24 Hour Party People? An Ethnographic Study of Hedonism in Stoke-on-Trent's Night-Time-Economies.

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the place of hedonism in the contemporary night-time-economy in Stoke on Trent. Based on ethnography, and extensive in depth interviewing and participant observation in a range of social settings in and around the city, it considers the changes and continuities that frame experiences of sybaritic harms in Stoke, particularly in its nocturnal drinking venues.

The thesis commences with a consideration of the historical socio, economic, political and cultural place of Stoke-on-Trent, a unique and yet hitherto little considered area in the United Kingdom that is now understood as post-industrial. It moves from this to consider framing debates on violence, consumerism, individualism and inebriation and the surrounding framing criminological debate around these concepts, before moving to consider specifically how the NTE has been understood as a context for social harm. It moves then to revisit this literature and use it, developing emergent criminological ideas associated with *Ultra-realism* to consider contemporary harms in the NTE of Stoke, a hitherto largely unstudied context that has transformed from a hub of nightlife to a decaying nocturnal economy.

It makes a significant knowledge contribution in the form of empirical material gathered through extensive ethnographic engagement and uses much of the thick data from this to show how the NTE and hedonistic drives in Stoke can be understood within the wider macro-context of neoliberalism. It then ties this data to theories and ideas emerging from *Ultra-realism*, seeking to broaden and reconsider how we understand the dynamics and complexities of social harms in the NTE.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to both my nana Joan, who passed away on the 29th of February 2024, and my beautiful baby boy, Fionn Francis Owen, born on the 10th of January 2024. You both are shining lights amidst the occasional darkness of life. A guardian angel and a gift from God. I strive to make the two of you proud always.

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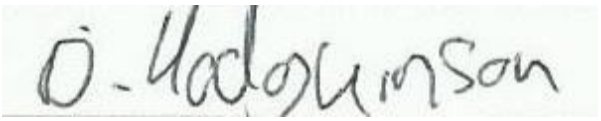
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not previously been submitted for any other degree at Staffordshire University or another institution.



Contents

1 - Chapter 1: Introduction

5 - Defining the Night-Time Economy

8 - Chapter Structure

12 - Chapter 2: *Vis Unita Fortior* – The History of Stoke-on-Trent

12 - Introduction

14 - A New World of Industrialism and Work

17 - Toughness & Resilience

23 - Alcohol & Crime

30 - Peaks and Troughs of the Golden Era

37 - Skint Consumers: The Neoliberal Era

44 - Permanent Decline?

49 - From Vibrant to Vacant, Hotspot to Danger Zone

50 - Conclusion

52 - Chapter 3: Literature Review

52 - Introduction

52 - The Growth of the Night-Time-Economy

52 - The 24-Hour City

55 - Hipster Capitalism

56 - Competing Nightlife

58 - Leisure & Its Function

62 - Individualism and Consumption

62 - Early Theories

65 - Over the Counterculture

68 - Nightlife Drives and the Death of Resistance

69 - Uber-Individual Adulthood

71 - Theories and Approaches to Violence

75 - Gang Violence & Moral Panics

77 - The Failures of Left-Idealism/Realism

80 - Masculinity & Violence

83 - Elias & The Civilising Process

84 - Nightlife, Violence & Late Capitalism

89 - Under the Influence

89 - Theorising Inebriation

91 - Normalisation of Drug Use

92 - The Drug Trade

93 - Normalisation of Cocaine?

95 - Binge Britain

98 - Inebriation Through the Lens of Consumerism

99 - Conclusion

101 - Chapter 4: Research Methodology

101 - Introduction

101 - Rationale

104 - Research Design

105 - Theoretical Framework – *Ultra-realism*

109 - Reflexivity

112 - Interviewing & Observing

121 - Research Questions, Aims & Objectives

122 - Sampling & Recruitment

131 - Harm to the Researcher

134 - Harm to Participants

138 - Researching the Inebriated

140 - Conclusion

142 - Chapter 5: Youth Transitions into Adult Violence in the NTE

143 - The Criminal Undertaker and Self-Preservation

147 - Territoriality

152 - Infantilised Violence

156 - Codes of Violence & The Pseudo-Pacification Process

163 - Rage Banking

166 - Cultures of Violence and Deprivation

170 - The Banality of Violence

174 - Conclusion

176 - Chapter 6: An Atomised Community

176 - Introduction

176 - (Mythical) paradise lost

181 - Community in Recession – The Case of Sully

185 - Community in Recession – Anhedonia and Jouissance

189 - The Injunction to Enjoy

194 - Standing Out from the Crowd

198 - 'I'm Better Than You'

204 - Conclusion

206 - Chapter 7: Expressive Individualism

206 - Introduction

206 - Scenes & Pseudo-Communities

209 - ‘Real’ Friends

212 - The Last Venue Standing for Socialisation

215 - Depressive Consumption

217 - The Death of Friendships

220 - Relationships & Betrayal

224 - Infidelity & John’s Special Liberty

226 - Casual Sex as a Social Transaction

229 - Sexual Failure

232 - Conclusion

233 - Chapter 8: Inebriated Leisure

233 - Introduction

233 - The Death of Night-Time Leisure Venues and the Rebirth of the Consumer Drive

244 - Illicit Drugs

251 - Trading Violence

254 - Drinking the *Jouissance*

259 - Conclusion

261 - Chapter 9: Conclusion

261 - Contribution

265 - Reflections

270 - Afterword

275 - References

320 - Appendices

Introduction

I'm at the Deck, an outside venue in the city centre, with Sully. I am not drinking tonight really, just a couple. Sully seems to have a lot on his mind and is agitated, which he tells me is down to trouble with his girlfriend. The club is a niche venue for Stoke with it being outside and tonight they have a saxophonist playing along to the DJ's soul music. The venue is relatively busy for a Friday night pre-midnight. Its not long before we are greeted by two female friends of his, Tia and Shaz. I tell Sully I'm not feeling it tonight, but he persists to buy me another drink. As the venue closes, Sully decides that the four of us are going to a retro club just up the road. We enter the club and head to the bar, I say no to another drink but he buys me one anyway. Feeling obliged, I drink it, hoping I am sober enough to drive home. I see a couple of regular faces, with Doc being present amongst his group of friends, one of which compliments me on my physique saying I 'look big', before showing me his recent fitness bootcamp before and after photos. The venue is not particularly busy, but full of a diverse range of characters, with no set club culture identity being prominent. There's flawed consumers, indie kids, lads dressed in Casual wear, and older people, one of which is in an electric wheelchair. The atmosphere is sometimes tense, with different sets of men seemingly looking for confrontation and its not long before it occurs. A well-built older man on the dancefloor, suddenly launches a large fishbowl type drink in the direction of the dancefloor, seemingly at no one in particular. One lad in particular seems to get the worst of it as he turns to confront him, but before full fists are thrown a bouncer has rushed in to drag him away. While the well-built man tries to wrestle the bouncers off, the other younger man laughs in his face, but in truth I feel he is relieved that he does not feel the need to fight him and is just trying to save face in front of his girlfriend.

Sully and the girls find this hilarious, while Doc's other friend, Gio, says in reference to the now kicked out older man "he was asking for a bag off me in the toilets, I knew he was going kick off". More pressing issues are ahead for Doc, as he says to me "you should fuck Shaz, I fucked her before. Tight as fuck mate". I explain that she is just a friend of Sully's, I have not met her before, and I'm not interested, to which he responds "nah I'm telling you she is after you". I find this is a good time to leave, and Sully agrees to come with me and we leave the rest of the revellers there. He tells me he will pay for me to go into the Hut, as he just wants to see if his girlfriend is in there after she told him earlier in the night she was ill. I agree, and we walk into the venue to see his girlfriend standing right next to the DJ. Sully is enraged, heading to the smoking area for a fag and a quick drink. I can sense this is about to turn ugly, and I suggest we leave, and I'll take him back to his. He says no. He rushes downstairs and confronts his girlfriend, albeit not aggressively, to which she responds by screaming at him and threatening him, telling the bouncer he "better get him out right fucking now". The bouncer just tells Sully to remove himself from the situation. He backs off but continues talking to her, criticising her actions and telling her he is done as he sarcastically blows a kiss and goes to walk out of the venue. I go with him, when suddenly his girlfriend is parting the crowd of people to get to him and reaches over to punch him several times in the back of his head to which he does not turn around or react, but he is forced into group of girls who seem to take more issue with me and him than his fist throwing missus. I separate as best as I can before a bouncer comes in and escorts Sully out of the club. Sully explains what happened to a doorman who he knew, saying that the bouncer was out of order for throwing him out and he needs to kick out his missus. The doorman goes back in and drags her out, telling Sully he is welcome back in but his girlfriend is still attempting to attack him outside. She finally goes and starts to talk to a

group of lads, probably telling them an untruthful version of what had just occurred. We stay by the venue door, not leaving until they've all left as a continuation of the confrontation, but now outnumbered by several other men, would not be ideal. We finally make our way back to my car and I drive him to his friends so he can carry on his night of drinking. He is visibly upset as I try to offer some semblance of advice. His tears quickly fade as he exits the car and sees his friends outside their house, returning to his façade of jubilance that he had earlier in the night.

The Night-Time-Economy (NTE) has altered in the last forty years, becoming an increasingly commodified space of hedonistic leisure and elongated adolescence (Smith, 2014), with urban centres across the towns and cities of Britain have gradually transformed to offer liminal spaces of nocturnal transgression as the day turns into night (Winlow, 2001; Winlow & Hall, 2006). While some are quick to note the positives that can be found within nightlife spheres (see Nicholls, 2018), social harms are present, be them through violence, uber-individualism or inebriation. The expansion of the NTE has occurred amidst the backdrop of mass industrial decline across the West that has atomised individuals and caused their identities that were once structured and tied to work, place, and family to splinter and become increasingly attached to consumer identities and hedonistic behaviour (Hall et al, 2008). The expansion of hedonistic nightlife from the 1960s onwards with movements such as Northern Soul (Wilson, 2007) and Rave (Redhead, 1993) has largely replaced the *symbolic* order of old, with consumerist ideals being embedded within the psychic drives of individuals, where all else is relatively meaningless (Smith, 2014).

While the market has provided an outlet for many deindustrialised locales to provide an outlet for such drives to be sought after, in recent years the landscape of Stoke-on-

Trent has failed to provide this, meaning the hedonistic drives of individuals have little outlet in the city as it has become not only post-industrial, but also *post-leisure.* This is a largely under researched aspect of nightlife culture, where most nightlife research has taken place in vibrant hubs of consumerism (see for example Redhead, 1993; Smith, 2014).

The thesis introduces the concept of *post-leisure* as a means of making sense of the shifting character of NTEs under the current ailing stage of neoliberalism, where it can no longer sustain its thinly veneered promise of financial security and consumption for all (see Streeck, 2016; Winlow & Hall, 2022; Varoufakis, 2023). Amidst this terminal stage, financial security has become almost unattainable albeit for a small minority, while consumption is increasingly unsatisfying as consumer drives are limited by a dearth of opportunities, compounded by the gradual collapse of the global economy (Varoufakis, 2023; Winlow & Hall, 2022). Consequently, previous hotbeds of nightlife leisure, such as Stoke, have succumb to a shell of their former self as businesses that were meant to be an outlet for neoliberal consumption are no longer able to survive under the economic turmoil that has increasingly hindered the neoliberal world for decades (Slobodian, 2018). The thesis argues that Stoke-on-Trent is representative of both the present and the future, as its *post-leisure* state has largely been ignored by academics, despite this being an increasingly common state for cities and towns across the country, with the nation's NTE showing little hope of improving (NTIA, 2024). Given the failure to provide an NTE reminiscent of its prime, it is important to assess what the impact this has been on consumers and their own motivations for entering the city's dying NTE, and also explore many of the issues and arguments put forward by researchers such as Winlow (2001) and Smith (2014) that need reframing within a

new context of decaying leisure. Over the next eight chapters I intend to critically explore this issue through immersing myself into the lives of nightlife consumers from Stoke-on-Trent, to better understand their behaviour and motivations within this *post-leisure* sphere.

Through ethnographic immersion, I have experienced the realities of *post-leisure* Stoke-on-Trent to give a thorough and detailed description and analysis of the current issue. By drawing on *Ultra-realist* theory and Lacannian psychoanalysis, the research highlights various issues that plague the lives of participants, notably violence, individualism and inebriation, and what their place is in the decaying NTE of Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding area. The research places the discussion of the micro- and meso-contexts of the participants in the macro-context of global capitalism.

The rest of this chapter shall give an overview of the structure of the thesis, outlining each forthcoming chapter and how each section supports the research aims of uncovering what underlines the motivations and actions of individuals in the NTE. But prior to this, the section shall discuss what is meant by the NTE in relation to this study.

Defining the Night-Time-Economy

The NTE is a multifaceted concept with varying definitions and focuses provided by different researchers. At its core, it involves economic activities taking place from evening to early morning. However, the specific parameters and components highlighted in studies can vary significantly. At its most stripped-down definition, it is described as the range of leisure and commercial activities that take place predominantly between 6 PM and 6 AM, with a usual focus on a high concentration of bars, clubs, entertainment venues and restaurants (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009) with the term predominantly associated with the 'booze economy' (Shaw, 2010) as opposed to

broader leisure, largely revolving around services that provide for consumers of alcohol in the evening and early hours of the morning (Wickham, 2012). The NTE revolving around such activities in an attempt to revitalise post-industrial city centres has been present in much of the previous literature on the topic (Hadfield, 2006). The NTE came to be shaped by the growth of urban centres and nightlife amidst the growing industrial era and the consequential normalising of nighttime activities (Thompson, 1963; Shaw, 2010). From this period onwards, such activities would become synonymous with the night (Gutzke, 2005).

It is important to note however, that in relation to this research at least, this definition of the NTE is somewhat lacking. While much of the research has taken place between the hours of 6AM to 6PM, there is more fluidity regarding the time of the NTE. The focus on pubs and nightclubs has increasingly moved from being a nightlife activity to a daytime activity, with the rise of 'day drinking' leading to an experience of nightlife, but in the day (Thompson et al, 2017). The experience of 'the night' in the day highlights that the NTE is increasingly fluid, and therefore this should be considered when conducting research in this area.

Further to this point, it begs the question whether the NTE is better defined through socio-cultural perspectives. As Chatterton and Hollands (2003) highlighted, the NTE shapes much of contemporary lifestyles outside of the NTE, where it has increasingly become tied to consumer culture, and hence bleeds into everyday life. The NTE as discussed here does not feature activities that would be seen as traditional 'daytime' activities, such as working (outside of professions that cater to nightlife consumers). Bushell (2022) highlights that the once stable division of night and day have shifted in the last 50 years to a blurred boundary supported by a 24/7 service economy. The

deregulation of the labour market has gradually shifted from traditional day and night shift work to a variety of working rhythms, whether it be task-oriented, contractual, or casual arrangements. This transformation has led to new leisure needs and different times for recreation (Rowe, 2004). With the rise of shift work and nightwork becoming increasingly prominent (see Lloyd, 2019), it is not unusual for people to work through the night, with there being 8.7 million nighttime workers in the UK in 2022 (ONS, 2023). Therefore, the NTE would be better defined as the 'booze economy', with the lines increasingly blurred between day and night.

This is relevant to the research presented here, as the data collection spanned both night-time and day-time, although all day-time data collected was focussed on night-time activities that had since transitioned to the day. The NTE is now no longer restricted to the post-working week and the night, with the blending of day and night through a shift in work patterns, the liberalisation of licensing, and the disintegration of a protestant work ethic culture which awarded its workers through the opening of pubs as shifts ended. Instead, the NTE can now be accessed, at least in theory, whenever one wishes as one cog in the nonstop neoliberal consumption machine (see Crary, 2014).

It is also important to note the contemporary shift from previous night-time leisure. It is more associated with so called *vertical drinking spots* (VDS) rather than traditional local pubs, where people spend relatively short amounts of time before moving on to the next establishment that offers something slightly different (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). This is somewhat encouraged by the promoters of the venues, who have seemingly acquiesced to the fact that people will move on, by running promotions alongside other bars for dual entry. Vertical drinking is a relatively recent phenomenon,

with the practice being seen as a ‘lower-class’ practice prior to its functionality being noted for developing NTE’s (see Meers (2023) for a historical overview). Traditional community pubs have been increasingly displaced by commercialised and consumer VDS bars where revellers can form an identity outside of traditional collectivity (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003).

Since 2000, a quarter of pubs have closed in the UK, totalling more than 13,000 locations. Four out of five people have seen a pub close down within five miles of their home. During 2023, more than 500 freehold pubs were sold, 34% of which will no longer operate as pubs in the future (Andersen, 2024), likely to be repurposed as other consumer outlets such as Tesco Metro and the like. This is no coincidence however, with this being part and parcel of the neoliberal ’24-hour-city’ policies implemented from the late 90’s onward. City centres were expected to maximise their potential, moving away from traditional working-class drinking establishments to more consumer-based establishments (Smith, 2014; Gardner & Sheppard, 1989), creating more avenues for economic growth as businesses close for the evening new ones should open. As people are leaving their jobs there is somewhere for them to go and consume more in an ever present ‘brandscape’ world (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003).

Proponents of 24-hour-cities merely saw this regeneration of NTEs as a further economic expansion, to effectively double the economy of cities through having cities that never sleep (Kreitzman, 1999). Notwithstanding the effects of nighttime work on workers (see Silva & Costa, 2023 for an overview), this highlights that such proposals are born out of liberal-capitalist desire for profit accumulation.

Chapter Structure

Chapter 2 offers a substantive overview of the history of Stoke-on-Trent, grounding the macro-context of global capitalism and consumerism in the local conditions as the city moved from early industrialism towards its post-industrial decline. The changing face of the city's drinking culture and leisure is discussed as part of this chapter, alongside the wider history of crime, poverty and work, highlighting the impact of these issues on wider leisure. The following chapter turns to a discussion of the wider literature of leisure and nightlife and how this informs the direction of the research. The concepts of violence, individualism, consumerism and inebriation shall also be discussed more generally through the analysis of their relevant literature, as these issues will come to be prevalent in the data. Gaps in the data and flaws in theorisation are identified to inform the direction of the research, while acknowledging the previous work that has come to influence this thesis. Chapter 4 turns towards the methodological aspect of the research, outlining my positionally as the researcher, and evidencing the importance of utilising ethnographic fieldwork and interviews to research nightlife in Stoke-on-Trent. The chapter evidences the need for an ethnography of the nightlife in Stoke-on-Trent despite the numerous ethnographies of similar urban locales that come before. The chapter outlines the theoretical position of the research, *Ultra-realism* (Winlow & Hall, 2015), and how this will inform the research and why.

Chapter 5 turns towards the data, with violence in the NTE being the first issue to be discussed. The chapter introduces the concepts of infantilisation (Hayward, 2024), hauntology (Linnemann, 2015) and rage banking (Sloterdijk, 2012) alongside the wider utilisation of *Ultra-realist* theory. The chapter argues that violence within this sphere has become normalised because of these issues, but also mutated across different generations. The prominent position of this chapter argues that, not dissimilar to Ellis

(2016), much violence is rooted in youth and the violence found in Stoke-on-Trent's nightlife largely mirrors the interactions of adolescence; a period in the participants life which they are increasingly tied to. Chapter 6 turns to a discussion of internalised individualism. The data highlights that the participants remain tied to ideas of 'cool individualism' despite the lack of night-time venues to present their consumer identities. The data highlights the participants feel compelled to enter the NTE despite this, with the psychic drive to consume remaining prominent despite their acknowledgement of its general poor quality and negativity. The NTE offers the subject an opportunity to not only express their identity, but also succumb to 'nothingness' (Freud, 1930).

Chapter 7 introduces the idea of expressive individualism. Building on previous accounts of transient friendships and relationships (Smith, 2014), the chapter highlights how relationships and friendships are actively harmful within the NTE, acting as a place where both come to die. Friendships are shown to be realms of betrayal, as are relationships, where adultery is abundant. Sex is analysed within the chapter, how it is both a motivation for nightlife entry, and also a source for sexual anxiety amidst the sexually unsuccessful. The final data chapter discusses the key role of the NTE, inebriation, more broadly. The chapter highlights once again the drives that persist within nightlife despite its decay, evidencing that they are potentially getting worse, with individuals competing against one another to transgress the daytime norms in increasingly harmful ways. The chapter highlights the prominence of cocaine within the area, why it is used, and how this is influenced by the venues that remain somewhat hubs of nightlife.

I bring the thesis to a close in Chapter 9. The main arguments are summarised and

brought together as one cohesive answer to why participants engage in certain behaviours within the city's NTE. I also reflect on my position as the researcher, outlining the potential limitations with the research conducted and avenues for future research. It is here that I acknowledge that the research does not hold all the answers, nor does it offer a solution. But what it does offer is evidence of a previously unexplored issue that has been caused by contemporary consumer capitalism and its psychic drives that it reproduces. I end the thesis with an early excerpt from the field notes, that reiterate the issues prominent within the field within one evening, night, and early morning in the ever-decaying post-leisure landscape of the Potteries NTE.

Vis Unita Fortior – The History of Stoke-on-Trent

Introduction

"The pottery towns are almost equally ugly. Right in among the rows of tiny, blackened houses, part of the street as it were, are the pot banks – conical brick chimneys like gigantic burgundy bottles buried in the soil and belching their smoke almost in your face. You come upon monstrous clay chasms hundreds of feet across and almost as deep, with little rusty tubs creeping on chain railways up one side and on the other workmen clinging like samphire-gatherers and cutting into the face of the cliff with their picks. I passed that way in snowy weather and even the snow was black…"

(Orwell, 1937:98)

George Orwell offers a bleak view of Depression Era Stoke-on-Trent in the seminal *Road to Wigan Pier*, describing the poverty-stricken conditions that the working-class occupants of the city inhabited. It is of little wonder that the book was attacked by prominent working-class leftists, socialists, and communists for its overtly condescending portrayal of industrial working-class towns and cities that Britain was built upon (Howe, 2001). The modern era offers little change from the Orwellian point of view, with the present middle class leftist commentators seeing the city, and more specifically its association with being anti-EU, as a backward city of consisting 'gammons' who 'do not know what's good for them'. This is best encapsulated by former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg claiming that the brexiteers associated with Stoke-on-Trent will be filled with 'bregret' (Wearmouth, 2018), while the second referendum backing group *Staffs4Europe* describing its Brexit backing neighbours as

“repeating what they’ve heard the politicians say on the telly” and “Voting Brexit was the first time they ‘won’ in their lives… They may not know what it means but they know they were on the winning side” (Lichfield, 2019). One point is for certain: Orwell was correct when he said that too many people claiming to be ‘Socialists’ have little more than disdain for the working-classes (Orwell, 1937).

The vast majority of the research presented in this thesis has its foundation in Stoke-on-Trent and its surrounding areas, with the participants being born and bred within the confines of the Potteries and most primary research also taking place within, but not limited to, this locale. The social, geographical, political and cultural makeup of the city are integral to the research, with the views and lives of the participants being influenced and constrained by these factors. Hence, it is imperative that a concise history of the area is given; a history that goes above and beyond the perhaps dated and one dimensional images that ‘outsiders’ such as Orwell would conjure, but instead offers a non-judgmental description of a city that has no doubt greatly influenced the life paths of all participants, laying the foundations for later sections through explaining the oft forgotten historical micro-, meso- and macro-contexts in which participants sense of self came to be.

The chapter will introduce Stoke-on-Trent from its humble beginnings as a collection of small villages, to its greatest epoch with the rise of the industrial/agricultural revolution, and its post-industrial decline. Further, the chapter will look into the lives of the community at this time, how they spent their leisure time, and what the drinking culture of the time was like. The study’s specific empirical focus covers the broad area of Stoke-on-Trent; hence it is imperative to outline the development of the various

towns that make up Stoke-on-Trent as changes throughout history had myriad implications for the broader area as a whole.

A New World of Industrialism and Work

The history of Stoke-on-Trent largely begins at the cusp of the industrial revolution in the mid-18th century, where the city became a prominent industrial center for the production of steel, coal, and, most notably, ceramics (Rice, 2010). While this is almost undoubtedly its most famous and defining period.

Prior to the birth of the Industrial Revolution, the area was largely unpopulated. The largest of the towns, Burslem, was still very much an area consisting of fields and lanes amidst the twenty-three pot banks, with the rest of the villages economic centre being representative of small agricultural communities of the time, with only essential shops such as a butcher's and blacksmiths existing; notwithstanding the small number of shops and population, there were still 19 pubs in the area (Taylor, 2003).

With the 1700's came an industrial revolution, transforming agricultural hubs such as Stoke-on-Trent into the limelight as key players in Britain's ever-expanding economy. No longer would the area's potters juggle their trade with local farming, for they would become crucial to new industrial market (Taylor, 2003). The area quickly became synonymous with pottery as the industrial revolution was taking off; Afterall, there is a reason the city is interchangeably known as 'The Potteries' as much as Stoke-on-Trent, while other cities and towns with unique histories do not take their name from their industrial heyday. For this reason, it has been argued that without pottery Stoke-on-Trent is nothing, it would not exist without it (Rice, 2010). Not only was the industry important for the namesake of the area, but also peoples' livelihoods were dependent

upon the industry, with it forming the area's economic foundations and subsequently becoming defined by their industrial prowess (Taylor, 2003). Yet, whether it is true or not that the city is nothing without its industrial past, the area at its peak was the most prolific pottery manufacturer in the world with 300 pot banks with their 2000 bottle kilns (Rice, 2010). The Potteries would not take long to make their footprint in industrial society.

As the industrial revolution continued, so did North Staffordshire's success in the pottery industry, remaining a major player in national and international trade and the city's main employer. In 1841 43.3% of men and women in employment over the age of 20 in Burslem and Wolstanton worked in the pottery industry, while in Stoke it was 38.2%. 10 years later, 70% of all Potters in England and Wales were employed in Staffordshire (Briggs, 1993). In fact, the population in general had grown exponentially thanks to the flourishing ceramics industry. Where the population of the pottery villages could have previously been counted in hundreds, by 1738 it had risen to 4000 overall. A century later, the population was 68,000 (Bailey, 2000). This also meant a restructuring of what constituted the area's industrial and social hub. While Burslem had originally laid claim to the title of the mother town, with it having the largest population, by 1801, Hanley had begun to surpass it as the most populace area of the pottery towns (Bailey, 2000). In 1925, employment in Stoke-on-Trent's pottery industry reached its peak, with approximately 100,000 workers and an annual output valued at the equivalent of £2 billion (Rice, 2010).

