
Exploratory Report: The smoking ban: Perceptions of safety on Edinburgh's scene



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INTRODUCTION

The smoking ban was introduced in Scotland on the 26th March, 2006 making smoking in enclosed public places illegal (Haw *et al.*, 2006). Generally the ban has the support of the majority of Scotland's population. For example, of the 1,040 individuals interviewed, 73% thought that the ban had been *very successful* or *successful*. A number of strategies have been set in motion to assess the significant health gains that the ban entails for the population of Scotland. However, one aspect of health that has not been considered in the evaluative process is that of personal safety as a consequence of standing outside public venues (Clearingtheairscotland.com, 2007).

The majority of leisure establishments in Edinburgh are currently not equipped with purpose-built, discrete areas for those clients who wish to smoke. As a result, the only option for smokers - if they choose to continue smoking - is to stand outside on the street. Research has consistently shown that pubs and clubs (especially at weekends) are 'hotspots' for violent or abusive behaviour (Allen *et al.*, 2003). A report commissioned by the Home Office in 2004 cited 'violent behaviour in and around pubs and clubs on weekend nights [as presenting] a significant public health, criminal justice and urban management problem' (Finney, 2004).

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual venues

Previous surveys have shown that anti-gay hate-crimes are most likely to occur (a) on the street outside well-known gay venues and (b) late at night (Morrison & Mackay, 2000; Mason & Palmer, 1996; Berrill, 1992). The smoking ban presents lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (LGBs) with new challenges relating to the negotiation of their sexual orientations / identities and the subsequent

disclosure of them. LGBs often adopt 'managing' strategies to 'pass' as heterosexual in social arenas where they are unsure of the attitudes of others, or to avert negative attention or overt discrimination (see Steinbugler, 2005; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Mason, 2001; Edwards, 2005; Seidman *et al.*, 1999).

In Scotland, those studies aimed at evaluating the impact of the smoking ban have, to all intents and purposes, ignored members of Scotland's LGB population, focusing primarily upon the impact of the ban for families and children. Thus, LGBs represent a silent group in this nationwide evaluation. Consequently, the aim of this exploratory (qualitative) study is to understand the effects of the new social regime on LGBs who smoke.

METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven individuals who currently identify as LGB. The initial decision to approach the topic from a qualitative perspective was in part based upon the novelty of the subject matter and the need for a developmental framework in which to explore fully issues raised by participants.

Criteria for inclusion in the study required that potential participants were smokers, identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB), socialised in Edinburgh's gay-identified pubs and clubs, and were over the age of 19 years (thus they had some experience of socialising in gay-identified venues prior to the smoking ban). Five gay males (aged between 22 years and 38 years) and two bisexual females (ages were 21 and 22 years respectively) were interviewed. The size of the sample, although small, is acceptable for exploratory research and conforms to the recommendations of Smith *et al.* (1999) for meaningful initial investigations.

Procedure

Flyers and advertisements were circulated to gay-identified venues and organisations throughout Edinburgh over a period of three months. The semi-structured interviews covered three broad themes:

- The experience of the increase in visibility;
- The emotional factors associated with increased visibility;
- Behaviour modification as a result of increased visibility.

Questions were developed for each theme, and a list of prompts was devised (see Appendix). Prior to conducting the interviews, a pilot run was undertaken with the cooperation of a 21 year old gay male student resident in Glasgow. The pilot interview offered an opportunity to assess the efficacy of the semi-structured interview structure, allowing for minor alterations to the vocabulary and structure the questions.

All of the interviews were conducted in safe public venues. Participants were presented with the information sheets upon arrival together with a consent form. All the interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 14-52 minutes. Transcription of the interviews was undertaken by the first author.

Prior to data collection, this project was approved by the Ethics Committee of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

RESULTS

The results indicated that the ban on smoking has had an impact upon participants in numerous ways.

