly disturbing manifestation of inequitable inter- and intra-gendered power relations. Similarly, more diplomatic yet quasi-fraudulent ‘cooling-out’ (Goffman, 1962) tactics, which transform employees to a less favourable social status, are increasingly likely in a highly flexible, insecure and impersonal labour market characterized by thin solidarities and transient loyalties (Turner, 1998). Hopefully, the present ethnography sensitizes other researchers to some of the gendered doings and processes possibly taking a more diluted form in organizations co-constituted by thinking, emotional, lived bodies. In that respect, the cool yet sometimes fiery bodily practices of doorwork — while distasteful to many middle-class academics — may be far from idiosyncratic.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the two anonymous referees for commenting upon an earlier draft of this article.

References