Early globalist competition between the Potters of Stoke-on-Trent and those of France however would potentially hinder Stokes thriving industry, with the French potters and their use of stylish but cheap ceramics threatening North Staffordshire's exporting

industry to America (Rice, 2010). Marx's (2012) 'coercive laws of competition' highlights how in instances such as this, businesses are forced to continually innovate and adapt in a market economy or risk witnessing their profitability and market position decline. Thus, *'business logic'* takes over, where entrepreneurialism, innovation and dynamism become central to market economies (Fisher, 2009).

Of course, pottery was not the only industry to take off during this period of prosperity. As previously mentioned, the ceramics industry was heavily reliant on the local coalfields, which in turn flourished. Pits such as Sneyd, Norton and Florence are as redolent of the area's past as Minton or Spode (Rice, 2010). The coal industry was well established from the 17th century, primarily supplying diverse industries such as tile making and small metal-based trades. But from 1750, large scale mining began due to the growing dominance of the pottery industry after the opening of the county's first porcelain works in Longton (Taylor, 2003). Pot banks were soon being built close to collieries to reduce the burden of having to travel far for coal, thereby maximising profitability (Taylor, 1995). Such natural, geographical conditions in the Staffordshire region therefore provided ample investment opportunities for the early capitalists. Large mines such as Adderley Green mine opened in 1799 to meet the demand of the pot banks (Corum and Lawley, 1993). Like the pot banks, the mines were a large employer for the area, with 10.5% of Burslem and Wolstanton and 6% of Stoke's male working age population working in the industry in 1841 (Briggs, 1993). Hanley Deep Pit alone would come to employ over 400 men and boys by 1868, producing 400 tons of coal a day (Edwards, 2012). By 1950, the industry would grow to employ 15,000 (Corum and Lawley, 1993). By 1937, Chatterley Whitfield colliery became the first

British mine to reach the singular production milestone of 1,000,000 tons of coal in one year, becoming the greatest coal mine in terms of output in Britain (Gomez, 2017).

Not only was there coal and pottery mass produced in North Staffordshire, but iron and steel as well, which, like the pottery industry, was built upon the abundance of cheap coal. Most successful of the area's steelworks was Shelton Bar, which was established in 1830 (Rice, 2010). Shelton became so successful; it ended up owning several collieries for use in their steelworks (Taylor, 2003). By the end of the 19th century, there were 3000 people employed at its steel works (Corum and Lawley, 1993). At its height, the steelworks encompassed over five acres of land all for the purpose of production. Such was the success and importance of the industry, it was successfully targeted by Nazi Germany in their bombing raids during the second world war (Burns, 1998).

Toughness & Resilience

Despite such industrial prosperity, the lives of the area's residents were far from luxurious. On the contrary, the Potteries were renowned as an area infested with crime, poverty, and disease. One of the main reasons for such deprivation in the region was due to, ironically, the success of its industries. While the three industries of ceramics, mining and steel successfully put Stoke-on-Trent on the map, they had dire effects on the lives of its citizens. With 200 years of industry, poverty, and grime, the city's industries had been poisonous and debilitating, underpaying workers and becoming less profitable for their owners (Rice, 2010).

Industrial life at this time, and for much longer, was of course very much male dominant in Stoke-on-Trent as it was in the rest of the country; hence it is important to remember that women's position here has not been forgotten, rather it is largely

confined to the home. Societal norms were such that men were the breadwinners, while women existed in the domestic sphere, away from the drudgeries of hard labour. Such working-class life was characterised by both fixity and lucidity, but also a massive lack of autonomy and freedom to break away from this societal norm (Rose, 2010). Yet, despite the relative deprived work conditions, the periods notable sense of stability throughout the period of industrialism, offered workers a universal, stable collective identity in which they were secure in their rigid working-class habitus (Gibbs, 2021).

The structured and collectivised way of life was present throughout whole communities within the Potteries, with workers often having a job for life from when they entered the workforce, lived and socialised in housing estates and pubs built around their factories and mines creating tight-knit communities and attachment to place (Jones, 1961). This unifying sense of commonality was brought into by most members of communities through the embrace of the *Big Other*, the collectivised norms of society which its members worked towards to create meaning in life (Hall, 2012).

The *Big Other* refers to the lies that subjects buy into which underpin our 'collective identities, the communal network of social institutions and the traditional values, customs and laws of our shared cultural life' (Hayward & Hall, 2020:12). While the *Big Other* is merely fictional it exists as long as we act as if it exists (Zizek, 2000), It is this shared fiction that allows the subject to navigate social life with a sense of coherence and stability. Within this period, prior to the somewhat mythical post-WWII golden age taking hold, the *Big Other* could be seen through the embrace of the Christian faith, hard work, discipline, solidarity amongst workers and the embrace of a shared struggle through early trade unionism and Chartism (Engels, 1993). Though this was the case, it

is important to still highlight the harms that that individuals had to endure during this period.

It was often said that the *Luftwaffe* never bombed Stoke to an excessive degree as one would think they had already bombed it due to the excessive smoke that filled the North Staffordshire skies (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993). Similar to much of the industrial heartlands of the North, the sun would be virtually blocked out by smoke, with people being able to walk down the street and be unable to see who was stood beside them (Rice, 2010). Riddler (1987) described The Potteries being 'more akin to Dante's Inferno than a busy industrial conurbation'. It would be this smoke that caused most of the problems for residents. Stoke was always noted as being unhealthier than most other industrial cities and towns thanks to the pottery industry (Corum and Lawley, 1993), with workers having no choice but to live close to their place of work, putting themselves and their family amidst the pollution (Taylor, 1995). The dust of the pot banks led to the debilitating 'Potters rot', a form of lung disease similar to silicosis (Bailey, 2000). In 1910, the biggest cause of death in Stoke-on-Trent was disease related to the respiratory system, evidently caused by the dirty, industrial smoke that filled the sky and lungs of the area's residents (Taylor, 1995). Added to this, the use of lead in the pot banks also had grim effects. By working with lead, workers suffered from poisoning, often developing partial paralysis and problems with their nervous system (Bailey, 2000). This was for many a best-case scenario, as there were many lead related deaths due to the use of lead glazes up until 1948, when it was finally made illegal for potters to use the substance (Rice, 2010).

Of the city's second industry, it could arguably be said that the conditions in the mines were much worse. Mining was perilous due to the threat of inundation from older

unused workings nearer the surface, and the large amounts of gas found in many mining seems (Riddler 1987; Briggs, 1993). The threat of danger was made worse by the sub-contracting that occurred at most collieries, where the Collier would lease a pit and employ his own workforce (Briggs, 1993). Of course, the owners principal concerns were often maximum output at minimum cost, due to the mining world being one where profit margins were often narrow (Briggs, 1993). It was not until 1872 that collieries were required to employ a manager to oversee the pits (Briggs, 1993).

Such need to maximise profitability is well documented through this stage of early capitalism, where the principal focus of the business owners is profit rather than their workforces health and wellbeing, which would largely mean that they would accept dehumanising working conditions and no health and safety precautions for their workers in industries such as mining (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018). This was after all the era of *laissez faire* capitalism, which was dominated by the ideas of Adam Smith (1982) whereby the logic was the state had no right to interfere in business practices in a way which might benefit the workers. Rather, the impersonal hand of the market was given primacy (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018).

As the demand to extract even deeper, chance of hazards occurring multiplied due to the heat, lack of ventilation, and deep winding (Briggs, 1993). The deeper the pits went, the more North Staffordshire experienced disasters. In the late-1800's, an accidental fire at Chatterley Whitfield mine resulted in an explosion that took the lives of 24 men and boys, while, at Diglake colliery, 78 miners lost their lives due to flooding from an old pit (Gomez, 2017). Unfortunately, the 20th century did not bring better safety measures to protect the miners. One of the worst disasters in the region was at Minnie pit in 1918, where a faulty safety lamp caused an explosion of gas and coal

dust, killing 155 men and boys; 144 of which died from carbon monoxide poisoning and not the blast. It took over a year to recover the bodies due to gas still being in the mine, and one captain of a rescue team lost his life in one of the first recovery attempts (Gomez, 2017). Compounding the conditions of work life, some villages and towns would be badly effected by World War 1. Blurton, though only a small rural village at the time, lost many of its working age men in the war (Corum and Lawley, 1993).

Despite the dangers involved and the harm caused by the city's industries, the workers were not exactly paid well, with it being the norm for factory owners to pay employees a pittance in all the six towns (Burns, 1998). As early as 1828, the towns were noted as being an area of suffering, arising out of the low state of wages compared to the high prices of commodities (Briggs, 1993). Compounding this, if you were injured or killed in the mines, workers and their families would have to rely on the generosity of the pit owner and hope they would pay them whilst injured, or to cover funeral costs (Warrillow, 1960). This was unlikely, as bosses looked to cut their costs as much as possible, even going so far as employing children as young as five in the mines and pot banks, exploiting them through long hours and poor wages (Riddler, 1987). Many children were forced to work by their families to supplement the income of those who had died due to Potter's rot (Warrillow, 1960).

Away from the drudgeries of work, life was not much better for the inhabitants of what would become Stoke-on-Trent, with the local houses largely being unfit for living. The packed rows of working-class houses bred disease, with cholera, diphtheria and scarlet fever being common complaints. During the 1897 diphtheria epidemic, there were 14 times as many cases of the disease in the Potteries than the national average, while

Longton had the highest rate of child mortality in England and Wales (Corum and Lawley, 1993). This was no doubt helped by the houses, crammed so closely together so to make more profit, suffering from poor sanitation, with the outdoor and open toilets being a source for such diseases (Bailey, 2000). By 1910, Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases spread through the slums accounted for 23% of deaths in the federation[1] (Taylor, 1995). The worst slum in the Potteries from the mid-1800s was in Burslem and was known locally as 'The Hellhole'. It was said to contain houses in squalor with half-starved, half-dressed women and children, and idle drunken men.

The Hanley slums of 1900 were said to be similar with town being widely acknowledged as having an abundance of houses where up to 15 people lived in a two-bedroom terraced house, poor sanitation, lawlessness and alcoholism (Riddler, 1987). Broken pavements, open drains, disease, immorality, and obscenity were the norm for slums like these (Warrillow, 1960). Areas such as these remained well into the 20th century. John Street in Longton was one such infamous community amidst the pot banks. They had no gas or electricity, and the only running water was a tap shared by up to 10 people in a backyard, with the outside toilets also being shared by two or three families (Corum and Lawley, 1993). By the 1950, 12,000 of such houses that were deemed unfit for habitation were still occupied in the city (Bailey, 2000).

To some extent such fatalism experienced by the inhabitants of the city during its industrial growth, through their experience of poor living conditions and widespread disease, is potentially still playing out in the city today, with the present being a refraction of what has previously existed helping to explain the contemporary context. In the present-day NTE, this same fatalistic disposition persists, albeit rearticulated

[1] The six towns of Stoke-on-Trent became a federation in 1910 prior to becoming a city in 1925.

through the lens of post-industrial decline and economic insecurity. Participants often described going out not as a pursuit of pleasure in any deep sense, but as an attempt to break from the monotony of working life or unemployment, frequently marked by excessive alcohol use, confrontational behaviour, and reckless risk-taking. The echoes of Stoke's past are not merely symbolic, but manifest in the contemporary acceptance of the decaying NTE and their wider socio-economic situation, yet still embracing the short-term pleasures that it offers as this is the only respite presented (see Telford, 2022 for a broader discussion of post-industrial fatalism).

Alcohol & Crime

Not only did the slums breed disease, but they also bred depravity, with the towns residential areas being hotspots for drunkenness and violence. Often due to the socio-cultural and economic conditions, such drunkenness and gambling on horse-racing was common, often resulting in debt and family friction (Corum and Lawley, 1993). The Potteries had a reputation of being one of the most drunken districts in Britain, with Hanley alone having 245 beer houses and 52 licenced pubs in 1869 (Warrillow, 1960).

Drunkenness was such a social problem during this period, some of the cities factory owners employed town criers to wake their alcoholic and idle men for work (Wedgewood, 1970). Unfortunately, this was rarely successful, as shown by one Longton pottery factory where 60% of workers were habitual drinkers, many of which failed to turn up for work on a Monday morning after a weekend of drinking (Warrillow, 1960). The employers struggled to control their men not only at home, but also at work, with drinking on the job being common, especially in the pits, with drinks sometimes being forced upon young women where the most villainous of workers would force themselves upon them (Riddler, 1987). This was of course not too strange

for this period, as both patriarchal sexism and static gender roles were commonplace across England and its highly stratified social class system. Women were seen as subservient to men, and in relationships they were often viewed as their sexual property (Burnette, 2008).

The employers did not help the alcoholism in the area, as most workers were often paid at their local pubs, whose landlords were happy to let them spend all their wages on their ale (Corum and Lawley, 1993). Most money was spent on drink and gambling, taking its toll on their already low wages; of course, this led to many a brawl between residents (Warrillow, 1960), in some cases resulting in murder over gambling disagreements (Wedgewood, 1970). Pubs such as The Sea Lion Inn and its nearby residential road Lower John Street were renowned for their drunkards and violence, with the area was known as the worst place in the city to live at the turn of the century (Taylor, 1995).

Much of this behaviour went unpunished, with the policing and the law either paying little attention or being unable to do anything about it. On one occasion in the 1890s, a drunken brawl took place outside the Black Horse pub in Hanley. For hours fighting continued with life and property in danger while no one was there to enforce the law (Warrillow, 1960). However, the slums and pubs were home to the working-classes entertainment as well as just alcohol and violence. Many of the pubs offered several brutal attractions, such as dog fighting, cock fighting, bull baiting and at one time even bear baiting; all popular pastimes amongst the Stoke-on-Trent clientele (Warrillow, 1960). The more respectable of the working-class however stuck to taking part in unlicensed boxing matches and illegal gambling, yet even this was regarded as immoral by the elites of the time (Taylor, 2003).

The mid-nineteenth century was also the advent of social clubs in areas such as the Potteries, which became a core haven for leisure and pleasure amongst the English industrial working-classes. They were largely formed to mitigate some of their dissatisfaction with industrial labour conditions and offered a haven via cheap beer and leisure activities such as darts (Cherrington, 2012). Further to this, they also offered workers a place to become educated on political issues such as the labour movement and Chartism, that aimed to garner further class solidarity from disenfranchised industrial workers (Tremlett, 1987).

Periods of annual leave for the workers was also known as a time when the North Staffordshire residents would let debauchery run wild for their week off of work, where there were often fights and pickpocketing amongst the drunkenness (Wedgewood, 1970). Such periods were known as 'Wakes', and lagely consisted of two weeks of carnivalesque (see Bakhtin, 1984) behaviours. There was much criticism by religious leaders and employers over the immorality that would occur during town's wake weeks; however, there was little fun for the working-class inhabitants of the region to have other than drinking themselves into oblivion as the poor were priced out of many activities in the late 1800's, effectively banning them from public parks where people had to pay to use the facilities (Taylor, 2003). Instead, the hedonism of the wakes could be explained by the business owners and local authorities refusing to invest in local facilities for the working people. While other industrial cities took pride in their community, seeing themselves as competing against other cities across Britain, the Potteries largely competed internally against each other, with not one of the towns offering much to the people (Taylor, 2003). It was more likely that the business owners were upset at the fact that they were not making the money for the weeks they were

closed and used the hedonism that took place as an excuse to condemn them (Taylor, 2003).

While low level crime such as drunkenness, prostitution, begging and fighting were seen as the common offences in the Potteries, more serious criminal activity occurred in the area with violent gangs being a fixture of the Potteries. In the 19th century Hanley was plagued by a gang of youths known as the *Rough Fleet* gang, the leader of which was Jack Wilson. Taking advantage of the poorly lit streets, they would beat and rob the people of Hanley. The local Watchmen and constables were helpless, as they also faced the being attacked (Warrillow, 1960). Wilson, despite being the son of a wealthy pottery manufacturer, was believed to have been spurred on for his love of gambling and drink. If he was not attacking people for fun, he was making local drunks in the pubs fight for his money (Wedgewood, 1970). Another, and much more sinister, gang was that of William Walklate's of Sneyd Green, who in 1820 raped a woman with his crew (Wedgewood, 1970).

However, crimes purely for financial gain were ever popular in Stoke-on-Trent, with the local working-classes often turning to crime to make money to supplement their poor wages. Some did this without the use of violence, such as Theodore Moore, who filled the Potteries with counterfeit silver coins, while most preferred more violent methods such as Highway robbery. Certain areas were renowned for this in the Potteries, with one lane in Etruria being known as *Rogues Lane* due to its prevalence (Warrillow, 1960). Basford in the 1880s was also an area with a reputation for Highway robbery, battery and assault, while come 1900 Northwood was home to another notorious area, known colloquially as *The Rocks* (Wedgewood, 1970). Brian Street in Hanley had a similar reputation, with those in the street having little respect for the policeman who

seldom dared venture there (Wedgewood, 1970).

Evidently, the role of the police at this time was little formalised. As with the rest of Britain at the time, especially in the earlier half of the 19th century, no formal state police force as we know it today existed. Most crimes went unpunished, as evidenced by the lack of police in the most crime-ridden areas. A large part of the reason why policing was so hard in the Potteries was due to the separate police forces that existed up until the six towns were finally amalgamated as one. Law breakers took advantage of this the best they could, with the poor cooperation between the different towns and villages meaning that criminals could often get away with their crimes. For example, cock fights and dog fights often occurred on the border between Fenton and Trentham; if police would turn up, those taking part would simply step over to the border, with the police now being unable to do anything about it (Warrillow, 1960).

The lack of cooperation between the towns brought much trouble in fact. Throughout the 19th century, each town was reluctant to abandon their separate independent existence, highlighted through the developments of local governments in the area (Greenslade, 1993). This was despite the fact that the villages that had turned into a cluster of large towns were no longer fit to run things as a local government. Yet, infighting between the local governments of the six towns meant that federation into one local government and eventually a city was complex and long winded, while the residents of the Potteries suffered (Briggs, 1993). Even post-1910 and pre-1925, each town, although amalgamated into a county borough of Stoke-on-Trent, remained a separate entity with its own local services and strong social affiliations and loyalties (Turton, 1993).

This has largely persisted through this period to the modern-day, with the area intra-

rivalries and loyalties existing amidst the city's backdrop of 'myopic provincialism' (Williams, 2006: 183). This is widely reflected in the religious structure of Stoke-on-Trent during the industrial period. Primitive methodism was founded by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, natives of Stoke-on-Trent, at a public gathering in the nearby village of Mow Cop. Bourne in particular advocated Sunday schools as a method of improving children's education, alcoholic temperance and equal treatment of the sexes in an effort to better the lives of the Potteries' natives (Mountford, 1994). Yet, methodism was fractious, and schisms in religion were amplified in Stoke-on-Trent where several different and competing sects became prominent in its regions (Ward,1984). Such disputes in the methodist movement may have given shape to some of the regional geographic differences in the city. The critical historical analysis of this period is patchy, and arguably because it is history from below and of the working-class there seems to be disinterest. But what is for certain, is the lack of cooperation and separated regional identities were prominent in this period.

This issue is complicated further in the forthcoming analysis, where the participants evidence such localised identities and attachment have not dissipated in the succeeding years. The persistence of myopic provincialism among many of the participants suggests a temporal continuity that spans the industrial and post-industrial eras. While the material conditions of working-class life have changed, with methodism no longer being prominent amongst the city's inhabitants, the place-bound identities, rivalries, and territorial logics that structure behaviour in the NTE reveal an enduring form of localised social ontology. This provincialism now floats in a post-industrial void, detached from traditional collectivity yet still anchoring identity through violence, local competition, and a shared memory rooted in nostalgic

attachment to an imagined past of stability and structured identity (see Winlow, 2025).

Returning to the rigid regional identities of the past, the lack of cooperation and policing at the time meant it was unlikely that the many criminals of the regions' slums would find themselves behind bars anytime soon. For the poor and the criminals of the Potteries however, the workhouse was what was really feared. Initial workhouses were clean and seen as genuinely helping the poor get back on their feet. As the industrial revolution took off however, the standards deteriorated. Workhouses such as Trentham and Norton housed inmates who were typically unemployed, sick, vagrants, and unmarried mothers in poor conditions, treating them as if to be unfortunate was a crime (Taylor, 2003). Workhouses were common in the industrial Potteries. Workhouses such as Burslem workhouse, dubbed *The Bastille* by the locals, loomed on the horizon of every family that lived on the edge of poverty (Burns, 1998). The discipline at the facility was so harsh it was as if it was a prison. Families were separated, and all personal possessions would be confiscated on arrival. They were locked in and provided with only enough food and sleep to enable them to keep on working (Burns, 1998).

Evidently, while Wedgwood had aspirations for his workers to have improved housing, education for them and their children, and some form of healthcare to combat the disease and pollution they lived in, this did not materialise (Briggs, 1993). Instead, houses had been built without a thought or plan in the race for wealth, while living conditions of the workers were forgotten by the owners in their struggles for production and profit. A selfishness existed that largely brought with it misery, crime, and immorality (Warrillow, 1960).

Peaks and Troughs of the Golden Era

Post-World War 2, Stoke would slowly begin to prosper. Housing estates were constructed, but outside of the major sites of building such as Bentilee[2] and Blurton, most were smaller scale and scattered across the region (Murray, 1993). Meanwhile, the reclamation of wasteland in the city begun in this era, with much of it being reshaped and relandscaped, yet little of it was suitable for building on. It was not until the late 1970's that largescale housing could be built once more with ground being found suitable in places such as Meir and Birches Head (Murray, 1993). At the same time the creation of the A500 in the 1970's and the M6 in the 1960's connected Stoke to broader British economic base (Ball, 1993).

However, in terms of the local economy there was not much success. Firstly, one of its transport links 'the Knotty' railway line was closed in 1964 thanks to increasing cuts imposed by the government (Ebrey, 2000) but this was the least of the city's worries as the traditional industries were showing their first signs of collapse. Jobs in the traditional city trades were falling during this period at unseen rates. For example, in 1971 there were 15,000 fewer jobs in ceramics compared to 1951, while mining and steel occupations had fell by 5000 and 1300 (Rosenthal and Lawence, 1993). Further to this, in 1968, employment at the pits was now only 11,000, while the number of school leavers going into the ceramics trade had halved in the last ten years. Fewer than 30 bottle kilns now remained in 1964 thanks to technological advancements and the Clean Air Act, with the city no longer having its trademark pall of smoke dressing its skyline (Rosenthal and Lawence, 1993).

From the mid-60s a number of important industries entered a phase of profound

[2] At one time the largest council estate in Europe (Mattinson, 2020).

restructuring as they began to be affected by new working practises notably mechanisation and greater competition from newly industrialising overseas countries, leading a number of them to go into a period of decline (Kivell, 1993). At the same time, the ceramic economy in the sixties and seventies begun to succumb to the pressures of competition, feeling the need to increase their production by narrowing their product range, and instead focusing on created customised items for those that could afford them. Consequently, 166 ceramic establishments had closed between 1951 and 1966 (Ball, 1993).

Manufacturing companies such the Michelin tire company supplemented some of these job losses for the area, with it now employing 18,000 more people in 1971 compared to 20 years earlier. Meaning that unemployment continued to be under 5000 up until 1970, in some cases there being a shortage of workers available. This was the case in the early 1960s, when people from outside of North Staffordshire relocated to the Six Towns to work in the city's coalfields (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993).

From the 1970's however, major job losses would not be supplemented by other work. Chatterley Whitfield finally closed in the 1977, while pottery firms would continue to merge and downsize (Rosenthal and Lawrence 1993). The majority of the city's steelworks closed in 1978 with the closure of Shelton Bar, with 2000 jobs being lost as a consequence and leaving the city with even more derelict land. The closing coupled with the thousands of jobs lost in recent years in coal mining was seen in the city as a major decline in male industrial jobs (Thomas and Hague, 2000). Consequently, unemployment would see rise by the end of the decade, but the worst was yet to come (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993).

While the local economy was no doubt rocked by the end of the seventies, the leisure

and NTE of the city was thriving like never before. Pubs were being built for the modern times, no longer alongside roads frequented by stagecoaches, and later train stations, the sixties saw them instead being built near to the new M6 due to the belief that large volume of traffic will mean more custom for the landlords (Edwards, 1997). Yet, pubs retained a communal charm no matter where they were placed, with charitable endeavours still somewhat frequent amongst pub locals, with regulars often being found raising money for local hospitals and schools (Edwards, 1997). But outside of the pub, there was an even larger NTE growing in the city.

The city was host to one of the largest hubs for leisure activities in the West Midlands. Since the sixties, leisure has become more commodified and commercialised, and based upon the rights of the consumer, which created a much-varied leisure scene for people, all of whom had to compete against one another (Edensor, 2000). For example, until the mid-60s Trentham Gardens remained a popular attraction in the city, with the site attracting over 30,000 visitors on one Sunday in 1964. This was helped by providing 'fun for all the family', with different activities being available for each generation as was the norm in the early sixties. By 1967, it was losing more and more custom due to the rise in other local leisure arenas, namely casinos, bowling alleys and nightclubs (Edensor, 2000B) It was instead forced to focus on different aspects of its appeal to people to be successful. It continued to be successful as an important place in the city musically, with it having hosted many of the biggest bands ever during the 1960's, such as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Who. This was a stark contrast to what they formally prided themselves on, 'fun for all the family' (Edensor, 2000 B).

The venue was not the only one to be a musical success either, with Victoria hall also beginning to show many of the biggest artists of the time as the 1970's came into

swing, with artists and bands such as Eric Clapton, AC/DC, Black Sabbath, The Clash, Queen, Motorhead and Elton John all playing the venue in the decade. Venues such as the Gaumont (now known as The Regent) in Hanley were playing host to large acts in this era as well, such as Jimi Hendrix, Cream, The Kinks, Chuck Berry, and Stevie Wonder.

But perhaps most famous for the city's music scene of this time were two venues that far outshone the rest: The Place and The Golden Torch. The least famous of the two, The Place, boasted the first disco outside of London, and was visited multiple times by stars such as Rod Stewart and David Bowie (Johnson, 1993; Abberley, 2018). The Golden Torch meanwhile opened in 1965 in Tunstall and was one of the most famous nightclubs of its day. The club first became known as a mod club, but from 1967 it became associated with soul music. In 1970 it becomes renowned for its soul nights and as one of the first Northern Soul clubs, with its first Northern Soul all-nighter being in March 1972 (Ebrey, 2000).

While this highlights a boost in the city's NTE and the expansion of leisure more generally, this would not last for long as Stoke-on-Trent licencing justices would refuse to renew the Golden Torch's liquor and entertainment licence following accusations of drug use going on in the in the venue. When the club closed the scene unfortunately move to another town, namely Wigan with the venue Wigan Casino (Ebrey, 2000). Nonetheless, for while it was there the Torch put Tunstall on the map, with people from all across the country travelling to experience the club. The regulars would all know each other, and a scene was born as the venue was much smaller than the city's other dancehall of the time (Ebrey, 2000).