Heightened awareness

Most of the participants referred to the increase in awareness that smoking outside a gay bar now entails. It is important to note that this increase in awareness is not always associated with a concomitant decrease in positive social experience. Furthermore, the extent of the shift in intensity of awareness did vary across participants. However, for some, this heightened awareness was all-encompassing: it was intrusive and constant whether they were smoking on their own, in a group, or with friends. As one participant (Mike) explains:

...aware of the number of passers by that, that are not not at the club and there is potentially there is yeah yeah although I wouldn't sort of intend to be looking at who's walking past but I'm...I'm aware of you know...maybe I'm a bit more streetwise since I'm, I'm aware of the fact that there could be individuals who are eh or who wouldn't look upon my lifestyle as as as easy as other people would look like em and I wouldn't eh I'd just be a bit more aware you know

Another participant (Richard) further stressed the notion of this pervasive, chronic awareness by referring to it as a 'middle eye'. He was also very specific in making a distinction between heightened awareness due to being outside, and heightened awareness due to being outside a gay-identified bar:

If I'm, at a gay bar yeah. I'm always aware if I'm standing outside a gay bar having a cigarette. If my friends are there or if I'm out on my own. I still think the awareness or you know the, the middle eye is still looking out

Steven and Emma also talked about their heightened awareness of themselves when smoking outside gay-identified venues, but they were explicit in separating an increase in awareness from an increase in perceived vulnerability:

Steven: I've only just noticed this because, as I say I don't really frequent gay bars that often but I've noticed it in the Regent And I, just over the last couple of weeks I'm aware- particularly if I'm on my own. Just through traffic and I notice "oh I'm standing outside a gay bar"

Emma: Em, I would feel slightly more aware of myself than normal, than in a sort of, in a straight club cos as I said I don't go to gay clubs much. But, yeah, I'd feel slightly more aware that I was outside a gay club, or gay pub would probably be more accurate, em, than normal. But, it wouldn't particularly bother me.

Overall, the action of standing outside a gay-identified bar or club smoking was one which made some of the participants more self-aware than when they stand outside a non-gay identified venue.

Loss of control

One result of this intense self-awareness was a perception of a decrease in control. For one participant (Sophie), this heightened awareness had been directed specifically towards her sense of control over her personal physical safety. She had become extra vigilant and yet was simultaneously aware of the futility of this vigilance due to the stationary aspect of standing outside:

When you're in, when you go into somewhere, you learn where the exits are, you learn where the bar is and you learn who looks a bit shady and who doesn't but, when you're outside you don't really have that. It could be anybody who walks past you.

Later, Sophie draws attention to her depleted hold over personal safety by pointing out a specific and dangerous practicality of smoking outside a gay-identified venue:

Um, I mean. If you're walking down the street and somebody comes up to you, you can move away from that person...but if you're standing outside smoking a cigarette, knowing that your only safe haven is behind you, and somebody with a problem comes up to you...you have two choices. You can either walk away from that safe venue or go back inside. But by going back inside it means the person there knows you're in there.

Mike also conceptualises the places where he socialises as being safe havens as opposed to the unpredictable and uncontrollable world outside:

Where I do socialise I I I can get in the four walls of the establishments and I can be myself. I don't have to look over my shoulder constantly [whereas] I am, whatever, very aware even getting on a bus, Richard [his partner] for example you know, he comes and he sits down beside me and I sort think you're leaving yourself open there for a potential attack verbally so...and physically and you, I'm uncomfortable with that cos I don't like to- its just the fear in a way of you know, you could be open for an attack and I don't want that you know.. and I would rather you use damage limitation.

Some participants reported feeling that they were no longer able to conceal their sexual orientation from others. Mike discussed the potential impact disclosure of his sexual orientation would have for clients with whom he works:

But clients who I deal with, my transactional work that's [his sexuality] information that is superfluous, they don't need to know that cos you know it could potentially, they may not look upon me in the same respect, you know as a professional. Some people have this warped idea, you know that type of thing, so why make life that little more awkward. Yeah when it can be avoided. I mean I am, I'm not shying away from who I am it should...only if I choose to volunteer that information. Then yeah that choice is taken away from me. I could be standing outside C.C.'s having a cigarette and my client walks past, you don't think that he might consider "oh he could be there with gay friends and he's actually straight". And again it's a niggling worry. You know cos I do take my job seriously and I don't want to put my organisation through potentially having to discipline or dismiss a client through a personal attack against me.

Richard experienced the most sinister aspect of such accidental revelation when he was verbally abused by teenagers with whom he worked. His presence outside a gay bar acted as confirmation for the teenagers of his perceived sexual orientation, and provided them with an agenda to harass him.

and they clearly know that I am gay...or maybe they don't. But then suddenly they did. And it's those kids who I have to worry about because it's those kids who I have been targeted by before and the difficulties of chasing that up is really hard.

Coupled with the obvious distress associated with being harassed, Richard was also aware of his lack of control in rectifying the situation. He described how normal institutional and societal sanctions against homophobia did not apply on the street, and this evoked in him a sense of overall lack of control.