It was different to the other dance halls of the city at the time as well, as it was a club

where you came to dance and never to meet a girl or boy. Yet, social divides were very present at the club, where people who were seen as the top dancers would dance at one end and newcomers would be on another, waiting to be accepted into the elite clique (Ebrey, 2000), reminiscent of divisions in the dark that would come to be a permanent feature in neoliberal NTEs (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). This remains a largely neglected aspect of subculture and working-class history despite, as Wilson (2007) highlights, changing consumption patterns and emergent concern with identity being at the core of it. Yet, that scene arguably did more to shape the NTE as we understand it today than anything else with its birthing of night-time drug culture, all-nighter events, and shared cultural practices creating nocturnal identities tied to consumption (Wilson, 2007)

Despite clubs such as this, Stoke never had the NTE that places like Manchester had from the early sixties, instead it had six towns who still held cultural differences at this time, uniquely retaining rivalries and loyalties to their pre-city era towns. The 'in crowd' at The Torch would begin to travel further afield to listen to soul music at places such as the Twisted Wheel in Manchester. Further to this, it was not a place where everyone could be fully accepted, as despite the scene being full of working-class kids listening to African American music, casual racism was still somewhat common as it was unusual to see a black person in the city (Ebrey, 2000).

Other social activities such as going to the cinema were being rejected by the youths of the sixties and the seventies, as they were far more interested in music and nightclubs than anything else (Cooke, 2000). Venues such as Jollees in Stoke and the Adulte in Burslem opened at this time as venues for dancing and to watch performers (Johnson, 1993). However, with different music tastes amongst different sets of youths from

different areas, violence amongst the different subcultures was rising.

Turf wars were popular amongst the youth in Stoke at this time, which could be identified by what they were wearing (Ebrey, 2000). At the more extreme end, this tended to be found amongst the football hooligan and skinhead gangs (Ebrey, 2000), but it was also common for youths who were into different music genres. While the early sixties had been marked by weekend battles amongst mods and rockers, this caried on well past this time. One notable example of severe violence between mod and rocker youths was in 1969 at Cobridge, with over 100 mods and rockers going toe to toe for hours as the police struggled to separate the warring factions (Cawley, 2013). The Torch was seen as mod territory in the city at this time, and rockers would often come to trash their scooters while mods threw motorbikes through café windows. Inevitably such behaviour often come to a head in heavy violence featuring not only fists but weapons too.

While people were certainly separated by their music and fashion tastes at this time, if anything could unify them it was the football in the city. Football was largely at its peak in the city during this period, with Stoke having many of their greatest moments in this era under Tony Waddington, including the resigning of Stanley Mathews in 1961, and winning the League Cup in 1972 (Kelsall, 2000). This would soon come to an end though unfortunately when in 1976 the Butler Street Stand blew off the stadium and began the gradual decline of the club after selling a number of their prized possessions such as Alan Hudson and Mike Pejic. Yet, The Victoria Ground had become a small business district in itself, with the traditional stadium built amongst the terraced houses of Boothen being surrounded by pubs, betting shops, newsagents, and fish and chip shops, all which were frequented by many of the spectators as part of the match

day experience (Kelsall, 2000). Meanwhile, the streets also provided an excellent battleground for many of the city's folk heroes such as *Tony the Axeman* to fight rivals hooligans on a Saturday (Chester, 2003).

More leisure activities such as going to the football were coming under corporate control and the working-classes who could once simultaneously be experiencing poverty and still afford weekly trips to Stoke or Port Vale, they were now being priced out of the attractions (Edensor, 2000). This gradually created a culture where the bosses of leisure industries wanted the most income possible, and this meant pricing out the poorest in society. This began to create a segregated society of the wealthy and the poor, with social mixing being reduced and leisure arenas such as football stadiums would gradually become places of selective admission and identity. Meaning once where people of any class background could be brought together, this was becoming increasingly less so (Edensor, 2000).

Further to this, there was becoming an increasing divide amongst residents in the sixties and seventies, with more and more affluent people not staying in Stoke for the wakes and holidays as they had become 'boring', and they thought that they could have better experiences travelling to the seaside in places such as Blackpool, while the even more affluent of residents began to travel abroad (Holliday and Jayne, 2000). As previously mentioned, these were once of great historical significance for the city's towns, all of which would be brought together to celebrate their history and indulge in hedonistic abandon. It appears such solidarity and community was slowly declining in the city thanks to the consumerist culture that the sixties helped to create.

Skint Consumers: The Neoliberal Era

Labour were finally ousted by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives in 1979, who set about radicalising the modern world with her rejection of traditional Keynesian economics in exchange for neoliberalism, with the market largely dictating Britain's economic direction at this time rather than the need to look after its people (Telford, 2022).

As a consequence of Thatcher's free market policies, the local economy tumbled during the 1980s. A large reason for this was the traditional pottery employer base being vastly reduced amidst the expansion of the globalised free-market and a lower wage workforce in developing countries, with it now only employing 30,000, a drastic decline from its industrial heyday (Imrie, 1989). 10,059 jobs were lost from 1978 to 1981 in the pottery industry, primarily as a result of 36 factory closures. One of the most significant closures was Wedgwood's Tunstall factory in 1981, resulting in the loss of 765 jobs. The coal industry was similarly in steep decline; by the close of the 1980s, it employed just 3% of the local workforce, having lost over 13,000 jobs between 1956 and 1987 (Imrie, 1989).

Meanwhile the steel industry virtually seized to exist come 1980 (Imrie, 1989). Other industrial firms that opened branches in the post-war period, such as GEC, Tube Investments, and Rists, Wires, and Cables, would soon close in Thatcher's early years during the 1980-1982 recession. As of 1983, the city's economic base remained concentrated in a limited range of core industries, leaving it increasingly exposed to shifts in national policy and fluctuations in the global market. The city was increasingly reliant on the four top firms that employed 40% of the workforce in 1981 (Imire, 1993).

The country's unemployment rate skyrocketed at this time, with the city's

unemployment rate remaining around the level of the national average, but later exceeding this in the 1990's (Jayne, 2000). Hague et al (2000) notes that the period of industrial restructuring during the early 1980s led to a sharp increase in unemployment, particularly during the recession between 1980 and 1982. Between 1981 and 1983, Stoke-on-Trent experienced jobless rates that well exceeded the West Midlands regional average. The decline of the pottery sector played a central role in this rise; in 1980, 28% of those claiming unemployment benefits had previously worked in the industry, increasing to 34% by 1982. Such high figures would remain past Thatcher's leadership, with areas such as Brookhouse having a 30% high youth unemployment rate in 1996 (Hague et al, 2000).

The city was not only being neglected at a policy level, with Conservative economic strategies appearing indifferent to the specific challenges facing post-industrial areas like Stoke-on-Trent, where regional development was stifled in favour of enhancing international competitiveness, it was also becoming evident that local firms were increasingly unable to withstand these broader economic pressures. Greater strategic importance was placed on international markets than domestic ones, leading profitable firms such as Wedgwood and Royal Doulton to relocate their manufacturing operations to North America and Australia, respectively (Imrie, 1991). During this era, the city faced a complete lack of financial support from both the British government and the EC, while also remaining subservient to the county council that continuously rejected its attempts to gain metropolitan status that would give them more financial and entrepreneurial autonomy (Rixon, 2000; Thomas & Hague, 2000). Consequently, the city fell victim to a bidding culture, where a lack of public funding must be superseded by attracting private investment.

While in other areas, industrial employments decline has been offset by a growth in jobs in the service, business, media, and financial sectors, Stoke-on-Trent failed to provide these jobs when compared to other cities. For example, by 1993, while 65% of new jobs were in the service sector on average nationally, in Stoke it was only 24% (Jayne, 2000). Consequently, prior to New Labour and despite the obvious industrial decline, Stoke still remained somewhat industrial with 36% of those employed in the city being employed in manufacturing (Rixon, 2000), while the city still produced 75-80% of the UK's pottery output in 1993 (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993).

While one may initially think that the dire circumstances of this era would mean that people could not afford the leisurely and nightlife pursuits of yesteryear, on the contrary, the city was more hedonistic than ever, with many inhabitants of Stoke-on-Trent participating in the leisure activities despite being financially constrained to do so, such is the power of consumerism under neoliberalism as is shown in the following two chapters (Kay and Jackson, 1991). With the arrival of Thatcherism in 1979, leisure became ever more concerned with the pursuit of individual pleasures and subject to the rules of the free market, with the state taking a lesser role in providing its citizen's leisure (Edensor, 2000).

As previously stated, there had been a policy drive to get private enterprise more involved in enterprise and funding, with much of the leisure facilities built at this time being a product of public-private initiative, such as Festival Park in Etruria and the Cultural Quarter in Hanley (Edensor, 2000). Stoke won the bidding for the right to hold 1986 Garden Festival, which would be held on Etruria's former industrial site. This was symptomatic of Thatherite Britain, with declining and deindustrialised cities urged to bid against each other for finite resources to aid their regeneration. This allowed the

city to regenerate the derelict land in Etruria, and also paved the way for the creation of the privately funded Festival Park retail and leisure centre that would replace it. However, this success came through participation in a competitive, free-market bidding process. The city's achievement ultimately highlights the stark reality that other areas remained derelict and deprived simply because they failed to convince a right-wing government that they were worth investing in (Thomas & Hague, 2000). Other areas to win the bidding for the Garden Festival in the 1980's were Liverpool in 1984 and Glasgow in 1988, both of which faced severe declines under Thatcher in the 1980's and struggled to recover. Knowing this, it is hard to view the Garden Festival as little more than the Conservative party giving the needy a pittance (Thomas & Hague, 2000).

The landscape that previously was home to 37 acres of British Steel, was now instead the home of a McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut and various shopping outlets. The city's largest cinema was also built here in 1989 as part of the parks leisure complex that also included bowling and laser tag (Cooke, 2000). Meanwhile, old attractions like Trentham gardens fell into a steep decline, with private owners who did not care to see it prosper as it failed to successfully bid for greater investment. It did see some prosperity with one off events in this era however by meeting the needs of hedonistic consumers, with the rave scene gave the estate a sense of purpose, amongst the youth of the city at least, in the early 1990's as the gardens would regularly host raves (Edensor, 2000).

During this time the city's NTE was becoming more and more prosperous, with not just Trentham playing host to raves. While the city's traditional rock music scene was still successful at this point, with bands such as Oasis and Radiohead playing the city's

venues in the early 90's (Taylor, 2003), the nightclub scene was rising in the city. Clubs such as Shelley's Laserdome in Longton, and Golden and the Freetown in Hanley were hubs of Britain's NTE, with people across the country travelling to North Staffordshire to hear the latest in dance music. In Particular Shelley's was well renowned for its resident DJ Sasha, who was seen as one of the best DJs of his time (Redhead, 1990).

However, clubs such as these were never far from courting controversy, with them being intrinsically linked to the city's underworld figures, such as the city's rival drug dealers and the city's top football hooligan firm, the *Naughty Forty*. Such trouble was known to occur at the Freetown, with Stoke football hooligans fighting with rival gangs who would try and encroach on their enterprise (Chester, 2003). The city's NTE at this time was evidently linked with much crime, with football hooliganism being prominent in the city during the Conservative era. Much of the idea of being a football 'lad' in Stoke was linked with the drinking culture, drugs, fashion, and criminality that was to be found in the NTE as much as it was about fighting (Chester, 2003).

Hanley was no doubt the centre of the city's business by the 1980's, and this was cemented in 1988 when the Potteries Centre opened in the town (Hallsworth and Stobart, 2000). Naturally the centre of the city and being best positioned to be the Central Business District in the city, it was clearly superior in this regard to the other five towns. Yet, the other towns did have business and retail centres at this time that were not as significantly smaller than the city centre as other cities' outer areas would've been. Consequently, the people who lived near these towns would often go to them for much of the shopping and trade, only venturing into Hanley when it was needed (Hallsworth and Stobart, 2000). However, as the 90's continued, it was clear Hanley was becoming more and more a city centre with it acquiring more funding and

regeneration than the other towns (Parker, 2000).

It was believed that the traditional environment of the city was changing, with it no longer being a place purely for its traditional hub of industrial workers. With the creation of Staffordshire University in 1992, with this brought a new hedonistic class of students to the surrounding areas (namely Shelton). This would create tensions between the traditional white working-class who had lived there for decades, and the Asian Muslim immigrants who resided in the area (Parker, 2000). There was a large sense of anger towards the changing environment, especially between the working-class youths of the city and the presumably middle-class students who began to rent in the area's universities' towns (Parker, 2000).

It was not just the people of the city that was changing either, for the look and feel of it was as well. This is most notable with the heavily funded areas such as Hanley and Festival Park, who had become increasingly globalised and soulless in the eyes of residents, as the old shops boarded up and the sense of community dying (Parker, 1996), while some would even highlight the moving of Stoke's stadium in the nineties from the working-class terraces of Stoke in the Victoria Ground, to the soulless industrial park that would situate the Britannia Stadium as being part of this sense of loss of the traditional city (Parker, 2000). While some like Parker may claim that these criticisms are based on people living in the past, objecting to both modernisation and progress (Parker, 1996), it is clear that Hanley's funding has meant that other towns do not get the same standard of shops that the one town does. The nineties no doubt show that the city was no longer seen as a unique amalgamation of six distinct communities, and the 'other' towns of the Potteries were going to face a decline purely because they were not located in the middle.

One aspect that was transforming into a globalised and soulless spectacle in this period were the pubs. While pubs did change somewhat during this era, there was still some sense of community spirit left in the pubs of Stoke-on-Trent, with one landlady at a pub in Smallthorne – The King's Head – celebrating her fifty years as landlady in 1990 by selling drinks at 1940's prices (Edwards, 1997), while pubs largely remained a rigidly gendered base as they always had, with some pubs being noted as very masculine and the absence of women was notable; yet pubs were beginning to change in the 90's, with pubs beginning to lack character and being markedly different to those of the past.

For example, the days of pubs having separate rooms was gradually being phased out, with one benefit of this decision being to stop drug dealing going on in the premises that was of course on the rise in this era (Edwards, 1997). Stoke's pubs were also facing the same issues that the rest of the city's economy was: rising prices and competition. By the 80's and 90's Stoke's traditional NTE of pubs was struggling to survive the competitive, capitalist era, as breweries began to sell off pubs at extortionate prices which sitting tenants were unable to afford. Many inevitably went to auction where the reserve could not be met. If they could find a tenant, they would attempt to put them on ten year or more lease contracts at three times the rent (Edwards, 1997).

To counter this, many pubs attempted rebrands, renaming themselves and losing part of their history in the process. One pub in Hanley known as the Antelope for over a century went through three name changes in four years in an attempt to rebrand and garner more custom in the mid 1990's. It instead lay derelict by 1997 (Edwards, 1997). Irish pubs also became prominent in the city in a bid to stay fresh for the consumers of the 1990s (none remain in the present day), rather than focusing on keeping pubs how

they traditionally were and acknowledging their historical importance to the communities of the six towns (Edwards, 1997). This occurred with some pubs at this time of course, with pubs such as the Leopard (Burslem), the Coachmakers Arms (Hanley), and the Unicorn (Hanley), staying prosperous during this era despite not resorting to constant rebrands and modernisation in the era of neoliberalism (Edwards, 1997).

Permanent Decline? [3]

The election of New Labour was thought to be a time of hope for the whole country after years of Conservative rule. However, the Labour party that the country got was not the party that the country had seen in the fifties and sixties, with many of the traditional working-class Left feeling as if they had been left behind by Blair and his new political direction for the party (Embery, 2020). No longer was the party fighting a class struggle, they were instead acquiescing to their own defeat. In the mind of the new incarnation of the party, traditional socialist principles had lost to Thatcher's neoliberalism, and all the Left could conceivably offer was the same neoliberalism but within certain limits (Winlow et al, 2017).

The party was seemingly focusing, in the minds of many working-class voters at least, on trivial issues that did not unite people together, such as the socially liberal policies of open borders and the promotion of multiculturalism while traditional aspects of Labour policy were somewhat neglected (Winlow et al, 2017). After all, the city's traditional industries had all but been demolished with the pottery industry declining and the areas last pit closing a year after Blair entered office; there was little fight put up by Labour to halt this or at least replace it with anything else.

[3] 1 Aspects of this section contain my own personal observations within the fieldsites

Also to decline during this period was the once booming NTE. During the times of New Labour, Hanley remained a somewhat thriving NTE, with venues such as Satchmos, Valentinos and even the Place remaining hubs of the NTE; although, it was evidently nothing compared to what it once was in its nineties heyday, with the loss of some of its most iconic venues such as the Free Town and Golden. Yet, streets would be filled several nights of the week as the sun would go down, with venues catering to different subcultures and genres. For example, clubs such as Satchmos would play dance music, while The Underground was host to *Club NME*, a night that would play indie-rock music and was renowned for being one of the best venues of its kind.

Hanley however was the only town that now had anything that resembled a NTE, with nightclubs such as Shelley's in Longton being closed since the nineties, decreasing the options for nightlife consumption. Fast forward to the coalition years, and the city was no longer renowned for its nightlife. It can not be denied that the city still had some form of NTE, but it was no doubt dwindling, with iconic nightclubs such as The Place and Satchmos having closed down, while other clubs failed to attract the numbers they once did.

Today, the city's NTE is virtually dead, failing to provide an outlet for the hedonistic drives of consumers (Winlow & Hall, 2006). A stroll through the city centre will be met with the view of countless boarded up clubs, with the empty venues that once were home to popular clubs such as Chicago's, Walkabout, and Boston Brothers being left with no tenant. The city has three main clubs now, the Sugarmill, Reflex and Fiction, while it also has two main gay clubs, Pink and Gossip; all of which do remain somewhat popular.

While there are other clubs and venues, few remain open for long stretches or are

even popular. Bars such as Bar360 are often dead, often only getting punters as the night turns into the day as they are the last club to remain open. There is some hope for a future thriving NTE however, with recent venues such as The Backyard pulling in decent crowds of various ages, although it faces the uphill battle against the weather as it is an outdoor only venue.

Recently there has been an increase in one off events taking place in the city, mainly for raves. One of such is the Spode rave nights, that take place in the old factory floor at the Spode Potbank (Loton, 2017). Even more increasingly, there has become a trend of nightclubs putting on nights dedicated to the nightclubs of the past in the hope of gaining custom based on people's nostalgia. Such nights include a *Club NME* reunion at the Underground, a Satchmo's night at the Sugarmill, and a Shelley's and Golden night at Keele University Student Union. Clearly struggling to remain relevant and popular in their own right, it appears nostalgia is employed by the club promoters to attract business, as these nights remain almost universally more popular than the clubs regular nights. Smith (2014) highlights that this incorporation of nostalgia is merely a *hyperreality* (Baudrillard, 1984), where it exists as a cheap imitation of a consumer boom period that grows increasingly distant from the original venues.

Moorlands towns such as Leek have remnants of a NTE still, however this is largely just pubs and tends to cater mainly to the town's residents, with it being rarer for people from the city to travel there for a night out. Nightlife remains in places such as Newcastle however, with many people from the inner city making the short trip to the more affluent side of town over going to the decaying city centre of Hanley. Clubs such as Revolution and Yates' remain popular venues for nightlife, however, like Hanley, this is really only applicable to Friday and Saturday nights. Venues in the town are seen as

being somewhat more middle class and pretentious than Hanley's nightclubs according to a number of participants, with many clubs still having a strict dress code that they adhere to such as not letting anyone in who is wearing Stone Island or Burberry, while the pubs such as Mitchell's refuse entry to anyone who is wearing sportswear despite the venue being a pub and not having club nights on.

There is meanwhile hope for towns such as Stoke, who have their own growing NTE in recent years with pubs such as the Glebe and Liquor Vaults putting club nights on, while the Potbank has had club nights. This is much more than the other towns have nowadays, yet it is still miniscule compared to the already small NTEs' of Hanley and Newcastle.

Pubs meanwhile have had a perhaps even more difficult time in the last twenty-five years than other aspects of the NTE, with many pubs that once made-up Stoke-on-Trent being long gone, with Staffordshire's pubs falling from 1,080 in 2001 to 780 in 2018 (Aru, 2018). A lot was made of the smoking ban and the effect that it would have on pubs (see Triggle, 2017), but, while it may have caused some customers to stop attending pubs, it appears that the pubs were heading into decline long before this.

This is for a myriad of reasons, namely the high rent prices on pubs as was the case in the nineties, a rise of cheap booze in supermarkets, and people drinking less and at home (Gratton, 2019). Meanwhile, the recession had a devastating effect on Stoke's pubs, with one in five allegedly being forced to close in its 2009 peak (BBC, 2009). More recently, 'old school' community pubs have been replaced by modernised bars in areas such as Hanley's Cultural Quarter, no longer catering to the working-classes of the city and serving pints of Bass and Joules, rather Gin and Tonics and overpriced food catering to the young consumer. Venues such as the Quarter and Bloom are notable

for this. Carbon copies of the 'hip' bars and venues that would be found in places such as Manchester's Northern Quarter, they appear as cheap imitations of places that actually have a thriving NTE. In the Cultural Quarter, only the Unicorn Inn is left standing of the traditional pubs of the city, a quiet reminder of the city's traditional life and history amidst the soulless venues competing to be cool.

There remains pubs in every part of the city, but they do not hold the same significance as they once did. Where pubs would once be numerous on some city streets, they now are few and far between. In one area of Stoke-on-Trent for example, Bucknall, two pubs remain, while in the late nineties there were at least five, plus two working men's clubs. Many of these pubs would also have club nights on, staying open to the early hours of the morning, giving punters the option whether to stay local for their nightlife or venture to the towns. This does not tend to be the case anymore, with many pubs rarely being busy and unable to attract the customers even if when they do put club nights on.

Pubs such as the Windmill in Werrington who put discos and Northern Soul nights on rarely get more customers coming through the door for them, with their regulars on weeknights and weekend afternoons numbering more. To make matters worse for the city's NTE, the Covid-19 pandemic ripped through the city, with draconian restrictions causing the city to fall even further down the hole of economic despair, with their being little evidence of the cities nightlife ever being able to recover (see Burn, 2020; Knapper, 2024).

From Vibrant to Vacant, Hotspot to Danger Zone

If you were to look at the city now, outside of large nearby employers such as Bet365 and JCB, there is little industry of any kind left, with all that has been left in its place is poor-paid jobs and high unemployment (Lichfield, 2019). The nightlife of the city has also seen a dramatic, decline in recent years with many of the cities former nightclubs and pubs now lying as derelict buildings, as if they were a relic of a time long gone (Davies, 2021). Average pay is 16% below the national average, house prices are half the national average, and its biggest employer is now an online betting company (Lichfield, 2019), replacing the purpose that the city's traditional manual jobs gave with making money off the back of peoples misfortune and financial precarities (Raymen & Smith, 2017).

The past decade of austerity has seen the city's public services become depleted (Price, 2024), while the crime rate has continued to rise and is significantly higher than the county average of 78 crimes per 1000 people at 123 (Crime Rate, 2023). The town centre's meanwhile range from the depressed to the derelict, with the once booming nightlife of the city being all but dead, with their being a 40% decrease in pubs and bars from 2001 to 2020 (Burnett, 2020). No doubt, the 2020-2022 Covid-19 pandemic has only added more fuel to this funeral pyre that is Stoke-on-Trent's NTE (Etherington et al, 2022).

The somewhat positive drinking cultures that could previously be found in areas such as working men's and social clubs, where a sense of community spirit was often found (see Winlow and Hall, 2006), have long gone from the city. All that largely remains is dangerously drinking to excess, leading to harmful behaviours, and possibly violence,

death, and addiction (Smith, 2014; Tariq, 2020; Byatt, 2023). Where once the Potteries had been a place of a pint and a line, media attention foregrounded problems of homelessness and new psychoactive substances, particularly monkey dust (McCormack et al, 2023; Andrews, 2024; Bradley, 2024) are emblematic of the changing fortunes of the city's residents.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the historical development of Stoke-on-Trent from the industrial period through to its modern-day post-industrial & *post-leisure* decline. This chapter has used 'thick description' to provide the reader with the historical context of the city and how this informs relations within the NTE and within the forthcoming data chapters (see Treadwell, 2020), evidencing how the city's working-class identity, once rooted in labour, community, and structure, has slowly unravelled in the face of economic neglect and cultural abandonment. What's emerged in its place is looser and more chaotic: a social landscape shaped by precarity, loss, and the need to feel something within the gaps left behind. The NTE does not just reflect this decline; it's part of it. It has become a space where traces of the old-world cling on, but are increasingly drowned out by the noise of violence, consumerism, inebriation, and a culture of individualism. This is evidenced by the changes in leisure practices in the city across a wide period and how they have been influenced by the wider socio-economic world. This backdrop is crucial to understanding the themes explored in the data chapters that follow, focussing on violence, selfish individualism, inebriation, and the drive to consume. These are not just random behaviours; they are shaped by history, the settings that the people occupy, and by the loss of meaning and stability that hangs over everyday life in the city. Following on from this, the next chapter places many of the

areas' issues discussed within the wider literature on the NTE, highlighting the various flaws in the academic research, while also highlighting concepts that will be drawn upon within the data.

Literature Review

Introduction

Having outlined the historical and geographic context of the thesis in relation to nightlife and social relations, the thesis will now examine the existing literature on the subject area and build on or later contest these arguments moving forward. The chapter will highlight scholarship from a range of different theoretical backgrounds that could have potentially been used to interpret the data and findings, to demonstrate their weaknesses and how they fail to accurately address many of the issues within the NTE when scrutinised despite being widely used. The chapter will first address the subject of what is meant by the NTE and its current state amongst wider leisure, before reviewing scholarship on different aspects of NTEs that will be focussed on in the data chapters, namely consumerism, individualism, violence and inebriation.

The Growth of The Night-Time-Economy

The 24-Hour-City

The '24-hour-city' has not come to fruition in the way that many expected it would. Rather, free-market capitalisms pursuit of profit just does not sleep, while the 'cafe culture' in the UK ideal is largely non-existent. Instead, businesses that work in the NTE largely just exist to cater to the inebriated masses, whether that is through taxis or takeaways. The utopian continental cafe culture of Europe was merely a hedonistic half-pint Ibiza (Roberts and Turner, 2005). The continental drinking culture that was desired by the 2003 Licensing Act was never produced (Jayne et al, 2008).

Images of couples drinking wine and enjoying tapas on hot summer nights were a chimera; the reality was a takeaway brawl and a late-night kebab. Winlow (2001: 121-122) aptly emphasises the realities of the 21st century NTE:

> 'Your night out can now take you in numerous different directions, and the pleasure derived from it becomes increasingly dependent on access to the full marketplace and its continued mutation so that now, having succeeded in attracting a member of the opposite (or even same) sex and brought a plastic roses, the discerning consumer can locate a friendly drug dealer and buy some cocaine or speed to keep himself awake, as well as some viagra… for the obvious. Then if he can avoid being arrested or beaten up and taken to hospital, he can grab a taxi to a hotel and seek personal nirvana. He might even stop for a kebab on the way'.

Though the idealist continental proposal never materialised, the NTE has nevertheless become synonymous with the image of the modern city, with the traditional industries in a moribund state (O'Conner & Wynne, 1998). The NTE was merely an attempt to fill the void left by deindustrialisation, a profit-making, all hours service economy to replace the now dead traditional industries and attract new financial investment (Ayres, 2019). As Harvey (2006) highlights, the economy has transformed from a producer of work to a service economy, and the NTE is an integral part of this transformation.

Many of the decaying buildings of the Fordist economy have been repurposed for the leisure economy, appearing as a spectre of the past (Smith, 2014). Stoke-on-Trent is no different in this regard, with one of its more famous ceramic factories, Spode, now providing the venue for raves, restaurants and bars (Loton, 2017). While this venue has

a somewhat limited rebirth, many of the other derelict buildings in the area act as a reminder of what has not been replaced. While some may see the regeneration of singular buildings positively (see Roberts, 2004), it fails to consider that this is simply papering over the cracks of a failing post-industrial society that has let its traditional industries decay to such a degree that they need regeneration in the first place. Smith (2014:50-51) notes the unnaturalness of these environments, where they share little in common with the industrial cities of old and corner-pub forged collectivity:

> "Just as industrialisation forged these characteristic sights, so too post-industrialism has moulded the cityscape. Today the modern and neon-light bright Quayside and The Gate in Newcastle, or the Gay Village in Manchester reverberate with throngs of drinker-consumers and repetitive base rather than the industrial missionary of a bygone age. These sites of hedonistic consumption are far from organic places. They are created environments, wilfully distorting reality, and sharing more in common with Disney World than the pubs and ale houses of previous generations".

Adding to the 'inorganic' cityscapes of the NTE, there is also the imaginary veneer of choice, with there being an increasing concentration of ownership in the NTE, with a small number of companies now controlling the majority of venues (Smith, 2014). Rising prices and increased competition has forced smaller-scale breweries and venues out of business, with a select few conglomerates having the financial capital to buy and resurrect them, turning NTEs into a selection of venues all owned by the same few investors (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). One might take refuge in the thin imaginary veneer of choice in the NTE, having the choice between Irish themed bar O'Neills, or the classier and stylish All Bar One. In reality, they are owned by the same corporate

entity (in this case Mitchells and Butlers), as is often the case in the supposedly varied city nightlife.

Hipster Capitalism

Yet, there is evidence that more independent bars, termed 'hipster' by Thompson et al (2017), are increasingly popular with consumers who are eager to stand out from the crowd through their individualistic expressions of identity, and these sentiments are projected by the participants in the later chapters. Bars built upon such 'hipster capitalism' are often characterised by having 'something for everyone', often appearing as a café-bar-club (Thompson et al, 2017; Hobbs et al, 2003). They claim to offer something different to the norm, utilising micro-breweries, a hybrid model of bar/café, and serving food that they claim you could not get from the other places in the area, giving off the image of an establishment that is 'transient, aspirational, precarious, and creative' (Thompson et al, 2017).

Possibly. Or maybe the workers and clientele are just dressed differently to the people who go to their local traditional pub and are more aligned to the middle-class habitus that they cater for. To Thompson et al (2017), who self-proclaim to be middle-class, they felt at home in these hybrid establishments that combined both work and leisure, yet felt out of place in the traditional community pub. They fail to notice however that this serves its purpose in the neoliberal age, where leisure and work are increasingly blurred. One can always have an abundance of free time, but one can always work (Lloyd, 2019).

Further to this, such establishments are built on the same premise of the other venture capitalists, they just merely do not hold the same financial capital. The venues

supposed ‘hipness’ is a strategy by businesses to embrace and market ‘hipness’ as a key component of consumer society, and has been present since the 1960s (Frank, 1997). In a consumer society, where the individual is encouraged to market itself as someone who stands out from the crowd, hipster venues hold just as important place in upholding the values of free-market consumer culture as does All Bar One (Frank, 1997). Such bars merely market their image to appear to imbue envy to the outsider, they have something different that you cannot get anywhere else, utilising their own niche consumer symbols and branding to establish consumer desire (Hall et al, 2008).

Competing Nightlife

Such conflicts between the custom of the more traditional drinking venues and the more ‘hip’ clubs and bars associated with the NTE are present in the literature, with the local pubs being seen as antiquated and for ‘chavs’ (see Nicholls, 2018). While it would be hard to deny that this transformation has seen some liberalising positives, with the drinking culture no longer a white, masculine sphere, with women and ethnic minority revellers increasing (Nayak, 2003; Wicks, 2022). Such opinions fail to recognise however the traditional and collectivised institutions that such pubs espouse, offering a sense of collective belonging not found in the vertical drinking spots such as Slug and Lettuce (Smith, 2014; Winlow, 2001; Winlow & Hall, 2006; Telford, 2022).

While the local estate pub may be rough around the edges, the drinking culture prior to mass consumerism was based around community and belonging. Seemingly, the drinking culture outside of this is about ‘getting pissed’ (Winlow & Hall, 2006). Nor was the culture one of competition, with the local pub having a positive effect on social cohesion (Cabras & Mount, 2014; 2017; Bowler & Everitt, 1999). Veblenistic (1965)

displays of wealth were relatively absent from traditional, working-class leisure based on community, yet the growth in leisure time and the rise of libidinal NTEs based on marketing and competition has found this a more common aspect of post-modern nightlife (Hall et al, 2008). The NTE and its indulgence is one part of a multi-faceted excess driven consumer culture, where cultural capital can be attained through a superfluity of competitive consumptive practices (Hall et al, 2008). The competitive nature is contained in the DNA of the NTE, with the sheer participation being a competition in itself, with it being increasingly expensive to afford what some would call a 'proper' night out, draining the consumers finances, but the fear of missing out means that people are willing to do what is necessary to achieve it (Hall et al, 2008).

The competitive nature of the NTE is not just present throughout social relations, but also in the shadow economy that governs the liminal spaces of the night. The NTE became increasingly splintered by the dawn of the 1990s, with licensed pubs and clubs no longer being the go-to for many consumers who had a renewed focus on drug taking over drinking alcohol, which could be done away from the premises that could not afford to lose their license over ecstasy and amphetamines (Hadfield, 2006).

Increased licensing has allowed the state to govern and regulate from a distance (Cowan & Hardy, 2021), but a shadow market has largely been expected to enforce order at will (see Winlow, 2001). This has lead to a largely self-regulating economy (Hobbs et al, 2002), which its venues are willing to overlook the potential harms of alcohol and drug use to outcompete those around them. As Winlow (2001) highlights, the NTE's venues can be an ideal location for amateur and often illicit business, with its relative informalities and anonymities, while the economy that exists on the periphery of these clubs and pubs also flourish during these same hours. This highlights the

competitive nature that resides in the NTE, that has acquiesced the social harm that they reproduce in the name of profit which the state largely permits through its license to have fun, but not too much fun.

Clarke & Critcher (1985) argued from a Marxist perspective that the state regulates leisure, determining how the working-classes spend their time away from work. Leisure has been noted as important historically to the economy, aiding the global economy through providing the industrial workforce time to recharge before they returned to work (Clark and Crichter, 1985). This continues to be seen today, with the NTE being a vehicle for consumers to escape their issues (Treadwell & Ayres, 2012; Smith, 2014).

To some extent the regulation of the working-classes has been seen, with laws such as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act in 1994 restricting unlicensed raves and free parties, taking the unlicensed scenes away from the shadow economy and instead in the hands of semi-regulated night- time-economies of the proposed 24-hour-cities and its later licenses (Critcher, 2000). The Licensing Act (2003) was the key turning point in the commodification of the night, with its extension of opening hours being rolled out across the country. The message between the two Acts was clear: indulge in your hedonistic pleasures, but only under the regulation of the free-marketised state.

Leisure & its Function

Much of the literature around the NTE from a social lens is based on the wider study of leisure. As Winlow and Hall (2006) point out, much literature regarding leisure is in fact related to only two aspects, sport and drinking, both of which are intrinsically linked to the NTE and working-class life. The NTE exists as a microcosm of the wider freedom to leisure, which some have been quick to label as liberating (Bennett, 2001), a zone for

resistance of capitalism (Fiske, 1991), while others attest its ability to build and mend friendships (Nichols, 2018). While others have taken a more critical view, highlighting the growth of leisure time as a distraction to the inequalities of capitalism (Brohm, 1978).

Fiske (1991) is one of the more influential proponents of the positive and liberating feature of leisure. Fiske (1989) suggests that people reproduce popular culture through using, rejecting, or modifying it to satisfy their individualistic needs which should be celebrated. Such 'freedom of consumerism' offers resistance to capitalism according to Fiske (1991), but, as Smith (2014) points out, there is little resistance when partaking in the consumptive practices of late capitalism.

While Fiske may see the subversion of capitalism through women going shopping while wearing clothes with rips in or manual work overalls, this in reality is offering very little resistance to Wall Street investors and Austrian economists. While it is undoubtedly true that people form identity based on consumer goods (Stebbins, 2019; Raymen, 2018; Smith, 2014), the idea that this resists capitalism when it merely reinforces it is typical of liberal-left thought (Kelly & Winlow, 2022), and is archetypal of much of the theory of leisure activities as a whole.

Parker has offered similar sentiments when discussing leisure and its relation to consumerism. Parker's (1976) work on leisure highlighted the relationship between work and leisure, and the inherent interconnectedness between the two spheres of life. In short, Parker outlined that leisure was dependent on ones work, and the work that one did would influence how they spent their leisure time. Building on this, he highlights the lack of time or energy for leisure for the manual labourer class who instead were content with playing cards and drinking in their local pub, while he went

on to predict that the growth in leisure-based identity would surpass identities built upon occupation (Parker, 1971). He saw the rise in flexibility as an opportunity for more 'pure leisure' (Parker, 1981), what he saw through a purely positive lens as a moral good.

Yet, this is evidently short sighted and failed to take into account the rise of the free-market and its ever-increasing gig economy, zero-hour contracts, and shift work, as flexibility quickly became flexibility on the terms of the employers and not the employee (Lloyd, 2019; Raymen & Smith, 2019). Rojek (2010) highlighted the flaws with the freeing potentials of leisure as proposed by Parker, whereby he shows that leisure has merely become a product to be sold to consumers. This has become 'the labour of leisure' (Ibid.), with pleasure being absent from many activities, rather being an emulative experience based on competing external consumer drives harnessed by the orderly nature of late capitalism (Rojek, 1995).

The discussion of leisure from a critical standpoint has been prominent in recent years from proponents of the *Deviant Leisure* (see Raymen & Smith, 2019) field with its theoretical foundations in *Ultra-realism* (See Winlow & Hall, 2015). Much of the theoretical discussion thus far and throughout the thesis have drawn on these theories and their underpinnings, and they will both be discussed in significant depth in the *Methods* chapter, so shall not be discussed here to avoid repetition.

But, I would argue, as would other proponents of the fields, it is clear that there is little being discussed of leisure and in particular the NTE outside of a positive lens. Few are willing to critique the NTE as a whole, even when criticising aspects of it such as violence, this can be met with the caveat that it still offers a multitude of social, cultural, or economic benefits (Saleem et al, 2020; Nichols, 2018; Finney, 2004; Dunn &

Edensor, 2020). This is arguably most clear in the work of Nicholls (2018: 91- 92), who despite engaging with the work of *Deviant Leisure* found the benefits of the NTE too strong to write it off as a consumptive nightmare of lust and harm:

> "… caring for intoxicated female friends as an opportunity to see friends 'at their worst', claiming that 'it gives you an extra layer of relationship with them'… Ally also claimed that 'they've got your back, you've got theirs' and suggested nights out built trust between female friends and provided you with 'someone to hold your hair back' if you were being sick. This sentiment was echoed by a number of other women, again highlighting links between alcohol consumption, intimacy and friendship".

Having someone to hold your hair back when being sick is held up as an example of the positivity that could be found in the NTE, a facilitator to cement relationships that is accepted at face value. The realities of the NTE is that it is a facilitator of violence (Winlow, 2001), serious drug use (Treadwell & Ayres, 2014), depressive alcoholic inebriation (Smith, 2014), rampant consumerism & hedonistic excess (Hayward & Turner, 2019), friendships devoid of deeper meaning (Lloyd, 2013), and risky sexual behaviours (Winlow & Hall, 2006), all encouraged by a consumer economy and an ever prolonging of youth (Hollands, 1995).

The following sections shall begin to delve deeper into each of these issues as they pertain to the NTE, offering a critical overview of each section to highlight gaps for this research to uncover.

Individualism and Consumption

Early Theories

Early theories of consumerism and individualism largely follow the early sociological theories of the past, with Marx and Durkheim being prominent. Marx (2011) view of consumerism is embedded in his broader analysis of industrial capitalism, where alienation is prominent. Marx (2011) argued that workers are increasingly alienated from the products of their labour, as they lack control over their products as they are sold by exploitative capitalist bosses for profit. Individuals are further alienated by being reduced to mere consumers, whose identities and fulfilment are tied to the consumption of goods rather than meaningful production based on their needs.

Moreover, workers consumed the products of others' labour, just as others consumed theirs, all while enriching the bosses through the circulation of capital; deepening their alienation from the goods they produced. Commodities, to Marx, came to be valued based not on the Labour that produced them, but the object themselves, developing irrational attachments to material goods. Their work that goes into making consumer products is fetishised as to not reveal the harms behind their creation. While initially written in the 19th century, as we will come to see there are still some noticeable similarities to the late capitalist world in which we currently exist, with the many harms of NTE consumption hidden behind the individuals drive for indulgent consumption.

These initial Marxist discussions of consumerism were later expanded on by the Frankfurt School. Marcuse (2013) expanded on Marx's position, suggesting that capitalism had created 'false needs', which serve capitalist society through promoting

consumerism and wealth accumulation, rather than striving for real needs that would benefit them and wider society. Most prevalent from this group however were Horkheimer & Adorno (1993), with their discussion of the culture industry. The concept argues that culture is mass produced by capitalists with the aim of manipulating the masses into relative passivity. Through the creation of a widely available popular culture, society was, they argue, turned into an army of passive consumers whose individualism is at best superficial.

Durkheim (2014) argues more from an individualistic perception of consumerism, that consumption is a seductive practice that needs restraining so that it does not drive the subject into anomic normlessness and threaten the moral norms of wider society. The consumptive practices are in need of restraint due to the potential instability caused by working towards their consumptive goals. Consumerism, to Durkheim, was intrinsic to capitalism and drove individuals to strive for better commodities. Weber (1946) brought forth the argument of status symbols in terms of consumerism, arguing that status was determined by what one could afford to consume. Consumer status was part of his wider tripartite discussion of social stratification through the accumulation of class, status and power. The interplay of these three aspects determines one's social standing, and consumerism enables one to display their social status to others.

This was heavily influential on one of the more prominent theorists of consumerism, Veblen (1994; 2005) and his theory of conspicuous consumption and the leisure class. Veblen (1994) argued that the status is achieved through the display of their conspicuous consumption, a display that merely highlights their ability to indulge rather than any material purpose. This enabled the leisure class to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, manual workers, who did not have means nor the

time to engage in consumptive leisure. There is a seemingly eagerness to achieve the consumptive standard of Veblen's (1994) leisure class within the modern NTE, some through the pseudo- pacified method of economic- and cultural-capital accumulation, while others remain criminal *undertakers* who are willing to use their potential for violence and criminality to reach the heights of the leisure class (Hall, 2012).

Simmel (1997) looked at consumption and individualism similarly to Veblen, highlighting that money allowed those who had access to wealth could achieve their desires through consumption, but saw this through a somewhat more positive lens. Simmel (1997) argues that fashion was a freeing aspect of consumerism, where one could express their individuality when they were unable to in other realms, highlighting that increased individualism would offer potential for liberation. This liberation was for Simmel achieved through money, liberating from the traditional social bonds of old.

However, despite this more positive approach on consumption and individualism that would become more prominent in the New Left, he was critical of the effect of finance on human interaction. Simmel (1997) highlights this through his essay on prostitution, noting how capitalist society treats human interaction as a mere market transaction, that fails to adequately replace the internal needs of the individual. In the case of prostitution, the consumer can purchase sex to fulfil his immediate drive for sexual gratification, but he cannot purchase love as it requires more than what can be easily transacted.

In a similar vein to Weber and Simmel, Sombart highlighted that modern industrial capitalism had created a culture consumption of where individuals' identities and social status became closely tied to their ability to acquire and display material wealth, rather than a producer or accumulator of wealth gaining distinction. He argued that the drive

for wealth, consumption and social distinction has been dispersed throughout society to all social classes (Sombart, 1967). Sombart has largely been forgotten by much mainstream academia - Hall (2012) however notably uses his work positively - but his work is worth critically exploring in relation to late capitalism.

Sombart highlighted the psychological drives embedded within consumptive capitalism, with the pursuit of consumption being based on pleasure moreso than profit accumulation and utility. Pleasure in this period was largely based upon 'luxury', and the will for one to attain this (Sombart, 1967). Sombart (1976) highlights that many in capitalist societies such as the early 20th century United States are more interested in the dominant beliefs of consumerism and the possibility of social mobility, with neither political party appealing to a traditional working-class hub like the UK Labour Party once did. This is strikingly similar to the current neoliberal epoch where class politics have largely been supplemented by parties in exchange for ideals of social mobility or fragmented and separative group identity politics (see Winlow & Hall, 2022). While there are issues with his work and it would be unreasonable to link all of what he argues to the current consumer capitalist landscape, it touches on consumerisms role in nullifying parts of the working-classes which we will see later in this thesis is prominent to this day.

Over the Counterculture

After early theories of consumerism, we first see a rise in attention during the beginning of the supposed 'counterculture'. Writing before this had fully taken hold, Hoggart (1957) highlighted the growth of consumerism in Britain through the proliferation of mass media and popular culture, supported by the Keynesian economic consensus of the post-war period and subsequent increases in disposable income. He

noted the negative effects that consumerism through mass media was having in traditional working-class culture and institutions through creating a superficial culture that does not provide the social bonds that traditional working-class life did (ibid.). As we will come to see, the growing consumptive cultural norms would have a damning effect on working-class life and culture as Hoggart (1957) foresaw, all the while being cheered on by the counterculture movement and the New Left (see Winlow & Hall, 2022). This would lead to an increased emphasis on individualism over the needs of the community, and the communal bonds of old would increasingly breakdown (Hoggart, 1957).

Prominent thought at this time viewed consumptive individualism as a mode of resistance, and much of the social sciences has remained tied to this ever since. Hebbidge (1979) argued that subcultures consuming different styles through fashion and behaviour would challenge societal norms and resist capitalism through subverting cultural norms. But of course, much of the writings from these academics downplayed the consumerist aspects of their own theories, instead often arguing that ideas of resistance endemic to individualism had been 'co-opted' by consumer capitalism (see McRobbie, 1994; Debord, 1967; Ewen, 1976).

DeCerteau (1984) saw these consumptive practices as inherent forms of potential resistance, where resistance is everywhere. Consumption is used to reinterpret and subvert the dominant culture through creating their own meanings for consumer products outside of their intended purpose. How this offers any type of real resistance is not quite clear, with material political resistance to neoliberal capitalism being all but dead (Harvey, 2005). Further to this point, the idea of consumption being 'co-opted' and absorbed by capitalism ignores its symbiotic reality that they are dependent on

one another (Hall et al, 2008). Global capitalism instead thrives on new, supposedly transgressive, cultural norms, with the late capitalist drive compelling the subject to 'stand out to fit in' (Miles et al, 1998). As we will come to see moving forward, this is the case within the consumptive practices of the NTE.

The New Left viewed the positives of consumption through the lens of resistance largely due to its individualistic orientation, the anthesis to conformity which they saw as repressive and indicative of the evil of the state (Badiou, 2002). Counterculture largely brought into this belief of the state as fascist and arbiters of authority (Hall et al, 2008). Hall et al (2008:103) posits:

> 'The countercultural left of the post-war period confused conformity with obedience, and, perhaps more to the point for this study, nonconformity with disobedience. To resist conformity one simply had to be conspicuously disobedient. In pursuing this line, the countercultural left have omitted the crucial fact that the culture industries of advanced capitalism have systematically transformed 'disobedience' into the accepted way to conform'.

The supposed individualism is reminiscent of the 'Goth Kids' from *South Park*, complaining about conformists while they all look the same as one another. But as long as it is somewhat different from the absolute dominant form of popular culture, it fulfils its liberal purpose of transgression. To the socially liberal left, counterculture offered an idea of freedom and individualism that would be repressed under the industrial state (Marcuse, 2012).

All the New Left really did however was remove the prohibitions that existed for repressed groups, just for them to be exploited by the capitalist market by embedding them fully in the competitive marketplace. For example, liberating sexual relations

largely just opened the doors for the pornography industry to exploit sexuality (Hall et al, 2008). The liberation of women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals can be seen as the force of liberation and acceptance, evolving progress in social attitudes and positive social change, and yet undeniably it enabled the embedding of these identities as unique identity groups as consumers in the NTE which could target their stereotypical group interests to further exploit them for profit l (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003).

Nightlife Drives & the Death of Resistance

Counterculture and its immersion into global capitalism had begun to be questioned by academics from the 1980's more frequently, highlighting the evident failure of it to offer any significant resistance to the current paradigm that would not be exploited by the very same system. Rather, its focus on individualism and freedom largely untied the communal bonds of traditionalism (Hall & Winlow, 2007).

Frank (1997) highlights that this idea of freedom that consumer culture and counterculture existed with were all part of the competitive late capitalist system that needed them in order to survive. Contrary to liberal ideals of freedom, the heightened individualism has in fact created an increasing self-centred and narcissistic personality (Lasch, 1979), that seeks personal gratification above all else. Contrary to the positivity outlined by previous scholars who saw conformity as evil, individual drives are noted by Hayward (2004) as having the potential for harm rather than positive freedom.

Consumer culture's disposability is not only found in the material spheres of fast fashion or the latest trends, but in the fluid identities of social life, which are adapted and then discarded at the will of the subject when their current identity no longer

fulfils its use (Lasch, 1985; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). The NTE is a core venue for consumer individualism to be displayed and subsidised, in an expression of cool individuality as part of their identity (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003), with the nightclubs of late capitalism being merely a stage for an increasingly diverse and ever fragmented mix of identities (Redhead, 1997). Traditional class subcultures had been replaced by 'club cultures' based on loose formulations of young people with a shared goal of hedonism (Redhead, 1993). The traditional landscapes that once made up the more mainstream of the traditional 'booze economy', such as community pubs and working men's clubs, have come to be seen as inhabited by 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 1997), the Other to the increasingly stylish and culturally capitalised consumers of the modern-day NTE. Thornton (1995) highlighted the 'subcultural capital' one could achieve through consuming within the NTE, with ideas of authenticity and hipness delegated as providing more capital in the marketplace of consumer identity.

Uber-Individual Adulthood

What is often seen as positive in these sites is the indulgent drives for pleasure with little restraint (Raymen, 2022). Briggs (2013) highlights the consumption that individuals feel within the NTE, with his participants emphasising that they feel compelled to experience the hedonistic spaces of Ibiza. Similarly, Hall et al (2008) highlight the need for their participants to experience nights out up town while wearing the latest fashion trends, despite living economically deprived lives outside of the NTE.

This is at clear odds with the traditional use of traditional drinking cultures that were not based on primal consumption and hedonistic desire, but rather a journey into adult

life. Hollands (1995) highlights that historically the purpose of 'going out' was the ascent into adulthood and the beginning of increased attachment to the local pub:

> 'Traditional rites revolved around courtship and marriage, introduction to alcohol, and integration into the community through the local pub. Drinking and going out in the North-East was also embedded in a wider cultural apprenticeship based around masculinity and women's subordination in the home… Their induction into the pub paralleled their transition into manual work and manhood generally- hence the traditional image of the hardworking, hard-drinking Geordie man'. (Hollands, 1995:18)

Bushell (2020) dictates that adulthood has been coalesced with adolescence through the saturation of infantile narcissism spread through society, at clear odds with the structural groundings of the social democratic era that was based on marriage, children and employment. Fragmented individualism has splintered the structures of old in exchange for very little else in terms of coherent conceptions of adulthood. This has been largely established through the disintegration of the former *Big Other* based on traditionalism and shared norms and values, where previous conceptions are no longer statically structured, with adulthood being merely one aspect that has lost all former clarity (Winlow & Hall, 2013).

Bushell (2020:66) notes however that at the same time there is no reason for individuals to want to grow into the traditional adulthood:

> ''adult' is increasingly seen as a byword for responsibility in the most difficult of economic environments. For many, adulthood is a struggle to make ends meet and support a family in a precarious and insecure labour market. It is to rue the inevitability of rising household debt and to accept the realisation that there

will be little or no pension pot on reaching retirement age'.

Within this context, the rise of certain behaviours in the Night-Time Economy reflects how economic markets have failed to reproduce the stable social structures and expectations of adulthood once available to previous generations. With limited access to secure employment, affordable housing, and long-term relationships — hallmarks of the post-war social democratic era — young people are instead drawn to alternative spaces where consumption and spectacle offer a transitory sense of identity. Participation in the NTE therefore becomes a compensatory practice, a means of constructing meaning and social value in a world where traditional routes to adulthood have become increasingly inaccessible.

Hayward (2024) highlights the issue of 'infantilisation' within contemporary society, identifying the development of this amidst the rise of consumerism. Infantilisation, to Hayward (2024), has permeated many spheres of contemporary life, from advertising and education to the political realm. This has no doubt had an equal impact on the behaviours and motivations within the NTE, as we will come to see throughout the data. Without a clear pathway from adolescence to stable adulthood, an infantile narcissism throughout the venues of the NTE will continue to permeate social interaction and the consumption of self-indulgent pleasure through expressive individualism, consumerism, violence and intoxication.