I feel actually I'm more protected in my work place than I am out on the streets. Yeah, cos the kids know what the sanctions are, they know what the rules are, they know what they can and can't say. The kids know what they are and aren't allowed to do within the establishment. When you're out on the street and it's the same kids, I think the whole ball game is different. The rules have changed, you know.

Emotional well-being

Sophie refers to the frustration she feels as a result of the additional stress she has to contend with if she wants to continue smoking when socialising in gay-identified venues:

It's difficult enough to be brave enough to go into a place that's openly gay without then being penalized for being a gay smoker. I don't think it's fair. If society changed I think it probably would be okay. But we're always going to have people who are not going to accept us so why can't the government decide to look after us.

Sophie seems genuinely disappointed in the lack of protection she experiences. She also refers to the added difficulty that the ban presents to LGBs with disabilities who smoke:

But I don't think we should be made to because...people who are wary of being outside a gay bar at night and people who have disabilities. It makes it more difficult for them to socialize. It's bad enough and difficult enough for someone who's gay with a disability to socialize without then being told "Out you go onto the street".

Richard also referred to the frustration he feels at having to consider his personal safety when he smokes:

But yeah the, the being conscious of the safety aspect and the being a little bit more aware. It does irritate me that I have to be like that.

Enforced visibility

A consequence of the smoking ban is inevitably increased visibility for LGBs who smoke:

Sophie - 'It's like putting a signpost over your head'

Emma - 'It's the whole target thing'

Richard - 'clearly blatantly outside a gay bar...in the line of fire cause you're automatically, you're wearing your sexuality on your sleeve If you're outside a gay bar having a fag.'

According to Emma the more gender-typical a person is, the less likely she or he is to feel self-conscious:

Again, though, I don't I don't look specifically stereotypically gay in any way, I don't, I'm not particularly butch for, you know people with

stereotypes who would go "that girl must be a lesbian cos she dresses and looks like that" and I don't so I'm not, I don't think I'm as much of a target, so to speak, for harassment potentially. But one of my friends who does look quite butch who is a lesbian people maybe turn round and look a little bit more at her, you know

Experiences of intolerance/harassment

A consistent theme to emerge from the interviews related to prior experience of homophobia. Richard, who was harassed outside a gay-identified venue only six weeks prior to the interview, describes how his view of the danger element associated with smoking outside has intensified. For him, knowledge that this exposure can result in a negative outcome has left him anxious and vigilant when he smokes:

I've had a couple of run-ins outside with [harassers] that I don't [work with directly] but who know who I am...and they clearly know my sexual orientation and they've had a real good pop at me. Which isn't particularly great, ahm, so yeah I'm very cautious when I go out for a smoke.

Mike is Richard's partner, and was with him on the night of the most recent attack. For Mike, the experience of leaving a gay-identified bar where he has stood outside smoking is one of trepidation. Due to the frustration and outrage he felt after the last episode, he uses hyper-vigilance as a preventative tactic to avoid further harassment.

There will always be some people who will attack what they feel is not acceptable but your own behaviour can sometimes perpetuate it and again its being smart, smart thinking, being proactive...look ahead, watch what your doing, watch where your going, little bit of planning. I mean after the attack, Richard and I, we...we always always get a cab home... we have to get a cab home.

Sophie also made reference to the fact that she had been attacked before, but did not elaborate whether the attack had occurred as a result of her sexual orientation. She did, however, refer to friends of hers who were attacked because they are LGB, and the subsequent impact that this has had on her general level of active risk-assessment.

I'm knowing a lot of people who got mug-got hurt on the way home, so you just, you're careful

A dangerous core

Participants explicitly asserted that any strategies they employ are to protect them from a 'hard core' minority group of people who believe that have a right to harass LGBs. As one might expect, these protective strategies involve avoiding particular venues or geographical areas of the City on evenings and weekends:

But, em, like yeah just George street for example now definitely not, it very you just wouldn't do it there's too many men kicking around, it's the influx from the outskirts of the city you know and that's you know George street, nah I just wouldn't go near the place. Again I don't like them and it's not cos there not gay friendly it's...I don't like the clientele, it's very rough and chavy (laughs) emm...I mean what I'm thinking of it, that's sort of particular individuals I don't share much either my ideals my morals my standards I mean you don't encounter kindred hearts there.