Theories and Approaches to Violence

Early research on violence often focussed on biological explanations of criminality, which could be seen through appearance, which predicted a higher propensity for violent impulsions (Lombroso, 1876). This has largely been resigned to the past within

criminological thought, assigned as pseudoscientific by most. Yet there has been some speculation in the late 20th century that biology could be of influence, with Raine et al (1998) finding that taller children were more likely to be violent to others. Sociobiological studies of violence have hinted at the link between biology and violent crime, with aggression being an innate part of some individuals' genes, who will resort to aggression if there is a need for survival (see Wilson, 1978).

However, there is debate around how much of this is reliant on social factors rather than biological, returning to the nature vs nurture debate. Supposed violent genes and chromosomes have largely been admonished by the social sciences for this reason, with the so called XYY chromosome once being labelled as an indicator of criminality, being shown to be no more likely than other men to commit violent offences (Witkin et al, 1976). A similarity controversial aspect of biological criminology is the relevance of testosterone on violence (see Olweus et al, 1988). While there is some grounding to this suggestion, with the use of anabolic steroids leading to heightened testosterone and violence being evident (see Beaver et al, 2008 for an overview). However, there continues to be debate around whether such biological predispositions are influenced by external stimuli, such as the aggressively masculine locales that steroid users may reside (Gibbs, 2021).

Similar to genetic and hormonal explanations of violence, there exists debates around the propensity of mental health being an influence on violence, with a statistically significant proportion of violent offenders having mental health issues (Whiting & Fazel, 2020; Monaghan et al, 2001). Such assertions are largely left unproven however, with issues such as schizophrenia and PTSD having a limited influence on criminality when controlling for socio-demographic factors (Silverstein et al, 2015).

Embedded within the debates around nature and nurture are the learning theories of violence, with the theories siding with the latter in the debate. Sutherland (1947) argued that criminal behaviour is learnt through interaction with others, in what he called differential association, with those more exposed to violent criminals are more likely to follow in their footsteps if they accept their 'meanings' for violence. This fails to consider why those who have spent time under the influence of intimate criminal groups do not turn violent. Meanings of violence can be understood as rational in many contexts such as the illegal drug trade in recession hit urban locales (see Marsh, 2020), but not all are willing to follow in these footsteps to become a criminal *undertaker* themselves. Much of differential association is tied to symbolic interactionism, where individuals supposedly interpret meanings of recognisable symbols to determine their image of the self. Such theories fail to accurately assess the wider social context in which meaning is made, with its focus being largely the micro- rather than the macro-context of socio-economic relations that inform most interactions (Hall, 2012).

The psychological and inherited aspects of criminality have often been overlooked by more modern criminology, with thoughts of Lombrossian pseudoscience muddying the well of the field (Jones, 2015). As such, psychological and neuroscience explanations for violence have largely been ignored by mainstream criminology, with the field largely focussing on liberal discussing of individualised trauma and shame as a trigger for criminality (see Quinn et al, 2017; McClure & Parmenter, 2020; Feiring, 2009; Tangney et al, 2011). This is not to say that issues such as shame and trauma do not play a role in the development of violent personalities, but they fail to offer a comprehensive conclusion on why some who experience these primitive feelings are willing to commit

crime while others are not.

Sapolsky (2017) offers a different approach from this orthodoxy, highlighting how neurobiological processes, hormonal influences, developmental stages, and evolutionary history contribute to human action, that are left misunderstood if isolated from their environmental contexts. Sapolsky (2017) discusses alongside this the concept of neuroplasticity, or the brain's ability to reorganise itself in response to experiences, underscoring the dynamic nature of behavioural development.

Hall (2012) has applied similar explanations to violence but highlighted the interaction of biology alongside the transcendental. Utilising Johnston's (2008) concept of *deaptation*, Hall (2012) explains that humans are hardwired for plasticity in terms of their drives and desires, but without the structure of a coherent symbolic order, the subject can become *deaptative*, meaning that a previously functional embodied ideology has become dysfunctional in its current form. Ellis et al (2017) highlights that in the case of violent men, such *deaptation* can influence violent encounters through feelings of humiliation and shame permeating their personal ideology of toughness and resilience that were needed in the world of heavy industry, but have little use in the current socio-economic system outside of violence. Extreme violence can stem from these feelings of humiliation (Gilligan, 2000), due to the lack of coherent symbolic order to pacify these drives (Hall, 2012).

Jones (2015) posits that with the liberal deconstruction of all previously grounding bonds such as class and religion, we are at an ever-greater risk of social isolation and shame. Those who have little attachment to others fail to successfully cope with shame, then feel the need to aggressively defend their self-image with whatever they can. Men capable of violence will actively search for auguries of humiliation, and are

willing to defend their self- image through violence (Ibid). This is significantly pronounced in the NTE, where slights and misunderstandings which could easily be resolved within the regulating spaces of the daytime are often the impetus for violent action (Winlow & Hall, 2006).

Much of this work is reliant on psychoanalytical theory. Psychoanalytical theories deal with the learnt behaviours within the unconscious. In brief, the Freudian mind is based on drives and desires (referred to as the id), and part of these drives are aggression. The ego is the rationaliser of the aggressive drives, determining what is acceptable by negotiating the drives of the id within social norms; while the superego is the moral conscience of the Freudian personality that has internalised wider morality. Those whose superego have failed to develop an appropriate morality from external stimuli, Freud argues are to develop a weak conscience in terms of experiencing guilt, and are more likely to allow their primitive drives to overcome their subjugating ego. The drives of the unconscious have similarly been utilised by other psychoanalytic scholars, such as Lacan (1988) and Zizek (2007), with Freudian ideas being gradually supported by neuroscience (Solms & Turnbull, 2002). *Ultra-realism* has successfully utilised psychoanalytical theories to help explain violence through its concepts such as transcendental materialism and pseudo-pacification (Winlow & Hall, 2015). These concepts underpin much of the theorisation of the thesis, and will therefore be explored in-depth in the following *Methods* chapter.

Gang violence & Moral Panics

Gang or group violence has been a staple of criminology research since the beginnings of the Chicago School, with football forming a large portion of the contemporary academic enquiry on group violence (See Frosdick & Marsh, 2005). Thrasher (1927) is

notable in his discussion of gangs in Chicago, noting that most gang members were from deprived areas and had few other recreational outlets other than violent confrontation, especially during the age which bridges between childhood and adulthood. Cohen (1955) in the UK similarly saw gang association as a system of self-esteem retrieval after it had been hindered by their schooling that they felt was not relevant to the industrial, masculine labour roles that they would eventually occupy. Contrastingly, Cohen (1972) argued that gangs and territoriality was less pronounced in Britain through violence, with group dynamics being built upon subcultural style and identity. I would argue however that this is considerably overstated. The notion that Glasgow's violent gangs are somehow 'unique' (see Deuchar, 2009; Fraser, 2013; Davies, 2013; McLean & Holligan, 2018) is not supported by my forthcoming data. Similar forms of territorial violence between different areas were also prevalent in Stoke-on-Trent, suggesting that such patterns are not geographically exclusive to Glasgow.

Due to the prominence of gangs being associated with youth and their supposed demonisation, there have been numerous researchers of gangs who are proponents of the Moral Panics theory (see Cohen, 1972; Welch et al, 2002; Bartie, 2010), which sees supposed minor instances of violence and deviance as amplified by the mass media to induce mass public fear and reactionary governmental policies. However, to believe such theories, would be ignoring the very real harms associated with violent groups, especially in locales of permanent deprivation (Hall, 2012). It is hard to suggest there is a panic about morals when the persistent, and at often times extreme, interpersonal violence has become increasingly normalised (Ellis, 2017). It also places far too emphasis on the very idea of morality. To Cohen (1972), such a reaction from the media and the state is due to these subcultures threatening the state through their non-

conformance to dominant social values.

Hall (2012) shows this to be a fallacy, highlighting that these individuals are actually confirming to the individualised competitive lifestyles that late capitalism requires of them to be a competent *pseudo-pacified* consumer. In reality, producing drill music and making this a core part of one's identity has little impact on wider society and transgressing its norms of individualism and competition. On the contrary, someone who listens to drill music and then goes out and shoots someone who mentioned him in a diss track probably does have an impact. Horsley (2017:88) suggests in this case that:

> 'It thus misses the logical suggestion that 'crime' and 'harm' might result less from pushing against a system that constrains them, than from a kind of 'hyper-conformity' to the primary ethical values of late capitalism and the fundamental disorder of multitudinous individualised passions eager for satisfaction'.

The Failures of Left-Idealism/Realism

This failure to fully grasp the deeper structural underpinnings of violence also extends to early criminological thought, and particularly the limitations found within both left-realism and -idealism. Much early criminological thought had been based on early sociological theory. Much of this early thought is based on conflict theories of Marx and Engels, despite Marx writing very little on the subject of violence. Engels (1993) suggested that violence during the industrial period was a retaliation against those who had subjugated them through deprivation and poverty. This would also determine who would be deemed as criminal also, with poor's actions problematised much more frequently than the middle-classes when they committed the same actions (see Chambliss, 1995). While proponents of the theory are quick to highlight crime as a consequence of conflicting values and social inequality, conflict theorists have

expressed that violent crime can be celebrated as transgressive and proto-revolutionary, with some even making defending their rape of women as an insurrectionary act (Ray, 2011).

Much of the theories were focussed on the social constructionist argument of crime, rather than why violent working-class people are willing to enact violence on those around them (see Quinney, 1970). It completely neglects the realities of violence, which is often destructive, and its seemingly incessant nature can lead to revenge attacks in a continuation of the cycle (Anderson, 1999). This failure to explain violence beyond vague dissatisfaction and untrustworthiness of the state as a vehicle for capitalists leaves much to be desired, as their Left-idealist arguments meant very little to those who experienced the very real dangers of crime (Winlow & Hall, 2015).

Further to this, the everchanging politico- economic order of the world is significantly different to the time in which Marx and Engels were writing, so to be so reliant on the old bedrocks of theory while failing to comment on the changes of global capitalism during this period in between adds very little to the discussion of the realities of structural influences on crime. The working-class and so-called underclass no longer hold the same communal weight that they once did, with Marx's (2011) description of them being a 'reserve army of Labour' largely being untrue in the post-Fordist economy. Rather, they have little industrial economic use at all, and what has been left in its place are transactions of economic and social capital through violent means (Wacquant, 1998). Violence merely allows those who have been neglected by post-Industrialism to compensate for their lack of economic capital (Wieviorka, 2009).

Left-Realism did work to rectify the issues of left-idealism/Marxism however, where they accepted the structural issues around crime and its causes, while also accepting

the blunt reality that interpersonal violence is harmful (Lea & Young, 1993). The proponents drew on strain theory and the concept of anomie, whereby there crime is committed when the legitimate means to success are unavailable (Merton, 1938), arguing that consumer society alienates those whose desires cannot be legitimately attained.

Lea & Young (1993) rejected the premise of left-idealists who proposed that criminology should be concerned with the labelling of deviants as criminal, suggesting that working-class people had little time for the romanticised view of crime when they were often victims of physical crimes themselves. The social exclusion brought about by relative deprivation and strain of the socio-economic landscape of neoliberalism is the core driver of violent criminality, with its most marginalised being the most likely to be both victims or offenders (Young, 1999). Lea & Young (1993) highlighted the very real realities of violence, and the rationale behind fear more generally in the post-modern world which was based on evidence rather than mere moral panics as their fellow left-realist Taylor (1999) would suggest. Authors may look to the supposed declining crime rates (Davies & Farrell, 2024), yet this ignores the actuality that violent crime, especially when it is committed in the NTE, is often not reported (see Winlow & Hall, 2006).

However, much of the theoretical field remains grounded in left-idealist ideas of moral panics as evidenced by Taylor (1999) and vague notions of resistance to power, without ever challenging the underlying criminogenic conditions of late capitalism as its pragmatic nature accepted relative defeat at the hands of the neoliberal order (Winlow & Hall, 2016), while concepts such as anomie failed to embed itself in a wider ontology that could answer why most people who experience such strains do not commit violent

crime (Katz, 1988).

Masculinity & Violence

In turning to questions of interpersonal harm, it becomes necessary to consider why it is, so often, men who are doing the harming. Much literature has focussed on the idea of masculinity and violence, and it is true that almost all of the violent instances featured in this thesis concern men, so this should be unpacked further. Debates persist around why men are more likely to be violent, with biological differences between the sexes being noted as pivotal in the difference (Schneider, 2005). Much of this literature has been concerned with what has come to be termed 'hegemonic masculinity', focussing on dominant forms of masculinity that are based on subjugating 'weaker' forms of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1987, 1995).

Messerschmidt (1993) defined the dominant hegemonic masculinity as emphasising aggressiveness, competitive individualism and the capability to commit violence and men will use the resources available to them to prove their superior masculinity by dominating femininity or weaker masculinity. Such theories have been used to explain violence against women where other outlets for achieving masculine prowess are redundant, and must resort to violent crime to uphold patriarchal standards of male dominance (see Bourgois, 1996; Hearn, 1992). While this has no doubt offered strong arguments for a criminology of masculinity, there is little discussion of why some men are willing to commit harm to others while others are not (Winlow & Hall, 2015).

Further to this, the arguments of upholding patriarchal dominance are seemingly weaker as the years go by, with studies on masculinities highlighting they are largely resigned to their masculine violence through fatalism rather than an urge to uphold

male dominance (Horne & Hall, 1995). The people most likely to partake in violence are in actuality more likely amongst the marginalised underclass, who receive little reward for their actions of supposed domineering (Hall,2002). The successes here are those who have been *pseudo-pacified* (Hall, 2002), and are ruthless in their pursuit of legitimate capital.

Katz (1988) in his explanation of violent masculinity suggests there are seductive aspects of violence, arguing that violence is a subjective choice made by those who are wanting to transgress the norms of society, based on the sensual thrill that they provide in the moment and immediate aftermath, which they will precede to morally justify. Similarly, some individuals have been socialised into violence, with Winlow (2001) highlighting the socialisation of some into becoming 'violence specialists' despite few rewards being present for their violent escapades, as only a select few use this to garner economic capital in the shadow economy (ibid.). This sense of potential danger has been noted as part and parcel of the appeal of the NTE (Winlow & Hall, 2006), with the NTE being a melting pot of different groups (Hollands, 2002), each of them bringing their own personal vendettas, grudges and triggers to town centres which could be sparked.

What we see in most instances however is moreso a sense of fortitude rather than excitement at this fact (Hall, 1997), highlighting the potential for different subjectivities to be formed dependent on the level of violence, and also whether the subject is the victimised or the perpetrator or both. Working-class locales have long been built upon such endurance, accepting that sometimes bad things do and will happen as a fact of life (see Ellis, 2017). Such sentiments have been established through the traditional industries and communities in which the industrial classes reside (Hall, 2012), though

the industries and communities are all but gone, their formative practicalities still permeate the psyche in their wider habitus. This still provides some capital to the men who partake in such violence, with the ability to engage in violence and not be humiliated is what matters more than actually defeating an opponent (Winlow & Hall, 2006), showing one's 'gameness' to not back down from adversity will earn just as much respect (see Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002 for a discussion of 'honour' in interpersonal violence). This has been aptly labelled the ideology of the 'nocturnal urban warrior' (Winlow & Hall, 2006:149), who imagines himself as a moral arbiter who exists to defend the honour of those at risk, and is willing to use extreme violence to do so.

What we see here is some evidence of codifying violent acts, bounding what is acceptable and unacceptable, but there is evidence that Bourdieu's (1977) codes of honour in violence are gradually disintegrating. Marsh (2020) highlights the willingness of violent people to inflict more extreme violence on to their opponents, with one of his participants detailing how he could not forget about being beaten by an adversary even if it was honourable, and would retaliate with increasing levels of brutality. Ellis (2016) highlighted similar vignettes where codes of honour were largely absent. This suggests that the honour codes that many believe they are abiding by are, at least today, largely mythical.

As we will come to see, it was not unusual for me to witness violence at odds with any sort of honourable codes, with weapons and outnumbering a relative normality, with the codes often only discussed when being on the receiving end, acting as a neutralisation to explain their defeat (see Matza, 1964). But I would argue that this is an inevitable result of the increasing winner/loser culture that the postmodern subject

has come to embody. Where competition is paramount, as is the desire to win and not be humiliated in the dog-eat-dog consumer culture that has infected all facets of social interaction, it is more important to win and destroy the adversary (Marsh, 2020). The 2020s young man is increasingly detached from the communal codes that once shaped the lives of his ancestors, and these no longer play a central role in shaping his social psyche, particularly in relation to violence and competition.

Elias & The Civilising Process

To make sense of this erosion of honour-based violence and the emergence of more instrumental, competitive harm, it is useful to consider broader shifts in behavioural norms, most notably explored through Elias's (1970) theory of the civilising process. Some of the most influential research on violence has been informed by Elias (1970) and his civilising process. Proponents of this theory have been commonly found in the study of Football Hooligans (see Dunning et al, 1987; Elias & Dunning, 1986; Murphy et al, 1990), a subcultural group which a number of my participants have been involved with and has significant crossover with violence in the NTE more generally (see Tomsen, 1997; Treadwell and Ayres, 2012, 2014; Ellis, 2017). The civilising process instead detailed the gradual broadening of socially acceptable behaviour, which had yet to reach the lower-class individuals who had instead been socialised into a world of violence and aggressive masculinity.

In reality, much of the violence came from individuals who were deeply embedded into the cultural norms of society that embodied individualism and competitive undertaking (Hobbs & Robbins, 1991). It further ignores the lives of violent men outside of where the violence occurs, with many involved in football violence for example leading lives that are legitimate and, if one is a proponent of Elias (1970), they

have seemingly been 'civilised' (Treadwell, 2010).

Winlow (2012) argues that Elias (1970) overlooks how physical violence has been transformed into symbolic violence. In contemporary capitalist societies, those shielded from the threat of physical harm are now embedded within a pseudo-pacified, individualistic system, where competition is channelled through finance and consumer identity. However, for those living in areas marked by permanent recession, where socio-economic capital is scarce or absent, violent behaviour may endure as one of the few available means of securing status and recognition. Hall (2012) utilises the concept of the *pseudo-pacification process* to better explain the realities of violence, where the physical exertions of violence have, rather than subside, become sublimated into symbolic violence within an inadequate, albeit still functioning, *symbolic* order that survived on aggressive capital accumulation at all costs. When this *symbolic* order is broken down however, and their remains no standardising *Big Other* for the populace to buy into, it is possible for the pseudo-pacified subject to breakdown, no longer able to sublimate his violent drives in the legitimate market forces of late capitalism. This will be discussed in greater detail alongside the rest of the fundamentals of *Ultra- realism* in the methodology.

Nightlife, Violence & Late Capitalism

These shifts in violent subjectivity demand a deeper engagement with the socio-economic and cultural conditions that shape them, particularly within the competitive, individualised ethos of late capitalism, where violence becomes less an aberration than a patterned response to structural insecurity. Much of the discussion of violence thus far has focussed on individualised forms of violent behaviour which I have shown to be at odds with the realities of violent subjectivities informed by the macro-contexts of

the social world, rather than a micro/meso act void of any economic or transcendental influence.

By focussing too narrowly on the individual within branches of critical criminology, the external realities of the wider world and how they impact the subject psyche has too often been neglected from the study of violence (Winlow & Hall, 2004). This has led to a significant focus on individualised 'deviant' escapist desires, without engaging with the wider socio-cultural conditions which impact them (Presdee, 2000). It is increasingly difficult to neglect the realities of the socio-economic effects on violent individuals who were raised in a precarious economic environment, and were at great risk of failing to achieve legitimate economic or social capital in a culture bred on competitive individualism (James, 1995).

The violence associated with those who partake in the study, and partake in the wider NTEs of Britain's towns and cities, has emerged in the backdrop of post-industrial globalisation and a consumer orientated society that has left traditional community ties by the wayside (Hayward & Young, 2007). The tough exterior of the modern-day violent male is not too different from what was required during industrialism, which, as already mentioned, has simply become *deaptative* (Hall, 2012). The masculine toughness that many from the working-class locales embody is primarily a masculinity that demands they are not soft, rather than one that demands they be violent: to be capable of violence rather than always violent (Connell, 1995).

Much of the violent crime in these deprived locales are often not on the more serious end of the scale, such as rape or sexual assault, and only a small proportion is linked to wider organised crime (Armstrong, 1998). The actions of violent people are almost always done for what they subjectively believe to be is good in the moment which it

takes place, in what Katz (1988) terms 'righteous slaughter'. Rather, in these recessed locales, certain types of violence offers a form of social capital to be acquired where there is little outlet for their redundant currency of physicality and toughness elsewhere, nor is there an availability of legitimate capital to be attained. After all, the need to defend oneself from outside threats, whether economic or violent, is still valued (Winlow & Hall, 2009), while fighting alongside friends or in the defence of friends can help to maintain bonds through its maintenance of defensive mutual back-up in an increasingly insecure and volatile nightlife, while also informing potential rivals and onlookers alike that those involved are not going to be walked over (Winlow & Hall, 2006).

Rutherford (1997) highlights that violence is one ingredient in a cocktail of sources of prestige:

> 'Redundancy has created cultures of prolonged adolescence in which young male identities remain locked into the locality… [and where] violence, criminality, drug taking and alcohol consumption become the means is gaining prestige for a masculine identity bereft of any social value' (Rutherford 1997:7, cited in Treadwell, 2010:1)

At the same time, Pearson (1983) highlighted the violent histories of much of the working-class prior to the rise in consumer, winner/loser culture, suggesting that it is a somewhat romanticised view of the industrial era to imagine a world in which violent actions were infrequent. In reality, the working-classes had always had a capability for violence, and sometimes at extreme levels (Emsley, 2005). While undoubtedly correct, we see a shift in the uses of crime towards one based on social distinction:

> 'In these disastrous locales we have seen the growth of criminal markets,

> predatory crime, violence and a raft of well documented social problems. Here we also see a complex hybrid of cultural breaks and continuities across the generations, which have resulted in the end of class based 'social crime' and a shift to crime as an instrument for achieving fantasised positions of social distinction and 'respect' in consumer culture' (Hall et al, 2008:12-13).

Further to the differences and continuities of previous violence, the NTE acts as a liminal zone, where the availability of violence exists outside the dominant norms of regular society, where violence forms one part of the wider inebriated hedonism that is more accepted (Hobbs et al, 2005), and is significantly more prominent (Lister, 2009; Winlow & Hall, 2006; Elias, 2017). "Perceptions of the 'hours of darkness' as a time of danger, fear, crime and sin seem to be persistent and deeply embedded components of British Culture" (Hobbs et al., 2003: 44) remain prominent. Working-class, industrial pubs have long established an aggressive type of behaviour built upon toughness and violence. Ones masculinity could be proven through one's willingness to drink copious amounts and inflict violence if necessary, making the pub an arena where masculine confrontation could likely occur (Winlow, 2001; Thompson, 1998).

Such cultures of violent delinquency were normalised within the habitual cultures where they took place, with credible violent capability held up as a favourable trait by those around them (Daly & Wilson, 1988), and could be effectively morally neutralised by the subject as standard (Matza, 1964). Similarly, Winlow & Hall (2006) state that the overriding knowledge of the potential for violence in the NTE environment has become *doxic*, leading to actual violence purely because of this. The authors highlight that this is because it is an effective defence mechanism against the potentially becoming a victim, with drunken and drugged youths highly alert to minor slights and their latent

potential to develop, with minor confrontations often leading to bloody brawls where heavy blows lead to critical injuries (Polk, 1999).

The violence that is evident in the NTE across the country is at odds with the belief of local governments and venue owners who require the image of a safe nightscape to attract consumers (see Lister et al, 2001; Winlow & Hall, 2006). This is however commonly accepted as a myth amongst visitors of city centres after dark, with the surplus of alcohol essential to increasingly aggressive behaviour to the extent that violence is often unavoidable (Hobbs et al, 2000). Violence in this sphere is often between inebriated strangers, where it is often expected as a regular and well-known experience (Winlow & Hall, 2006).

Much of the violence displayed in the NTE, and with the participants in this study, is hostile violence, in which the subject employs violence in the aim of settling disputes or for retribution rather than any for economic incentive (Toch, 1992). This is not to say however that hostile violence does not serve a greater purpose, with the use of violence often being rationalised and internalised by the subject to meet their needs (ibid.). Violence serves the purpose of transgressing potential shame and humiliation that they could feel at the hands of another aggressor (Ellis, 2016). Within pockets of social and economic deprivation, there exists a 'visceral habitus' (Hall, 1997) where violent masculinity is afforded the room to thrive amidst the ingrained endurance of traditional working-class life that have since been abandoned (see Telford, 2022). The violence present in these locales offers a clear rationale for perpetrators, who see its value in formulating both identity and self-preservation (Hobbs, 2013).

Under The Influence

Theorising Inebriation

Much historical drug literature theorised drug use as symbiotic with addiction that would be found with opiates, focussing on issues such as compulsion, psychological failing, or social inadequacy that leads to using, rather than the commonly reported reason of pleasure (O'Malley & Valverde, 2004). Merton (1957) was foremost here, utilising his conception of Durkheimian *anomie* to argue that drug addicts and alcoholics were a deviant retreatist subculture of people who had failed to succeed in competitive capitalism after failing through both legitimate and illegitimate means.

This fails to adequately explain why people who use drugs in the NTE are by and large fully invested in the materialistic system of consumer capitalism, often legitimately (or illegitimately) financially successful outside of their forays into weekend inebriation (Ayres, 2019). Yet, while anomie fails to adequately explain drug use in the current age, the concept offers some grounding that is missing from other criminological theories, as it highlights systematic aspirations that is rooted in the social world of capitalism and influences interaction (Hall, 2012).

Social control and self-control theories offer the view that drug use is natural, and the only factor that stops people from partaking in drug use is early socialisation and the norms of society, and by extension the individuals ties to them. Drug use in this sense is explained by those involved having little regard for those around them and the social consequences of their actions; they are merely driven by the pursuit of hedonistic self-interest because they lack self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

This is a recurring theme in social explanations of drug use, with a heightened focus on individual flaws meaning they could not appropriately adapt to the wider societal social

norms, so they adapted to others, highlighted by differential association (Marcos et al, 1986), social learning theory (Bahr et al, 2005; Menard & Johnston, 2015), and subcultural theories (Becker, 1963). These accounts fails to consider the issue of transgression becoming increasingly meaningless in late capitalism, where the norms of wider society embrace supposedly transgressive consumption within the marketplace of identities (Hall et al, 2008). Redhead (1993) notes that the following the normalisation of ecstasy and its widespread proliferation throughout youth culture, previous models of deviance or subcultural theory fail to adequately explain its growth. Further to this, they fail to offer any sort of structural grounding to the transmission of the social norms, in which they fail to sufficiently locate a root cause to not only drug use but crime overall.

Briggs (2012) has offered some insight into the subcultural aspects of drug users, highlighting their identities are often at odds with the morals of wider society and face hostilities from wider society because of this, feeling the need to create positive conceptions of the self through identifying with their like-minded group through successfully becoming 'one of them'. Users consequently embrace the values of their wider group in a search for *psychic security* (Lasch, 1985) that has not been viable within the wider constraints of post-industrial instability which increasingly offers the conception of there being 'no long term' (Fisher, 2009).

There has been some grounding for drug use being symptomatic of the conditions of global capitalism within conflict theories, but this has again largely focussed on the addictive lifestyle drugs of heroin and crack cocaine (see Currie, 1993) and seeing drug use as a form of resistance (see Spitzer, 1975). To be intoxicated is therefore a rejection of capitalist society, exiling oneself from the restraining norms of society and into the

freeing hedonistic liminal spaces (Bataille, 1991). Walton (2003) argues that intoxication through alcohol or drugs is an innate drive for the subject, which is heavily regulated by the state as a form of control. He later argues that this is due to their unproductivity, which hinders their, amongst other aspects of capitalism, consumption. The unsober state for Walton (2003) is one of authenticity and creativity, outside of the constraints of sober life.

Normalisation of Drug Use

The embrace of drug use in subcultures was present within the NTE from the era of Northern Soul, with the scene convening those with anti-drug views to accepting the use through its normalisation within the subculture (Wilson, 2023). But from the late 1980s drug use had become an increasingly normalised part of youth culture through the advent of dance music and raves (Mugford & O'Malley, 1991). Recreational drug use first come to be aligned with club cultures with the advent of ecstasy, first seeing its use in raves in 1987 (Redhead, 1993), with ecstasy largely going hand in hand with the development of the hedonistic NTE of the late Thatcher era (Reynolds, 1999). Ecstasy was the prevalent choice of drug within the rave scene, with it being unlikely that users would use the drug outside of the rave context at the same rates (Ward & Fitch, 1998). It increasingly become part of NTE consumers wider nocturnal identity, while it also become more visible within popular culture from the early 1990s after the so-called second summer of love (Reynolds, 1999).

While ecstasy was popular during this period, this was often used alongside other substances, such as amphetamine, cannabis and alcohol (Hunt et al, 2009), with polydrug use been noted as a regular occurrence in British clubbing (Measham et al, 2001; Deehan & Saville, 2003). This rise in drug use was seen as a move towards

hedonistic drives for consumption, encapsulated most with ecstasy, with it being noted as ‘a pleasure for its own sake’ (Redhead, 1993:7).

Of course, drug use in the NTE, like every other social harm within mainstream academia discourse, has been commonly explained by an application of Cohen’s (1972) moral panic thesis, highlighted by the surge of government regulation and dismissal of drugs such as ecstasy as destructive substances after high profile deaths being tied to the drug. Clark (2023:128) argues that this was done due to the transgressive nature and the deviant subculture it was tied to:

> ‘ecstasy’s associated cultural trappings – the repetitive, insistent music, the baggy clothes distinct from the buttoned-up power-dressing of the 1980s, and the huge raves deemed a threat to public order – that made it disruptive to the prevailing culture’.

Redhead has some notions of agreement with the moral panic theories of old in terms of the rise of ecstasy in the NTE, highlighting the media and political portrayal of the drug, especially when drug deaths occur, but argues that many views dissent from this line, with the positives of the drugs outweighing the harms to users (Redhead, 1993). This has been echoed in the years following, most prominently by Nutt (2021) who has highlighted the unlikelihood of death or serious injury occurring through using ecstasy. Yet, ecstasy has been linked to psychological and physical issues, as well as long term brain damage and psychological dependency (see Hunt et al, 2009 for an overview).

The Drug Trade

It has been argued that drug use during its 90s explosion into mass consciousness helped pave the way for a transgressive movement against the socio-economic

downturns of post-Fordism through the creation of rave culture, with ecstasy's emphasising characteristic of increasing both sociability and sensuality primed as a core reason for this (Colin, 1997).

The normalisation of drug use and supply within the NTE (see Winlow & Hall, 2006) offers a prime venue for what Moyle (2023) calls 'friendly business', satisfying the financial goals of supply while also providing an outlet for social bonds to be retained and bolstered in an era where it is lacking. This nightlife offers a venue for user dealers to thrive, with the social supply to friends and associates a recurring feature of user-dealing (Coomber & Turnbull, 2007;Morgan & Silverstone, 2023). It is further compounded by the consumers urge to consume more, with the supplier role offering them an opportunity to acquire 'free' drugs (Moyle & Coomber, 2018). Further to these points, dealing offers an avenue for dealers to achieve economic capital without ever fully embracing their illicit occupation full time, instead using it as a form of doubling up on their legitimate income for the purpose of luxury consumption, financial security, or investment capital (Salinas, 2023).

Normalisation of Cocaine?

Within this NTE, much drug dealing would be carried out individually through loose social networks reminiscent of the 1970s soul scene (Windle & Briggs, 2015). The sale of drugs has by and large diversified and altered within the subsequent decades however, with the rise in the availability of other drugs within the NTE.

While ecstasy may have been the notable drug of choice in the early rave scene, cocaine has been noted as being more prominent in the UK NTE in recent years, with Britain being the largest user of the drug in Europe being driven by its relatively low price compared to previous eras (Kale, 2019). Cocaine use has been problematised

similarly due to its believed effects on violent disorder due to it increasing aggression (Measham & Moore, 2009; Daly, 2009; Treadwell & Ayres, 2012). Cocaine's use is clear in the NTE, for its supposed ability to sober the effects of alcohol to continue drinking sessions (Edland-Gryt, 2021), facilitate sexual performance (Green, 2007), increase sociality, and enhance ones capabilities for violence in a realm where violence is a constant potential undercurrent to interaction (Treadwell & Ayres, 2012).

The rise of cocaine over ecstasy has been driven by a number of factors, such as an increase in bar type venues rather than venues suited to the mega raves of the 1990s, the growth of 'binge drinking' where it is commonly used alongside alcohol, the increased purity, and the relatively low price compared to other nations (Measham & Fisher, 2018). Despite this, there is not the dearth of literature one might expect on cocaine use from a socio-cultural perspective (Edland-Gryt, 2021).

Edland-Gryt (2021) discusses cocaine use in terms of group interaction rituals, and how the shared ritual (using cocaine) brought his participants closer together as friends. While the author offers an insight into the ritualistic aspects of cocaine use amongst groups within nightlife settings, her argument that the practise is a unifying experience is somewhat misguided. The use of cocaine in nightlife has become a ritualistic practice, but the communal and unifying aspect of this, I would argue, is merely a façade for the individualistic goals of Epicurean sybaritism, which is bolstered through social interaction with a drug like cocaine (see Ayres, 2019). Meanwhile, the supposed 'collective effervescence' creating a shared community and enhancing bonds, an argument also shared by Tutenges (2023) and Nicholls (2018) in terms of nightlife more broadly, would be to ignore the social harms associated with drug use, which are often underpinned by an uber-individualistic subjectivity for pleasure, often at the

expense of those around them (Winlow & Hall, 2006). The friendships are often little more than ephemeral and transient, reliant on the mutual urge to achieve *jouissance*, with bonds present as a means to an end, not the reverse (Smith, 2014).

Binge Britain

The expansion of a culture of intoxication is a relatively recent development with the 'determined drunkenness' (Measham & Brain, 2005) of the 21st century growing alongside the NTEs expansion and the cultural dissemination of encouraging alcoholic excess (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007). Inebriation quickly become the end goal of a successful night out, with individuals determining how successful a night is by how 'fucked up' they get (Briggs, 2013b). Binge drinking become a publicised issue at the turn of the millennium, with it being linked with nocturnal crime and disorder across British towns and cities (Richardson & Budd, 2006). Hackley et al (2013:944) note the carnivalesque aspects of binge drinking:

> 'The experiences our participants describe are not in themselves pleasurable: they are usually uncomfortable, unhealthy, expensive, and embarrassing, not to mention troublesome to parents, police, club owners, and other public services, and potentially carrying devastating risk which could damage the young person's future. The positive element to these experiences lies in their transgressive resonance as mass expressions of carnival, as countercultural expressions of putative freedom from social norms that are constituted as oppressive or lacking in fun and a sense of freedom'.

Some saw this rise in binge drinking as a transgressive rejection of authority and a threat to public order (Casswell et al, 2002; Yeomans & Critcher, 2013), yet this contradicts the clear encouragement of this behaviour from the free market. How

‘binge drinker’ would be defined was not particularly clear, but what was evident was the significant increase in the consumption of alcohol amidst the relaxation of licensing laws (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007).

Hayward & Hobbs (2007) argue that state regulation of this practice would be at odds with their goals of driving consumption to drive capital accumulation, in contrast to the industrial era where heavy drinking was at odds with the heavy labour required for economic production. The post-Fordist consumer is instead inundated with nightlife marketing emphasising the pursuit of hedonistic consumption, where pleasure is to be found in the next drink (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). Advertisements for alcohol are in abundance, through using Hollywood stars to market their product, to open product placement within box office blockbusters, with their being some evidence that this influences future consumer choices (Redondo et al, 2018). The proliferation of alcohol marketing has no doubt influenced the increased intake of liquor, with drinkers believing that they were being encouraged to drink to excess (Van Wersch & Walker, 2009). Hence, any argument put forth for harm reduction by state actors will be offset by the demands of the market who urge its consumers to pursue alcoholic excess (Measham, 2006).

Briggs (2013b:128) highlights the drive for aggressive consumption present in holidays based around nightlife consumption, where the ‘aggressively commodified social context…endorses and amplifies the group's deviance and risk-taking, cashes in on their desire for indulgent hedonism, and leaves them almost penniless by the time they return home’. This is seen on a smaller scale within the nightlife industries of Britain, offering a supposed identity through the ‘fantasy frameworks’ of consumption structuring the subject’s desire (Zizek, 2020) through the successful proliferation of

hedonistic drives via the abundance of advertising which has effectively not only decriminalised deviant indulgence, but reproduced it (Smith, 2014).

The commodification of intoxicants was obvious in the marketing of alcohol, with the urban landscape of bars and clubs adorned with the recognisable logos of recognisable alcoholic brands such as Budweiser, Grey Goose, Gordon's, and Jack Daniels (Smith, 2014), all carrying with them a form of socio-cultural capital for the consumer, determined by successful promotion by their owners (Thurnell-Read, 2023). The consumption of craft ale for example is often associated with being for a class of people who have no interest in the intoxicating and unadulterated hedonia associated with NTE, represented instead as having more in common with upper-middle-class wine connoisseurs than local Carlsberg drinkers, and is commonly portrayed as a return to authenticity against the proliferation of popular brands (Ibid.) This was not too dissimilar from the so-called designer drugs, with ecstasy being purchased on the back off its recognisable branding such as Mitsubishis or Doves with MDMA aficionados expressing the qualities of each sensation off the back of their recognisable symbols (Reynolds, 2013).

The connoisseurship of intoxicants has been highlighted as a form of othering, separating themselves from others who drink to excess in the belief that they are a more enlightened consumer above the intoxicating excess of the binge drinking generation (Spracklen, 2013). This is indicative of the consumer practices that are prominent in late capitalism, with the need to separate oneself from the herd of 'other' inadequate consumers who they believe fail to succeed in their appreciation of their chosen consumer leisure pursuit (Raymen, 2018).

Inebriation Through the Lens of Consumerism

While some saw the growth of intoxication as naturally transgressive and a threat to the mainstream ideals of wider society through its embrace of hedonistic indulgence, which Glover (2003) believes to be at odds with the 'delayed gratification' ideals of contemporary capitalism. This fails to recognise the ever-increasing drive for instant reward. Capitalism had successfully 'pseudo-pacified' (Hall, 2012) the violent drives of the working-classes, sublimating them into the financial competition of consumer capitalism. The present mutation of late capitalism is based purely on an individualistic competition that has permeated both the economic and cultural spheres (Lloyd et al, 2023). Those who are fully embedded within this fractious symbolic order are encouraged to do what they can to succeed, justified through their use of *special liberty* (Kotze, 2024).

Winlow (2001:152) highlights that drug use is not a deviant, transgressive act, but rather a 'route into mass youth cultural acceptance', where choice of drug becomes another consumer choice in the same vein of designer clothing. Drugs are heavily linked to the glamourous luxury of consumption, with drug dealing offering a supplement to legitimate income to consume to excess (Winlow, 2001). This is not just the case with the dealing of drugs either, with the consumption of certain drugs offering a glamourous form of social capital in the NTE habitus (Hall et al, 2008).

To believe that intoxication is a liberating experience would also be to ignore the immense social harms associated with the hedonistic indulgence. Drug use has been noted to increase alongside wider frustrations, such as struggles with employment (Briggs, 2012), suggesting the descent into the intoxicating spheres of nightlife have an undertone of a depressive indulgence into escapism etched into its being. Engels

(1993) highlights the escapist realities of consumption for the working-classes, highlighting how consumption through alcohol is a means of escapism and an attempt to cope with their realities of industrial, poorly paid labour. This escapist drive remains, though not to escape the brutality of their work under laissez-faire capitalism, but rather their own instability and lack of stable identity that is abundant in late-capitalist cultures. The alcohol consumption in the NTE is not merely a social bonding experience as could be found in working men's clubs of old either, but rather an excessive and problematic intake of booze (Hadfield, 2004), leading to a burgeoning of alcohol related violence as the sun goes down on post-industrial towns and cities (Lister, 2001). While such behaviours are not entirely new and can be seen as part of a broader continuum of alcohol-related social harms, their frequency and intensity appear markedly greater today. The more structured, communal, and restrained drinking cultures of the past have largely dissipated, giving way to a more chaotic and individualised pattern of consumption (Hayward & Hobbs, 2007).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the disparate academic fields and framing discussions, the academic contributions that frame and give vital contextual backdrop to any contemporary qualitative study of practices in the NTE. These issues are those that will be explored in this thesis, and hence violence, individualism, inebriation, and the wider study of nightlife and leisure and some awareness of this body of literature is core. This chapter has critically highlighted the flaws in many of the positive arguments for the post-modern NTE, evidencing a need for further rigour in research of this area in relation to the prevalent social harms. While flaws of previous research have been evidenced, the positives of research and theoretical ideas have

been highlighted that will be drawn upon and expanded on within the data chapters of the thesis.

While previous nightlife ethnographies have stylistically and theoretically provided the research with a useful frame of reference (See Smith, 2014; Winlow & Hall, 2006; Briggs, 2013; Redhead, 1993), they are also only of partial relevance to the study. They were conducted years prior to this study and therefore do not document the change seen within the last ten years of nightlife culture, nor do they document the generational differences in nightlife consumption as this thesis does. Furthermore, their fieldwork is conducted in places that are far removed from the Potteries, and remain places of exuberant hedonistic night-time pleasure where streets are busy, and the illusion of choice is less apparent. This is not the case in Stoke-on-Trent anymore. However, the prior research does most importantly frame the understanding of methods, and the importance of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in order to produce a better understanding of nightlife, to which the thesis will now turn. The following methodological chapter shall draw on this literature review further, showing why there is a need for further study of the NTE, especially in deindustrialised areas such as Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding areas.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological grounding that underpins this study. The chapter begins by providing a rationale for studying the NTE in and around Stoke-on-Trent when there have been numerous studies of nightlife in post- industrial locales. It also justifies the use of ethnography in researching this subject, embedding this in the wider *Ultra-realist* framework that is also explored in greater depth. The chapter also gives an overview of the questions, aims and objectives of the thesis, while also detailing the sampling of participants and various ethical risks to both the researcher and participants. Throughout the chapter, issues that arose within the fieldwork are noted and how these were addressed to overcome any potential barriers.

Rationale

Research on the post-industrial North has been plentiful, especially amongst *Ultra-realist* scholars, with the social harms that have taken place since the rise of neoliberalism being well documented in the areas that once held strong, industrial identities in the modern era (see Winlow et al, 2013; 2017; Lloyd, 2013; Ellis, 2017).

There has also been a growth in research around the NTE in such locales over the last twenty years, with Winlow and Hall's (2006) ethnographic study of the NTE in the North-East of England being just one of several studies to highlight the issues and harms associated with postmodern nightlife, while also highlighting the wider issues that created these harms in the first place. While research in deindustrialised locales has been prominent, Stoke-on-Trent in particular has largely been ignored by such

research. This is in spite of its historical role in British industry with it being one of the most important and biggest producers of ceramics and coal, and the area once being home to a thriving NTE up until the late 20th century. If you were to look at the city now however, there is little industry of any kind left, with all that has been left in its place is poor-paid jobs and high unemployment (Lichfield, 2019), while the nightlife of the city has also seen a dramatic decline with many of the cities former nightclubs and pubs now lying as derelict buildings, as a relic of a time long gone (Davies, 2021; see the *Historical* chapter for an in-depth overview).

Of course, this is not all that makes the city unique and worth investigating, as if it was this would simply be a revision of Winlow and Hall's (2006) study. Much has changed since Winlow and Hall's (2006) book was published, especially within Stoke-on-Trent. Tony Blair has long since retreated from the forefront of politics, and so were all of Labour's seats in the city up until 2024. The free market destroyed the world's economy in 2008, hitting the six pottery towns as hard as anywhere in the country owing to its large working-class population. Meanwhile, the affluent have only gotten richer (Fleming, 2022). The UK came out in droves in 2016 to vote to leave the European Union; Stoke was to become known as the 'Brexit Capital' shortly after when it was revealed it had the highest percentage of the population to vote leave (Lichfield, 2019). Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic ripped through the city, with draconian restrictions causing the city to fall even further down the hole of economic despair, with there being little evidence of the cities nightlife ever being able to recover (see Burn, 2020; Knapper, 2024). For these reasons, this is an area that is in dire need of study, as its unique history and its effect on those who live within its boundaries is a story worth telling.

The study shall document the decline of the city and its nightlife through speaking to all generations who were exposed to different NTEs, documenting how the culture of 'going the dancing' has transformed into 'getting on the piss'. The research is also timely given the vicissitudes of night-time consumers in a left behind area as the levelling up agenda has rung increasingly hollow (Etherington et al, 2022).

Through the analysis and review of current literature, various themes have been identified that need further study. Much literature discussed has focussed on the users of NTEs and their hedonistic pursuits of sex, violence, and inebriation through both alcohol and psychoactive substances. While these issues have been discussed at length within literature, there has been very little discussion of NTE in relation to Stoke-on-Trent, a city which once had some of the best nightclubs in the country, which now is left with a nightlife facing near extinction. While there is research on similar post-industrial locales (Hall and Winlow, 2006), these fail to answer some of the questions specific to the history of the Potteries, such as how it once had a well renowned NTE and now it does not, and how life is like within not only a post-industrial setting, but also *post-leisure.* Therefore, there is an importance in helping to create an informed critical criminological insight into the current landscape under late-neoliberal economic relations, placing the situation of the Potteries within the wider macro-context to produce an original contribution to knowledge.

To address this gap in knowledge, the study utilises *Ultra-realist* theory as used by Ellis (2016), Hall and Winlow (2015), Winlow et al (2017), and Telford (2022) amongst others to theorise why hedonistic pursuits of enjoyment in Stoke-on-Trent's NTEmay revolve around issues such as narcissistic pleasure first pointed out by Winlow and Hall (2006) in their research on NTE violence. The need to create ethnographic networks to

highlight issues in the wider context of neoliberalism is paramount, as expressed by Winlow & Hall (2015). Furthermore, the research seeks to answer whether Stoke-on-Trent has issues specific to its location while retaining problems similar to other locales.

Research Design

The research project was conducted qualitatively, through employing ethnographic interviews to discover and observe the experiences of consumers in North Staffordshire's NTE. Epistemologically, quantitative data is useful for pointing to issues that require further analysis. This is evident in the NTE, with Brands et al (2015) using quantitative analysis to uncover trends in the NTE on a significantly larger scale than is possible with immersive qualitative research. However, its over reliance on statistics means that it fails to uncover the underlying causes of harmful behaviour (Hall & Winlow, 2015). This is also the case for much qualitative research, however. While qualitative research may uncover reasoning and motivation more than quantitative research more generally, it often fails to place these issues within a wider framework of harm or engage with how behaviours are reproduced (Ibid.).

Realist qualitative research on the other hand is for the most part exploratory, with the method being utilised to delve beneath the surface of social issues to understand underlying reasons and motivations, providing complexity and nuance to issues that quantitative research fails to show through statistics (Treadwell, 2020). For this reason, qualitative methods have often been the main tool employed to research those within the NTE (Winlow and Hall, 2006; Hall et al, 2013).

Theoretical Framework – *Ultra-realism*

The research is conducted through the lens of *Ultra-realism*. This entails conceptualising the localised data and theory within the macro structures in which the participants exist (Hall and Winlow, 2015). Conceptualising the research data in global structures has been utilised by other ethnographic researchers such as Ellis (2016), Telford (2022), and Winlow (2001), as discussed in the literature review. *Ultra-realism* is utilised to conceptualise the participants feelings and experiences of the NTE within the political, cultural, and socio-economic context in which we exist.

A fledgling theory, *Ultra-Realism* theory was largely conceptualised as a solidified movement following the release of Steve Hall and Simon Winlow's 2015 book, *Revitalizing Criminological Theory: Towards a New Ultra-Realism.* However, the framework of *Ultra-Realism* had been developed by both Hall and Winlow over a number of years through their previous works (Hall, 2000; Winlow, 2001; Hall, 2007; Hall, 2012; Hall and Winlow 2012), with academics utilising many of their concepts in studies predating the framework's official inception (Treadwell and Ayres, 2012; Hall & Wilson, 2014). Proponents of the theory seek to move away from the current right and left-liberal approaches that exist in much criminological thought, as they seek to place harm and the contexts in which it occurs onto a stronger ontological footing (Hall and Winlow, 2015). In doing so, the theory borrows from a host of interdisciplinary fields to create an alternative to liberal criminology in which crime and its causes can be contextualised in the current socio-political landscape of neoliberalism (Hall & Winlow, 2015).

The theoretical position that *Ultra-Realists* hold is evidenced through the inter-

relationship of three core concepts: *transcendental materialism*; the *pseudo-pacification process* and *special liberty* (Hall and Winlow, 2015). Alongside these three core concepts, *Ultra-realism* draws on issues such as childhood trauma, histories of violence, and social isolation to detail the factors that shape the propensity for individuals or groups to visit harm on one another (see Ellis, 2016; Winlow and Hall, 2013). Further to this, derivative concept models such as *deviant leisure,* created by Smith and Raymen (2016), have been utilised by followers of the school of thought to highlight why people become attached to certain harmful identities. The study draws upon core concepts such as these to contextualise the data in the macro framework of global capitalism and consumerism.

However, this is not to purely lay the blame for the actions of violent men and women at the door of systems outside of their control as Wood et al (2020) have claimed. On the contrary, the *Ultra-realist* framework does not lay the blame for society's woes solely at neoliberalism's feet without discussing any other issues, as many ethnographic studies highlighted that issues such as gender and culture play an important role in the development of criminal identities at the micro-level (see Winlow, 2001; Hall et al, 2008; Ellis, 2016). Yet, *Ultra-realism* seeks to contextualise this in the context of what has been the dominant capitalist socio-economic system since the Middle Ages (Raymen and Kuldova, 2020). While this has seen many different guises over that long period, Hall (2012) highlights that - in contrast to Pinker (2012) & Elias (1994) – the so-called civilising process through this period has been dogged with insecurity and anxiety especially in periods of rapid socioeconomic change. This contextualisation is evident as far back as Winlow's (2001) study on bouncers, where he highlighted the role masculinity played in their affinity for violence, but also acknowledged how

neoliberalism may have played a part in this formation of masculinity, that has been reconstituted under post-modernity and deindustrialisation. *Ultra-realism* has also identified that people do have agency to shape their environment, yet very few do, as the subject does not want to acknowledge what they are a part of (Raymen and Kuldova, 2020). With this being the overarching theme of the research, its core tenets as well as the concept of *jouissance* shall be explored further here.

Transcendental materialism is at the forefront of *Ultra-realist* theory as the underlying ontological foundation for the whole project. This perspective views subjectivity as shaped by an active and adaptable neurological system, inherently equipped with a built-in capacity for change. In this context, ideologies are imprinted onto the developing subject as they seek a stable symbolic framework to make sense of the external world, thus averting the possibility of regressing to their pre-symbolic existence of *the real*, a void which must be filled with meaning and stability (Hall, 2012). To escape the anxiety of *the real*, the subject actively searches for stable *symbolic order* to make sense of the world as a coherent *Big Other* (Hall, 2012). This is not a linear and clear process however, as the *imaginary* order exists between the two, distorting our desires onto misidentified external objects (Raymen, 2019).

The symbolic realm is inflexible and resistant to transformation, while the subject is adaptable. Desire is formed, mediated, and reinforced at the crossroads between our internal space and the rigid external social world (Hall, 2012). Issues have arisen, Ultra-realism contends, through the embrace of neoliberal economics and uber-liberal culture, dismantling the socio-symbolic order where the subject now resides in a state of *objectless anxiety* without clear objects of desire, primed to be harnessed by the free market, trapping the subject within the *imaginary* through misidentified

attachment to consumerism (Hall 2012). This consumptive lifestyles that are embodied by the individual manipulate them into seeking a life that can never be attained or satisfy their drives as no structuring or satisfying *Big Other* can be attained (Hall, 2012). Alongside this, the subject has been *pseudo-pacified* by capitalism through centuries of competitive capitalism that has transformed interpersonal violence into capitalist competition to further their own financial interests and grow the economy (Hall, 2012). At its worst, the *pseudo-pacification process* produces *special liberty*, wherein the individual disregards all moral codes to satisfy their individualistic competitive urge by whatever means necessary (Kotze, 2024). This is not merely an economic framework, but rather a social one also, as it has trickled down into social relations which urge the subject to compete and enact various harms such as violence (Hall, 2012). The Sombartian criminal *undertaker* is key to this, as the *undertaker* will overcome the codes that exist 'to get things done' in pursuit of his position ascendency (Winlow, 2014). The *pseudo-pacification process* is beginning to break down under the pressures of consumer capitalism and the decline of a coherent moral authority or *Big Other* (Bushell, 2020). As collective norms weaken, special liberty emerges more frequently, with individuals increasingly willing to assume the role of the criminal undertaker, rejecting conventional morality in favour of individual gain and status accumulation.