Oh absolutely, ahm, I wouldn't go drinking on Rose Street. I wouldn't go drinking on George Street. Yeah but there are definitely places that I wouldn't dream of going out for a drink on a weekend or I wouldn't at anytime to be honest. Well...based on their location, based on the higher possibility of having some sort of abuse thrown at me not that I think I'm a particularly camp, in-your-face man. Ahm, but you know it's the other people that you've got to consider.

DISCUSSION

Participants' responses suggest that issues of heightened awareness, loss of control, and fear for physical and emotional well-being are closely linked to the experience of standing outside a gay-identified venue. For some the fear of heightened exposure interferes with their social experience and promulgates a sense of diminished control over personal safety. For example Sophie remarked that she feels uncomfortable standing outside a gay bar smoking, and describes that feeling as enforced entrapment - alerting potentially aggressive members of the public to her whereabouts. However, participants also recognised that the ban poses dangers for heterosexual customers standing outside bars and clubs - particularly young women.

A diminished sense of control over personal safety was accompanied by a perceived lack of control in 'coming out'. Simply put, 'being caught'

outside a pub or club can have wider ramifications than personal safety. For Richard and Mike, inadvertent disclosure could impact upon on their work environment, career advancement, and general quality of life.

For members of the LGB community who smoke, a gay-identified bar or club does not always serve as a safe haven where individuals can socialise without fear overt harassment. For those in the early or tentative stages of coming out, exposure to negative comments or abuse by passers-by can have a significant emotional impact which delays or impedes positive development.

A particularly distressing element emerging from the interviews relates to the anxiety and confusion some participants expressed because of the constraints placed upon their behaviour. For example, Richard's observation that the rules change from the workplace to the street is very poignant. For Richard, the protections he has as an employee are more effective than those he has as a citizen.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to capture some of the issues and experiences of LGBs who are forced to stand outside gay-identified venues (bars or clubs) when smoking. For some the ban has introduced an extra stressor into their social lives wherein personal safety and right to control disclosure of sexual orientation is compromised. Issues such as heightened awareness, loss of control, negative affect, and internal conflict have been discussed, particularly by those who had previously encountered homophobia, and by those who are concerned about the ramifications of being seen outside a gay-identified venue. Participants understand the difficulties faced by the owners of gay-identified venues in providing suitable accommodation for customers who smoke. However, it is incumbent upon the owners of those venues to work constructively with the Council and the Police Force to ensure that customers who face abuse or harassment whilst smoking know that they can report it and that, wherever possible, action will be taken.

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NOTE:

We acknowledge that we have omitted transgender citizens from this report, however, we are aware that transgender people also face harassment. Much more research is needed into the lived experience of transgender women and men, and it should not be inferred that the authors believe that the issues raised in this report (a) do not apply to transgender people, or (b) are not as serious.

This report is based upon a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Health Psychology by Leah Cronin.

APPENDIX
Semi-structured interview schedule

How do you think your smoking behaviour has been affected by the ban?

Have you noticed a difference in the amount you are smoking?

How often do you go outside for a cigarette on an average night out?

In general, how well-equipped are Edinburgh's gay bars and clubs for smokers?

When you're out, how common would it be for you to be in a gay bar or club?

What's a typical pattern for you on a night out

Would you start out in a gay bar or straight bar?

What time would you normally be in a gay venue?

At what time/s would you place yourself as being outside a gay bar smoking?

How do you feel when you're standing outside a gay bar having a cigarette?

Could you describe the experience of standing outside a well-known gay venue smoking?

How would you describe your awareness of yourself?

Would you normally go out alone or with friends?

How do you think the experience is affected by whether you are on your own or with friends- could you explain how it differs/is the same?

Do you drink alcohol?

How do you think the experience of standing outside is affected by your alcohol consumption/ how do you find it affects other people around you?

What are your opinions on personal safety- how much attention do you pay to personal safety?

Why do you think this is?

What impact do passers-by have on you?

If you do notice them, what do you think they are thinking?

How do you feel about that?

How open are you in regards to your sexuality?

Is that the same in all your relationships such as friends, family, workmates, new people that you encounter?

What do you think about public displays of affection between same-sex couples?

How comfortable would you feel kissing or holding hands with a same-sex partner in public?

If yes, is this always the case in every scenario?

If no, why do you try and refrain from public displays of affection?

How would you compare public affection to standing outside a gay bar in terms of revealing your sexuality to passers-by?

Why do you think this is?

How would you compare your awareness of passers-by in the two situations?

What do you think about the location of Edinburgh's gay bars and clubs?

How safe do you feel the areas are?

Have you anything else you'd like to say about what we've discussed?