Tied to the development of *Ultra-realism* has been the use of the Lacannian concept of *Jouissance*, which will be incorporated throughout the thesis. *Jouissance* is the embodiment of excessive pleasure that extends from pleasure over into pain (Zizek, 2006). This is driven by consumer capitalisms embodiment of the *imaginary* and its drive for desires which cannot be satisfied. Under consumer capitalism, the drives that are often formed through the 'injunction to enjoy' where the subject is constrained to

maximise their enjoyment despite never satisfying ones needs (Zizek, 2008). *Jouissance* pushes the boundaries for joy further to the point of pain in in ones pursuit of pleasure which can never be realised (Zizek, 2006). Other aspects of *Ultra-realism* shall be explored throughout the thesis, but these core concepts are what the thesis is built upon.

Reflexivity

Of course, with *Ultra-realism* being the dominant position of the researcher, this brings about the issue of subjectivity vs objectivity. The study took a similar approach to Williams and Treadwell (2008), who accept that qualitative research such as ethnography cannot be totally objective, as the researcher will no doubt be influenced by their own personal biases and opinions. Hence, it is an informed opinion rather than a neutral finding. However, by being 'reflective' in your ethnography, Treadwell (2020), notes, allows the research to remain transparent through detailing the researchers role in the study and giving context to how perspectives have been formed.

In this vein, reflecting on my positionality as a researcher, I should be open about my own reasoning for undertaking this research specifically and how this is informed by my biography. Having spent years within the NTE, first entering it on a regular basis from 2014, I had seen the decline of the city's nightlife in real time. Having played in bands in and around the city from the age of 16 to 19 and being a semi-regular of the nightlife scene up until the Covid-19 pandemic, I watched night- time venues gradually decline with fewer people being present in both the nightclubs and pubs of its urban centre. I recall Hanley's streets being full as I walked between different nightclubs, and almost all of a sudden as I aged the streets begin to turn eerily quiet. I remember nightclubs being sold out to watch teenage indie bands on multiple occasions, and

then watch the same bands struggle to sell enough tickets to make any money.

As I grew older, I became disillusioned with the NTE, with my interest in football, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kickboxing and fitness becoming increasingly both more important to me and at odds with the heavy lifestyle of drink and drugs. My only real flirtation with the booze-economy during this period was around football. I had a partner who I lived with; I did not need to 'pull'. I had friends who I saw outside of the NTE, so I saw little reason to return.

But something changed post-Covid. Fighting, going to the football, and going to the gym quickly become unattainable amidst the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, meaning my social life had largely been decimated. But I could drink at home, and that is what I did. By the time the Covid-19 pandemic had ended, I was drinking regularly, I had little interest in fitness, and this no doubt influenced my decision to stop fighting as I no longer felt the stamina and ability that I once had when I was 21. Added to this, I no longer had a missus and was living back with my family. It was not long before I re-entered the NTE with my friends who I grew up with. I had many of the same motivations that the participants in this study had: escape depression, 'pull', find a missus, get as inebriated as possible, forget all responsibilities, and not back down from any confrontation that might come my way. And while all of that was achieved, the city's NTE was no longer the same.

Expecting a somewhat lively nightlife as lockdown ended, I was met with disappointment. The clubs were less busy than ever before, and closing down at a rate that I had not seen before. Amidst the dead bars, pubs and clubs of the area's nightlife centres, I realised that while the place had changed, the people had not. if anything, their motivations had become more pronounced. It was during this time that I decided

to research this environment that was decaying before me, unable to provide the necessity for the psychic drives of atomised individuals. I wanted to uncover why the city was like this, and why people were going out despite their acceptance that it was no longer good. My own personal motivations for excess or escape has begun to once again subside as I found myself incapable of entering the NTE without theorising what was going on around me. I wanted answers, as I was the same as a lot of others in the NTE. Through conducting this research, I have analysed the causes of the participants to explain their issues. But their issues were not just theirs, they were mine too.

I recognise my own nostalgia for a nightlife I once lived through, though I knew it was marked by harm, risk, and violence (Winlow & Hall, 2006). Despite this, I still sought the inebriated indulgence of sociality, fetishistically disavowing its destructiveness (Zizek, 2002). My nostalgia also stretches to an industrial *Big Other* I never experienced firsthand, but which lingered in family memories, a world grounded in community, structure, and tradition. While I still see the need for a more coherent symbolic order (Winlow, 2025), the consumerist 'prime' felt more attainable, even as its promises fade (Varoufakis, 2023). This tension was echoed in the field. The younger participants expressed nostalgia largely through memories of earlier consumption, though they occasionally alluded to the stability of a past that they had not directly experienced. Older participants, by contrast, were more explicit in their longing for the social cohesion of their youth, even as they acknowledged such times were unlikely to return (Winlow, 2025).

My involvement in the NTE was not impartial; like many participants, I was once drawn to it for escapism, excess, and release. This shaped how I built rapport and interpreted the field. Rather than a limitation, my embeddedness fostered trust, though it required

sustained reflexivity (Treadwell & Williams, 2008). I avoided romanticising or judging, aware that my aim to understand decline wasn't always shared. Participants concerns were more immediate and revolved around excess. Yet, they often recognised the change in patterns of consumption and expressed disillusion with the current state of the city's nightlife.

Interviewing & Observing

The research used qualitative research in the form of ethnographic interviews, as had been utilised by Pearson (2012) and Telford (2022). Ethnographic interviews have been highlighted by Treadwell (2020) as largely interchangeable with unstructured and semi-structured interviewing that relies on life histories and biographies, however a core difference is the immersion of the researcher into the culture of those who are being interviewed and the importance of establishing a relationship. In essence, the key difference between ethnographic interviewing and other types of interviewing is the depth that arises out of both the long-term relationships between the participants and the researcher, and the natural field setting enabling higher quality and natural interactions that delve into the participants lives, feelings and beliefs that remain scarcely explored when this research context is not present (O'Reilly, 2009). Due to me already having a relationship with some of those who were to be interviewed to varying degrees (some are known through mutual friends), much of the relationship establishing was already completed due to a sense of trust and rapport already being in place through years spent in the same local NTE as them.

The use of ethnographic interviews was implemented as the method enables the interview to flow as a conversation, making participants more relaxed as the informal

manner of the interviews take on the character of intimate conversations between close friends (Finch, 1984). This allows for a narrative discussion to take place, where the interviewee is probed to tell stories relating to the questions, enabling the participant to provide an oral history of their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). From their narratives, qualitative and insightful conclusions to the research questions were drawn.

However, ethnographic, qualitative interviews are not without their limitations. Researchers such as Pearson (2012), Armstrong (1998), and Winlow et al (2017) largely relied on ethnography in the form of covert participant observation. This enables the researcher to view the lifeworld of the participant, unobstructed from bias or the potential for the participant to be lenient with the truth (Pearson, 2012). This has been noted as an advantage over overt interviews, as participants in previous research have been noted as acting differently in a more relaxed interview setting than they would be in the field where they may be influenced by group dynamics, bravado, and mind-altering substances (Ibid.). However, to negate this in the interview setting, the participants were questioned on whether they have acted in a way they would not have ordinarily. While this does not allow the researcher to view the actions of the participant for themselves, it does offer some insight into whether the participant may change dependent on different factors, and with a rapport being successfully made it makes it more likely that they were answering truthfully.

The interviews were carried out in various places comfortable to the participants, such as the participants' home, within NTE venues, and when driving between different places so that those partaking were in a place where they feel comfortable and so they did not have to travel out of their way to take part in the study. While online

interviews do have the potential to reduce the problems that can hinder face-to-face interviewing, such as the availability of time, and geographical and financial constraints (Janghorban et al, 2014). Despite these advantages, the method affects the ability to build a rapport with participants (Lo Lacano et al, 2016), a factor which is one of the most important when conducting qualitative research with groups that could be wary of outsiders (Treadwell, 2020).

One aspect of interviewing I was keen to note was the potential for participant reactivity effecting the validity of responses (Krathwohl, 2004). While I did not find this as prominent in the field site observations due to witnessing similar behaviours in the NTE to what I would outside of researching, but when interviewing there were times when participants answers were at odds with what I had seen from them in the field. This however is evidence of a self-perception being at odds with their real-world behaviour which was noted throughout the study as will be mentioned later in this chapter. This only solidified the need to study the participants in various settings to see both their onstage and backstage perceptions of self (Treadwell, 2020). Furthermore, this is largely an aspect that dictates social interactions more generally, with people approaching interactions with people by what they can gage at the surface level (Goffman, 1990). This was also largely offset with me being known to many participants at some level prior to interview and observation, while also having a similar background alongside aspects such as accent, music taste, football allegiance and dress, allowing me as the researcher to slip in and out of the researcher mode at ease (Treadwell, 2020). This background has enabled me to find such data, without which would arguably be less valid or gather data as rich, highlighting the benefits of my role as a consumer of nightlife prior to my entry into the field similar to other

ethnographies (see Wilson, 2007; Colosi, 2010).

Once interviews were conducted, transcripts were written up, from which thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke, 2006) took place in order to uncover trends and themes amongst the different interviews were then analysed through the lens of *Ultra-realist* theory, focussing on how socio-economic issues could influence the development of their motivations and feelings. Thematic analysis is useful when conducting qualitative research as the coding of different themes makes it easy to highlight similarities and differences in participants' perspectives, while insight can also be gained through the generation of unanticipated results, taking the research in a different direction as was previously thought (King, 2004).

Thematic analysis was deemed most appropriate for this study due its relative theoretical freedom it provides over other methods such as narrative analysis, allowing me as the researcher to easily identify broader and recurring themes and patterns rather than individualised stories that fail to consider the overarching theory (Bryman, 2016). Further to this, the thematic nature of the analysis allowed me to analyse data throughout the research process, often before formal interviews had taken place, informing future directions in my questioning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To help structure the analytical process, Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6 phases were followed. The phases – familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report – were followed and repeated throughout the data collection process.

Away from interviewing, ethnographic observations were utilised. Like most ethnographic studies, the study comprised of prolonged researcher involvement within a loose group of people (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). In this case, the group was

those who are consumers in the local NTE. The sites that were studied were the pubs and clubs largely confined to the city centre, and to a lesser extent the other towns of the city and Newcastle-under-Lyme to the city's West. As well as this, pubs were utilised in the various villages and suburban areas within the city, while pubs and clubs outside the city in nearby areas were also ventured into with participants due to their proximity to the city and the frequency in which people local to the Potteries visit these other NTE's. Prominently featured is the nearby town of Hillstown, as a number of the participants frequented the bars in this town on a weekly basis, often moreso than Hanley, the city centre and main NTE in North Staffordshire.

The decision to branch out into other areas was twofold. Firstly, it highlighted the dispersal of Stoke's nightlife consumers to smaller locales amidst their city's relative nightlife death. Secondly, it highlighted a world in which is often neglected by much academic discussion, with most NTE studies concerning sprawling urban locales (see Smith, 2014; Winlow & Hall, 2006), while the smaller locales highlight the differences in nightlife cultures (Shaw, 2014).

Hillstown for example is unmarked by a visibly post-industrial landscape. In contrast, Hillstown is a semi-rural town situated on the periphery of Stoke-on-Trent, with its population smaller, culturally homogeneous, and undergone fewer structural and demographic changes over the past few decades compared to inner city areas such as Longton and Fenton. Despite its proximity to the city, it retains a distinct identity, with a slower pace of life and more fitted sense of community. These differences provided a useful lens for examining how class, space, and localised identity shape social relations and experiences within the NTE. This will be explored further in the following chapter. The towns and villages outside the city's metropolitan area, such as Hillstown and

Milltown, have been afforded further anonymity due to their small habitat and the quick realisation that most people in these towns knew each other. Stoke-on-Trent and its towns and villages is not afforded the same level of anonymity, with its large population and general post-industrial atomisation meaning the risk of identification was mitigated.

The primary aim of ethnographic researcher involvement in these sites is to gather 'rich, nuanced and comprehensive' data that will enable the researcher to produce a thorough account of the observed (Hall, 2018:391). Therefore, the data collection process for ethnographies is often long and complex. In June 2022, to start the observations I used my own contacts to enter the Stoke NTE and begin to conduct unstructured and broad observations of events, actions, social environments, and research participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). As the data begun to demonstrate themes and theory was drawn upon to explain the observations, further mini tour observations took place in order to narrow the topic of interest and observe trends closer (Spradley, 1980). The observational data collection is therefore to some degree both iterative and simultaneous, with the data collection continuing whilst I conduct initial analyses.

Observations were long and unpredictable, sometimes spanning from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m., mirroring the erratic tempo of nightlife. Nights fluctuated between camaraderie and conflict, quiet reflection and chaotic spectacle. A conversation in a pub could dissolve into violence outside a kebab shop or fractured intimacy on a dancefloor. The field spanned pubs in Hillstown, curry houses in Stoke, homes in Newcastle, and clubs in Hanley. Each setting shaped the nature of encounters: pubs often brought out nostalgic melancholia, while Hanley's clubs were built on intoxicated bravado and

sexual display. Together, they mapped the city's emotional terrain: warm, fractured, or transactional depending on where one was stood.

Participant groups varied, with some figures recurring regularly. Sully, for example, became central due to his deep ties to the nightlife scene, his availability, and his ability to connect me with wider social networks. Fieldwork peaked on weekends but extended into weeknights in quieter pubs, where the tempo slowed, revealing subtler rhythms of working-class life, though these too could quickly turn into hedonism. The unpredictability demanded constant mobility and emotional readiness.

The toll was significant: exhaustion, hangovers, and the weight of repeatedly witnessing violence and despair. I underestimated the psychological cost of prolonged immersion (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000). Yet the intensity yielded complex, layered insights into Stoke's post-industrial nightlife and the social contradictions embedded within it. These experiences were shaped not only by place and time but by my relationships with participants and my own role in the field. The blurring of observer and participant, and the ethical dilemmas that came with it, were central to the study's ethnographic depth.

In order to record the data collected from the observations made, extensive fieldnotes were taken. Field dairies were used to document observations during the fieldwork stage. I started with headnotes, developing them into scratch notes and progressing onto full notes, each time becoming more detailed and conducted in a timely manner to ensure the maximum amount of data is recollected (Treadwell, 2020). Furthermore, thick description was utilised when producing the fieldnotes. This allows for an in-depth explanation of experiences and observations that enables the researcher to examine the findings and place them within the wider theoretical debate and social

structures while ensuring validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

While the headnotes-to-scratch-notes approach is common in ethnographic research, it is not without its pitfalls. Headnotes, relying on memory, can be affected by fatigue, intoxication, or sensory overload (Manning, 2018; Emerson et al., 2011), requiring a proactive researcher who participates actively to observe key events. Scratch notes, written quickly in the field, capture important details but are fragmentary and prone to retrospective bias (Hobbs, 1988). The limited time for note-taking in NTE spaces often prioritises conversations over context (Treadwell, 2020). I addressed these issues by quickly turning headnotes into scratch notes to prevent memory decay (Berman et al., 2009). Using my phone to jot down notes minimised suspicion compared to using a physical notebook (Armstrong, 1998). I also used breaks, like smoking outside, to write more detailed notes for later expansion.

However, in a field where alcohol is prevalent, these challenges are intensified. Alcohol-induced haziness compromises data accuracy, and the blurred line between observation and participation complicates recall and emotional interpretation (Joseph & Donnelly, 2012). To counter this, I made full notes after returning home, capturing my inebriated state before details faded. Although fatigue sometimes hindered this, writing while intoxicated allowed me to capture both my own and the participants' feelings. The next day, I revisited the notes with a clearer perspective, adding reflexivity and analysis.

This combination of immediate, inebriated notes and later sober reflection facilitated "thick description" (Geertz, 1988), balancing raw data with deeper analysis. These note-taking practices, rather than being methodological flaws, reflect the complex interplay between researcher and researched, especially in inebriated NTE settings.

Observations and the use of fieldnotes to document them are often seen to be subjective due to the influence of the characteristics and background of the researcher (Kawulich, 2005). This puts into question the validity of the research findings. By taking the previously mentioned Treadwell and Williams (2008) approach to being reflexive, it has mitigated this issue. This has helped to ensure that the role and characteristics of the researcher are acknowledged and address the impact they may have on the research design, data collection and the overall findings (Wincup, 2017).

Further to this, my position on the issue of subjectivity is that I, nor the wider *Ultra-realist* framework, make any such claim that this work is of objective truth (Winlow & Hall, 2015). Indeed, the research gathered is largely dependent on both the subjective lives led by the participants, and also my own subjectivity, highlighting that the descriptions offered are a microcosm of various different data that could have been produced in similar studies (Brewer, 2000). Due to this, and my overall opportunistic use of gatekeepers I am already known to in my initial sampling, I accept that the data produced largely reflects the lives of a similar group set of people that may be vastly different to another researcher employing the same methods.

While not necessarily completely linear, the penultimate phase of an ethnographic study, which takes place prior the final write up of the ethnography, is the analysis of data. The nature of ethnography requires the researcher to repeat research steps numerous times. This enables the researcher to develop a further understanding of the observed, collect additional data that provides further richness, perform a more cultivated analysis of the findings and enhances reflexivity (Treadwell, 2020). Therefore, the data analysis for this study begun from the moment the fieldwork commenced and continued until the write up phase begun.

Ethnographic research rarely follows a clear linear progression, with the boundaries between data collection, reflection, and interpretation often being blurred. When first entering the field, Initial observations, informal conversations, and fieldnote writing all involved early stages of interpretation, where meaning was tentatively assigned to events and interactions in real time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Treadwell, 2020). These moments of analysis were not necessarily systematic, but were nonetheless vital to shaping the study's emerging themes and overall direction.

Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

This study intended to conduct ethnographic observations and interviews with those who are, or who once were, regular participants in Stoke-on-Trent's NTE, more specifically those who frequent venues such as nightclubs and pubs. The main focus of the study was the lived experience of the users of the city's nightlife. These data was used to examine the purpose and culture of the NTE in a post-industrial city that has largely been left to rot by the neoliberalism (see Lichfield, 2019). This was explored through asking participants why they engage in such practices that some researchers have labelled inherently harmful and serve no purpose, while I also spent time with the participants to fully experience their life within the culture to add further contextual depth. From these experiences, I can highlight where wider social, cultural and political shifts have influenced the life path and worldview of participants, placing the micro-cultures of Stoke-on-Trent within the macro-culture of post-modern society, highlighting how it has potentially failed or benefitted people of today. Through conducting this research, the data adds to wider theoretical debates surrounding neoliberalism, cultural shifts, depoliticisation, and social harm within the post-industrial West Midlands.

Aim:

To explore the lived experiences of consumer within Stoke-on-Trent's NTE, utilising the data within the wider macro-framework of social, political, and cultural issues to examine why and how issues within this arena exist.

Objectives:

1) To generate the data required for this study by conducting ethnographic fieldwork consisting of extensive participant observations and comprehensive unstructured interviews. This will allow me to examine the reasons for engaging with certain behaviours within the NTE, and why this is the case for the participants.

2) To place the findings within the macro-framework of neoliberalism, and add to theoretical debates surrounding social harm and cultural shift within working-class locales and places of *post-leisure*.

Sampling and Recruitment

In order to gain access to participants, I relied on my own circle of family and friends who I already associate with, using them as 'gatekeepers' to interact with others in the NTE. Relying on one's social network to begin data collection has been deployed by other researchers, such as Hall and Winlow (2006), Ellis (2016), Lloyd (2018) and Telford (2022). My extended family is large, and my social circle is varied, with many of my friends belonging to different social circles, so the findings were not skewed by only interviewing the same types of people as the sampling was diverse to ensure reliability. This meant that many of the participants I spent time with did not have significant links with the others, although there were some occasional overlaps.

For example, Sully, Jimmy and Davo were part of the same core friendship group, and

their network occasionally overlapped with other participants, such as Jimbob, Doc or Alex. However, while they were aware of other participants and knew them by name, they would not socialise with them on a regular basis, with their relationship being at best transient and fleeting meetings in bars and clubs. Further to this, some participants had significant connections but this did not necessarily translate to associating in the NTE. Wayne and Alex are father and daughter, yet their experience of the NTE are vastly different due to their age difference and how the world changed during their formative years, but also those who they chose to associate with being vastly different individuals. This point in particular evidences that while gatekeepers may lead to connections being made to those who are closely associated to the initial participant, the data that can arise from the extended sample can often be distinct.

However, while using 'gatekeepers' to access participants is well established in criminology, it must be noted that gatekeepers have their own views and attitudes that could impact the research (Treadwell, 2020). During his study on football hooliganism, Pearson (2012) noted that there was a lot of people who he was warned against talking to as they were 'bluffers' – people who claimed to be involved in levels of disorder when they had not. Similarly, Ellis (2016) noted that the football hooligans he used as gatekeepers warned him of talking to 'dressers', people who wore the same clothes as football hooligans and acted similar but were more interested in appearing as football hooligans rather than live the reality. Henceforth, it is important to use gatekeepers who are trustworthy, and others can vouch for as being heavily involved in the NTE.

This was a core issue highlighted in the research. When data collection began and gatekeepers began to introduce me to others, I actively searched to see whether their tales, stories and accounts could be verified. Part of this is undoubtedly on a subjective

level, where my own knowledge of the city, field, and to an extent the biographies of potential participants informed my approach. This is not unheard of, with Wakeman (2014) highlighting how his prior experience of heroin communities allowed him to avoid situations where he believed he was about to be robbed. In my case, it allowed me to negate spending time with suspected 'bluffers'. One such case was a friend of Sully's, whose willingness to express his experience in violence and drug dealing in one of our first informal meetings conveyed to me a sense that he would not provide any meaningful data that was true after he described to me an interaction he had with the Traveller community that was largely a bad revising of the film *Snatch*.

One such occasion where I did find it useful to speak to a renowned 'bluffer' however was with Sully. He was renowned by other participants as being relatively loose with the truth, being quick to exult his capabilities for violence and sexual conquest. This is despite there being little evidence of this ever occurring amongst other participants, or when in the field with him. However, what he did offer was an insight into this view of himself when under interview conditions, largely expressing as the interview went on that this was largely a façade he maintained to offer some form of symbolic capital amidst others whose capital relied on violence and sex, which would be analysed as part of the data theorisation.

Once contact had been made with those willing to participate, consent forms would be signed and ethnographic observations would be made, while ethnographic interviews would also take place to gain an insight into their life experiences, and a rapport could be made between myself and the participant via the conversational method of unstructured interviews which lead to an undistorted insight into their life history to develop theory and insight into the question. I quickly realised that the observations

were better utilised prior to interviewing. Entering the field first with the participants allowed this rapport to be quickly built after sharing experiences with them (Treadwell, 2020). Further to this, it enabled me to be further reflexive in my ethnography and question them on their actions that I myself had witnessed in the field, allowing them to explain them in a sober setting.

Convenience sampling was first utilised as I already knew a large number of people who were prevalent in the NTE. This allowed me to quickly identify and collect initial data and themes present within the field (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). From this point on, and to avoid issues regarding the data not being valid outside of my immediate reach, snowball sampling was also utilised, requesting that they put me in touch with any of their associates who may offer unique and informative insights into Stoke-on-Trent's NTE.

The study involved 26 participants who were interviewed, as this provides an adequate enough sample for qualitative research to be conducted and analysed. There is variation in what is considered a valid number of participants for qualitative research, with Geerson and Herowitz (2002) arguing that 60 people are needed for the data to be valid enough to support convincing conclusions, while Morgan, et al (2002), Guest, et al (2006) and Francis, et al (2010) highlight that many concepts and themes are identified after five or six interviews. Utilising 26 participants enabled the data to produce significant data through the extensive time spent in the field with the participants and others, while the long-form interviews (some which lasted up to 4 hours long) created such data that anymore would lead to data saturation. Hennink & Kaiser (2022) highlighted that data saturation is often found between 9-17 interviews. I found this was similar to my data collection, with many themes repeating after 15

interviews. I decided to continue conducting interviews up until the number 26 to press further on different themes that were not as prevalent in the initial 15 interviews, enabling the research to cover a variety of different problems prevalent in the NTE.

With the ethnographical paradigm being utilised for the interviews, previous studies in this vein such as Treadwell and Garland's (2011) show that a small number of participants – in their case three – can still be utilised to bring back strong data that can be expanded on in later studies; henceforth the use of 26 interviews is more than sufficient when using ethnography to delve beneath the surface of participants feelings and motivations. Although the sample size is smaller than Geerson and Horowitz's (2002) suggested 60 and is arguably less reliable (see Frosdick and Marsh, 2005), long periods of time can be spent with participants to gain epistemological insight into their world view and life experiences, with the longer the time spent with the participants allowing the researcher to dig under the surface of the NTE consumer's identity and gain a clearer picture of their motivations and practices (Treadwell, 2020).

The sample size of 26 had been designed to be large enough to generate the rich qualitative data needed, yet small enough to ensure dedicating enough time and effort into collecting such quality data (Worley, Barrow and Wood, 2016). After securing ethical approval, over a year was spent within the NTE field between July 2022 and September 2023, ensuring that an adequate number of observations are made in this setting. This ensured that enough in-depth data was collected to provide a comprehensive account of Stoke's NTE without saturation taking place (Hall, 2018).

To ensure that the data collected was able to answer the research questions effectively, the following procedure took place to approach and recruit participants:

1. Interviewees were identified firstly through purposive sampling of those who frequent the NTE, and then by the way of snowball sampling, whereby participants were asked to identify other potential participants (Babbie, 2008).

2. I provided all interviewees with all the information contained within the participant information sheet verbally when I invited them to take part in the study. Paper copies were provided to participants at the interview to ensure they had further access to the study information and Staffordshire University contact details if needed.

3. The researcher allowed potential participants time to decide whether they wish to participate. To ensure that participants did not feel pressured into participating, no further attempts were made to communicate with them in relation to providing an interview. If participants wished to provide an interview, they could communicate this decision directly to the researcher. This allowed them to make an informed, voluntary decision to participate in the study.

4. All participants were to encouraged and provided the opportunity to ask any further questions they had prior to signing the consent form (see appendix).

5. Once a participant had chosen to participate in the study, consent was obtained verbally and an interview or observations were arranged for a time that was suitable for the participant, where they gave signed consent via a participant consent form.

6. As outlined previously, the voluntary nature of the study and the right to withdraw was reiterated to participants throughout the duration of the study to ensure informed consent was taken without duress.

7. To collect the remaining data outside of interviews, in a way that mitigates the

intrusion into the lives of the participants, the researcher engaged in ethnographic observations. This includes participating in 'ordinary conversations and activities' with those who are consumers in the Stoke NTE.

8. To ensure that the identity of research participants and those observed remained unidentifiable to the public, the results are presented as an aggregate, whereby the identity of research participants are protected by removing all personal and identifiable data.

9. As mentioned earlier, if the research procedure did not generate enough interest and further participants were required, the process would have been repeated.

Participants invited to partake within this study included anyone aged over 18 – but they may discuss details from when they were younger – who has currently or in the past had experience as a consumer in the Potteries NTE. The inclusion criteria has been developed to ensure that the data collected has the ability to adequately answer the research questions. Interviewing people who have experienced Stoke's NTE in different generations gives an important insight into how and why the city's nightlife has mutated, providing a unique insight into the experiences of NTE consumers who have witnessed such a change.

Due to wanting to adequately document this change, the participants taking part cover a diverse age range, with those interviewed ranging from 19-65. Only 13 of the interviewed participants were between the ages of 18 and 35, while the rest were aged 36 and over so that the study can give an adequate insight into the changes that have taken place within the NTE in decades prior. While some of the older participants were not as frequent in their ventures to the NTE in the current era, the majority were,

with 8 of the older participants still frequenting the NTE on a regular basis.

Participants were selected for their working-class backgrounds to focus on those affected by the transition from industrialism to post-industrial consumerism and *post-leisure* nightlife. Affluent individuals, less impacted by economic decline, typically did not frequent drinking spots in Stoke-on-Trent. While many participants' working-class status was clear, based on their jobs, education, and family background, it was not always straightforward due to the subjective and shifting nature of social class (Savage, 2015; Evans, 2023).

For example, Dale, an older participant, is a well-paid, university-educated teacher, yet grew up on a major council estate and comes from an industrial working-class family. His brother, Kevin, also well-paid but uneducated, still embodies working-class traits through his mannerisms and job. These complexities did not diminish their relevance to the study, as they retained core elements of their working-class habitus despite changes in their economic status. Some younger participants, like Gene and Jimmy, reflect the changing nature of class in the 21st century. Both went to university, traditionally linked to the middle-class (Reay, 2017), but pursued university for hedonistic pleasures and returned to jobs requiring no formal qualifications. In the post-industrial landscape, despite the push for ‘social mobility’ and its limited outcomes (Ingram & Gamsu, 2022), Gene and Jimmy have not ascended to middle-class prosperity.

What is certain is that all participants came from working-class backgrounds and experienced nightlife as individualised consumers of pleasure. These individuals, straddling class categories amidst economic precarity and cultural dislocation, were ideally suited for a study grounded in *Ultra-realism*. This supports the *Ultra-realist* view

that the breakdown of traditional class structures has not led to liberation or social mobility, but instead intensified ontological insecurity (Winlow & Hall, 2013), showing that even those who climb the social ladder often find it leaning against a hollow wall. Alongside the interviewed participants, interactions were made with countless others whilst in the field. This has the potential for ethical issues due to the issue of informed consent. This is negated by the fact that informed consent generally is an imperfect process when conducting ethnographic research (Miller & Boulton, 2007).

Firstly, it is logistically impossible to tell everyone within the field sites that I am an ethnographic researcher and not a consumer. This would muddy each and every interaction that would take place, and also exclude much of the data that I witnessed taking place. To negate this issue, I ensured when collecting data in the field I was present with at least one consenting participant, while providing the same anonymity to those who I had interviewed. This is to an extent a position that relies on my own ethical code, existing outside the remits of formal ethic committees (Ancrum, 2012). Secondly, there was a lack of understanding in itself to what the research entailed by many who did not take part in the study when I did choose to disclose my position, highlighting further the issues regarding ever gaining fully informed consent (Treadwell, 2020). For example, one person who I made contact with was a bouncer who told me that he taxed the drug dealers working inside the nightclubs where he worked, before quickly telling me that he forgot I was 'training to be a copper'. Another incident involved a potential participant who was under the impression that I was out to 'expose' him even though he did not take part in any considerable criminal activity other than drug use. Despite my explanation that this was ethically secure through anonymisation, and I had previously spent time with drug dealers and those involved in proscribed organisations, he remained defiant.

The study aimed to gather data as balanced as possible in terms of gender to ensure that issues that are unique to different genders (see Winlow and Hall, 2006; Hall et al, 2008) would be highlighted within Stoke's NTE. 10 interviewed participants were female, which gave the sample significant data from the female lens despite not being completely equal. I found this to be largely down to me being male, as most of those who I entered the field with were usually all male groups, and while I did enter the field with the women involved, they were largely mixed-gender groups. Water (2015) highlights that this can be an issue regarding access, with similarities between the participant and researcher enabling barriers to be broken down easier than when differences are present. This was also prevalent regarding race. While one participant of Pakistani origin was initially arranged, this was stopped by his sudden stay at his majesty's pleasure for a GBH conviction. This meant that every participant interviewed was White-British. Again, this is largely due to how the sample was collected and the racial singularity that many groups within Stoke-on-Trent possess, and the city's relatively small ethnic population (83.5% white as of 2021) making this somewhat unavoidable. Other researchers (See Bushell, 2020) have also found issues gaining access to racially different groups, with efforts being met with suspicion. I however found this to not hinder the research, but rather give an insight into the experiences of one group within Stoke-on-Trent that does not necessarily hold true for other ethnic groups.

Harm to the Researcher

The NTE and the social harms associated with it can be considered a sensitive topic for all parties involved. One of the ethical risks related to this project is the potential for participants' recollecting their experiences becoming upset or angry by participating in

the study. Treadwell (2020) and Ellis (2016) highlight how participants who have previously committed or been victims of crime may become violent or frustrated during studies if they feel as if they are being targeted. This is evident in Ellis' (2016) study where he saw one participant threaten one of his friends as he felt his friend was being insulting.

Further to this, some may be willing to inflict harm on those that they view as suspicious or with ulterior motives, such as those who are attempting to research them covertly (Pearson, 2012). Further to this, conducting research in fields with unknown consumers carries the risk of being a victim of violence personally. This is evident in Treadwell's (2010) research where he was accused of being from a rival football 'firm' during his research into football violence. This was something that I found relatively regular, with violence occurring around me commonly, and being targeted with potentially violent encounters on numerous occasions. One such occasion was during the field in a town to the north of the city, where I was met with hostility from a man when I was away from the rest of the participants. After wrongfully accusing me of 'giving shit to one of [his] boys' and making a gesture as if to say 'come on then', I laughed at him, stood up, and told him to fuck off as I did not know what he was talking about. He soon dispersed, and started on a person sat next to me instead who remained defensive and was then soon met with a more sustained encounter.

While in this situation I found this to be the most successful way to avoid further confrontation, even though it may well be out of the realm of the ethics committee to endorse such necessary field conduct. As Treadwell & Williams (2008) highlight, this can be a learnt tool from ones biography to negate potential harm in the field, which I largely stuck by within my time in the field as I was aware of the sites I was frequenting

could quickly divulge into violent encounters. As regular frequenter of the Stoke-on-Trent NTE, I have the biographical experience needed to stand me in good stead to do this research and drew on this throughout to inform my encounters (see Wakeman, 2014). While this may not always be the best way to approach an encounter, my decision to act was always informed by my own experience within this field in terms of what would lead to the best outcome.

While it is important that I remained reflexive while realistically minded of protecting my own safety, this should not come at the behest of good social research, henceforth participants were still questioned on things which could have potentially made them angry, such as disagreeing with them on answers and probing them further (Treadwell, 2020). Further safe interviewing techniques were employed to minimise the risk to the researcher. This includes building a rapport with the participants prior to the interview taking place and positioning the researcher closer to the door of interview room to facilitate a quick exit if needed (Treadwell, 2020).

Nevertheless, some safety precautions were taken when entering the field for observations. While I had initially planned to take more significant precautions, such as having my supervisory team being notified when I enter and leave the field, my whereabouts and who I am with, and being contacted immediately if I am in any danger, I found this to be largely unnecessary and unrealistic when I was entering the NTE most nights of the week, especially given it is a setting I find entirely comfortable.

I did plan to stick to the following precautions however, such as if there was a potential for harm by going into the field, I would have discussed this with my supervisory team first and made them aware, providing us with an opportunity to discuss and resolve any potential issues prior to entering such a field. Furthermore, if I

was made aware by participants that I could be put in harm's way by interviewing and observing certain people, I would have made sure that I did not approach them to take part in the study. If I felt uncomfortable during the fieldwork taking place, I would have left the field early and inform my supervisors my reasons for doing so. Meetings between myself and my supervisors continued to be scheduled once a month and were available upon request to ensure my well-being. This provided me with the opportunity to discuss my experiences and any issues I may be facing. Accessibility to support from Staffordshire University's Wellbeing Centre was also available if required.

This however was largely not an issue. The NTE is inherently a place of danger with its exuberant machismo and drunken encounters (Winlow & Hall, 2006), but this was a world I was more than experienced in and had come to expect. Hence, to ring my supervisors or leave the field at the first sight of conflict would leave very little being written in form of a PhD thesis, nor were these experiences anything out of the ordinary. While my background has in no way informed the research in terms of creating an autoethnographic account as this is not what the study is about (Crewe, 2009), it has informed my approach to research and my place in it. The same as Wakeman (2014), my background has allowed me to have a privileged position in terms of insider knowledge and how to use this to foresee potential danger and avoid it as best as I knew possible due to my prior experiences in these situations and the emotions that they produced when in environments of intoxication.

Harm to Participants

While participation in the Night-Time Economy carries a risk of violence, so too does discussing such experiences in a research context. Conversations around violence, harm, and criminality can trigger feelings of guilt, distress, or emotional discomfort

(Ellis, 2016). Beyond this, more general ethical concerns were addressed, particularly the need to maintain participant confidentiality, minimising the risk of repercussions such as retaliatory violence or criminal justice intervention (Ellis, 2016). Central to this was the imperative that no participant should leave the study burdened by emotional distress as a result of their involvement (Linkogle and Lee-Treweek, 2000). To ensure this, steps were taken to create a supportive and non-judgemental space for disclosure, guided by the British Society of Criminology's (2023) emphasis on minimising harm in all stages of research.

I ensured I was most sensitive in regard to this when interviewing participants who had experience of assault or a history of drug use, being careful to approach these topics delicately and without judgement while asking more than once whether they were comfortable to continue talking on the matter. To minimise this potential, participants agreed to discuss the topic beforehand and were able to inform me of any subtopics that they would rather not discuss before the interviews take place. Furthermore, with the interviews being largely unstructured, the participant could direct the conversation in whatever way they wish. If for any reason a participant did become upset because of participating in this study, I would have given them the opportunity to discontinue the interview, as well as contact details for mental health support services if relevant, while disregarding my interview notes and materials. If the participant became upset during the interview, I offered them the opportunity to pause the interview and take a break or the option to terminate the interview.

However, I aimed to sense whether or not topics are distressing to the participants by assessing their body language (Allmark et al 2009). If their demeanour changed after a certain question was asked, I would make sure not to probe them on the topic further.

However, these potential issues did not arise during the interviews. While one participant, Kenny, was worried after the interview of what he disclosed coming back to him, after assuring anonymity and again outlining that everything linked to him would be deleted, he was left reassured. The confidentiality of all participants was honoured by ensuring that all participation and confidential details remain anonymous outside the research team (Wiles et al, 2008). This was achieved by using coded participant identification numbers and storing the codes safely and separately in a document protected by a password.

To further protect the identity of participants, pseudonym's chosen by the researcher were used for publication. Additionally, any identifiable data was not included in the interview transcript. Disclosure of information that indicates that people are at risk of harm moving forward could have lead to the disclosure of this information to the appropriate authorities, however participants were informed of this practice in the participant information sheet and provided consent for this to take place via the participant consent form.

However, danger to participants when in the field was largely out of my control as this was outside of the interviewer/interviewee setting and involved other nightlife consumers. The role of an observer in this sense is complicated (see Treadwell, 2020). While on the one hand, I as an observing researcher should not influence what is or what is not going to happen, at times this had to be contravened. At numerous points in the field, participants were confronted by others, with the potential for violence frequent. It is at this point I often felt responsible for their safety as much as my own. In one such encounter, Jimmy was confronted by a man who previously took part in an attack on him, and I quickly intervened to try to minimise the conflict and blocking it

from turning violent, which was successful. Similarly, when Izzy was being made to feel uncomfortable by a man in the Hut who would not leave her alone, I made the bouncers aware of his behaviour, for which he was thrown out. Involvement in the field is inevitable, as Winlow (2001), Treadwell (2010) & Pearson (2012) show through their foreseeable involvement in conflict, where the researcher must act on their initiative to avoid harm for both them and their participants. While ethics boards are quick to acknowledge the avoidance of harm in interview settings, I believe this to be equally paramount within the field. In other cases, me being present during violence and being shown to support those involved by mitigating their potential harm enabled me to become fully accepted and embedded within their social group, building further rapport and consequently producing further rich data.

My involvement in encounters for the sake of participants did not always extend to others in the nightlife environment who were not part of the study. I felt no obligation to intervene in routine acts of violence involving strangers, as these had become a desensitised, expected part of the city's NTE. However, when moral responsibility outweighed methodological detachment, I intervened, especially when women faced unwanted sexual attention or physical aggression. One instance involved an intoxicated participant who would not leave a group of young women alone at The Hut.

This raises an ethical tension in ethnographic fieldwork: the challenge of maintaining a purely observational role in uncomfortable or harmful situations (Calvey, 2008). Goffman (1990) highlights the choice between 'being there' and 'being involved,' and at times, I felt compelled to act rather than simply observe. Such blurring of roles challenges the ethnographer's neutrality, as intervention can be necessary when

individuals are at risk.

I do not share these moments to present myself as a moral hero, recognising the danger of romanticising intervention (Coffey, 1999). My decisions were not ego-driven but instinctual, stemming from a basic sense of discomfort and responsibility, shaped by my ethics, cultural background, and relationship to the nightlife space (Treadwell & Williams, 2008; Treadwell, 2018).

Researching the Inebriated

While it presents various ethical issues to document participants who are under the influence of alcohol and possibly other psychoactive substances, there are a range of measures that can be deployed to mitigate this and ensure ethical research. Research with the inebriated is nothing new, with researchers such as Newcombe (1992) documenting drug use in the UK dance scene thirty years ago. While ethics may not have been as vigorous in previous eras it is a suitable tool if it is used correctly, and it would be wrong as an ethnographer to not document people in NTE if they are drinking (see Treadwell, 2020), when after all, that is what they are likely there for (Smith, 2014). Furthermore, ethnographically documenting these circumstances enables the research to 'peel back the curtain' into people's real lives (Treadwell, 2020).

While interviews give a good insight into how people view themselves and their life history, ethnographic insights evidence the 'real thing' and wont rely on their sober testimony. Furthermore, to counter the ethical issues with researching the intoxicated, the participants were asked prior entering the NTE to give me their sober and informed consent to document them in this situation both verbally and via the consent

form. The participants anonymisation also meant that nothing they do in these situations could have any bearing on their life outside of the data collection. I enter the NTE outside of the research on a weekly basis and have done for a number of years, so nothing out of the ordinary occurred, while the consent forms and anonymisation give them more protection than they would usually receive.

In summation, to conduct research with the intoxicated ethically, I followed the guidelines set out by Beauchamp and Childress (2001) of:

- Autonomy: participants should be free to participate. As previously mentioned, they sign a consent form when sober having been informed of the purpose of the study. They also have up to two months to withdraw from the study from when initial contact is made.

- Non-maleficence: participants should be protected from harm. I had to take into account the participants health in this circumstance. If I found that they are what I would consider to be too intoxicated as other researchers have (see Deehan and Saville, 2003), I would not have used them in the data in that circumstance and instead seek that they stop drinking or get medical help if needs be.

- Beneficence: the benefits of research should outweigh the risks. In this research, it is imperative that I viewed and documented participants in this environment for reasons mentioned prior, while they will face little risk due to the anonymisation process.

- Justice: people should be treated equally. In the case of my research, the participants shall not be taken advantage of due to their inebriated state. This means that I treated them as I would if they were sober, and let them guide the research rather than let myself influence them whilst they are intoxicated and potentially more

easily persuaded.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the methodological foundation of the research, offering a detailed account of how and why the data was collected, and the rationale behind key decisions that shaped the research design. The overall aim has been to explore the lives, behaviours, and underlying motivations of individuals who participate in the NTE in and around Stoke-on-Trent. In doing so, I have positioned this research within a broader theoretical and epistemological framework, drawing particularly on the insights of Ultra-Realism and the psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance*. These ideas not only shaped the interpretation of the data but also informed the methodological choices that were made throughout the research process.

The chapter has justified the use of ethnography as the primary mode of data collection, reflecting its value in accessing the rich, often messy lived experiences of nightlife participants. Ethnography enabled a sustained and immersive engagement with the field, providing a nuanced understanding of the everyday dynamics of nightlife spaces that could not be captured through more distanced forms of data collection. Alongside this, I have reflected on the ethical complexities inherent to conducting research in such settings, where issues demanded ongoing negotiation and reflexivity.mThe process of access and recruitment has also been outlined, with justification given for the inclusion of a varied participant sample that spans different age groups and genders. This diversity was necessary to capture a broader spectrum of perspectives and behaviours within the NTE, helping to avoid narrow or reductive conclusions. In addition, the chapter has explained the decision to use thematic analysis, emphasising its compatibility with the theoretical framework and its

adaptability to the demands of ethnographic data. This method allowed for a flexible yet rigorous approach to coding and interpreting the data, remaining open to emergent themes while guided by established theoretical concerns. Attention has also been paid to the challenges that arose throughout the research process, including issues around access, ethics, and data quality. Rather than gloss over these difficulties, I have addressed them directly and reflected on how they were navigated in practice. These discussions highlight the unpredictable and often improvisational nature of real-world research and underscore the importance of methodological adaptability.

By outlining the theoretical commitments, practical strategies, and ethical considerations that shaped this study, this chapter has provided the groundwork for the empirical analysis that follows. The next four chapters will present the data thematically, focusing respectively on violence, atomisation, expressive individualism, and inebriation. In doing so, they will draw upon the methodological and theoretical insights highlighted here to offer a critical account of the social harms that characterise the contemporary NTE. Through this analysis, the thesis seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how broader structural and cultural transformations are experienced and influence behaviours at the micro-level.

Youth Transitions into Adult Violence in the Night-Time-Economy

> "It's what came first back then. Stoke (football violence) and fighting came before everything else. You judged the success of a night out off the back of having a fight moreso than pulling or whatever". Wayne.

While the study is largely focussed on the violence that takes places within the NTE, this section shall also highlight how violent identities are formed from participants' working-class childhood where violence was a relative norm for the men and women studied. This chapter will show that the issues arising within the NTE are merely exemplified issues that are found in alcohol -free spheres, with causes of violence already being developed in the day-to-day lives of the participants. These are often already established in their teenage years. Under the development of an increasingly infantilised culture that rewards narcissistic behaviour (Hayward, 2024) and where a smooth transition into adulthood was all but absent for some (Smith, 2014), the data suggests there is little difference between the uses of violence within the NTE and youthful territoriality. This is merely just a 'proving ground' for more serious violence once one enters the NTE, hardening oneself up for the realities of nocturnal violence that is so prevalent within economically deprived locales (Winlow & Hall, 2006). This chapter will demonstrate the use of violence for self-preservation of one's 'illegitimate identity', the tribalistic territoriality between different parts of North Staffordshire, the disintegration of 'coded' violence, and the overall banality of violence in the areas deprived locales. In a similar vein to Hood and Joyce (1999) who highlight generational changes in crime in London, this section looks into three generations of participants who partook in the North Staffordshire NTE to uncover how violence and the codes and rules around it may have shifted over time.

The Criminal Undertaker and Self-Preservation

It was a Saturday in late spring, I'd had a phone call of one of the participants, Davo, telling me he was out with Gene and a bunch of others who were not participants, but I knew relatively well. I took him up on the offer of meeting in a town just to the East of the city, for the purposes of the study shall be referred to as Hillstown.

Hillstown is close enough to Stoke-on-Trent for the participants to see themselves as being from Stoke and Stoke City FC being well supported in the area, but it has noticeable differences. While the traditional Potteries towns such as Longton and Stoke carry with them abandoned factory buildings and unused pot banks as ghosts of their industrial heyday (see Fisher 2014), Hillstown was, and remains, largely rural. The accent in the area is noticeably different despite being only a few miles away, the town has not experienced multiculturalism to any degree, and the people tend to be sheltered from the goings on in the inner city. However, Hillstown is to an extent reminiscent of a 'community' which participants from Stoke-on-Trent nostalgically longed for. Everyone seems to know everyone in Hillstown, the pubs are often busy leading to a somewhat thriving NTE, and they appear to be wary of outsiders, with all eyes being on them as they enter the pub. While this may not be completely reminiscent of the inner-city's industrial cultures (see Telford, 2022), the similarities to this long-gone era are there to be seen. These places have largely ceased to perform their roles as pillars of British industry, but the spectral elements of the past remain haunting the dead space and permeating the psyche of its inhabitants through the lasting presence of those who no longer remain (Linneman, 2015). Despite the participants not experiencing this firsthand, their traces are felt within the social

interactions of the community, even where they fail to fully serve their original purpose (Derrida, 1993). As Linneman (2015:530) notes: 'despite the attempts made to exorcise them, the spaces we travel through are alive with ghosts of the dead. Attached to homes, towns and people, the ghosts conjured by cultural production continue to make themselves known'. This is exemplified in Hillstown, where remnants of community remain, but far from the idealised bonds formed in previous generations. Rather, these ghosts exist as a spectre emanating from a collapsing of the past and present (Buse & Scott, 1999).

I meet Davo, Gene, and the others in The Bear and common pleasantries are exchanged before the conversation changes to standard drunken chats about violence, sex, drugs, and what flavour disposable vape is superior. After half an hour, we all head to another pub in the centre of town, The Coach and Horses. The pub is the liveliest in the town, with Karaoke and discos being a regular fixture of the pub's entertainment.

Tonight, the clientele is made up largely of under thirties who are local to the area, interspersed with the odd drunk. There are a group of older men who seem to be in their fifties to the right of our table. We sit across from the bar, with the dance floor to the left of us and a pool room round the corner to the right. Once again, the conversation is dominated by hedonistic tales of travels, sex, drugs, violence, and more often than not reminiscing of times when they were younger and saw each other more often, and good times that have come and passed. The people I am with intermittently trip to the bathroom together to snort cocaine, while a drunken Gene takes requests from the group for what to sing on karaoke. The night passes relatively uneventful, until it comes to time to leave.

A known face around the area is in the pub, little trouble has happened thus far in the night, but as we approach midnight and booting out time, a commotion begins by the bar between the known face, Murphy, and an older individual. Murphy, of stocky build dressed in CP Company shorts showing his electronic tag from his ankle, approaches the other man:

> *"Fuck are you saying he runs Hillstown now, who the fuck runs Hillstown?"*

Little can be heard amongst the ruckus as the barmaids and other individuals try to get in the way of both parties. More swearing and offering each other on occurs. A girl tries to get involved despite the obvious disadvantage with her being female and standing around 5'3. A taller friend of Murphy's approaches the opposing man and headbutts him in the middle of the pub. The attacked man gets thrown out and Murphy and his acquaintance stay in the bar, with Murphy having an embrace with who I imagine to be the landlady, suggesting they are on friendly terms.

As this is going on, the group begins to discuss the events as if the confrontation is not occurring directly in front of us.

> *Ray: Bad guy him you know; he's not long been released for petrol bombing someone's car.*
> *Ibo: Is it that Murphy yeah?*
> *Gene: Yeah yeah. Do not you have a duty to get involved here Ibo [off duty police officer]?*
> *Ibo: Do I fuck mate I've had a drink fuck that*
> *[all laugh]*
> *Gene: He filled Jez [a friend of the group] in not long back did not he*
> *OH: What was that for?*
> *Gene: Fuck knows really, Jez was giving it biggun I think, and they just come and kicked fuck out of him.*

For Murphy, it is clear he was quite different from a lot of the other participants in the study. Through violence he has been able to acquire links with the criminal underworld

that has seen him in and out of trouble for the law for drug dealing (Hobbs, 1995). However, the area he was so attached as to feel as if identity was being challenged holds a population of less than 15,000, and there are a number of other drug dealers within Hillstown, so how much of this town was actually 'his' is difficult to say. Hobbs (2001) highlights how since the structural socio-economic changes of the in the late 20th century, the organised crime within areas is becoming increasingly fragmented, with the traditional crime families no longer holding such a monopoly. While to Murphy, he may take offence to the idea that there is someone else local to the town who has more power than him, and he is willing to inflict violence to protect this view of the self (Winlow & Hall, 2009), he largely occupies a low-level role within an already small area, a significant distance from the heights of the criminal undertakers within Stoke-on-Trent, let alone the larger cities. Nonetheless, it emphasises the fact further that violence can occur from little provocation, and that this instead is a reactive defence mechanism from *the real* in which Murphy exists on the periphery of (Winlow & Hall, 2009). He has little more than the identity he has cultivated in a world where traditional masculinity's physicality and hard work mentality is no longer rewarded with the benefit of good wages and comfortable lives (Hall, 2012).

The violent subject such as Murphy, imagines himself to be transcendent of the norms of social life, acting through his *special liberty* in order to keep a distance from the terror experienced in *the real* (Winlow, 2014). To reiterate, *special liberty* is the entitlement of an individual to inflict harm onto others to further their own interests, in Murphy's case, instrumental interests to secure his symbolic survival (Kotze, 2024). This enaction of *special liberty* is reminiscent of the infantile narcissistic personalities that make-up much of the post- modern social world. The 'primary narcissism' (Freud,

2014), the self-centeredness nature of putting oneself and their mirror image above all else – often to others' detriment – that is prominent amongst young children, has not dissipated for people such as Murphy, who have built a consumer image of their self as a gangster who is capable of violence, and this image must be defended at all costs (Hayward, 2024). This is despite this image often not being reflected by others around him. As shown by the indifference to his violence by the participants, they do not particularly fear him, nor do they give him the respect and adoration he gives himself. Rather, the consumer world in which he resides has allowed him to exist within this fantasy and harm others who he feels offer an affront to his enjoyment of this imaginary status (Hayward, 2024).

Territoriality

Gene informs me a few months later Murphy was causing trouble in the same pub once again, inflicting violence on whoever got in his way, using the only method to succeed he has available, *special liberty,* to maintain his image:

> Gene: "He's a prick mate, kicking off last Saturday he was, got put in the back of a police van in the end, he was just hitting anyone who got in his way outside. He decked that Jak, you know him? Tanned lad who goes out with [names girl we both know]".
> *OH: Yeah, I know who you mean, I would not have had him down as much of a fighter?*
> Gene: "No is he fuck, he was trying fight anyone, mate of our brother's tried calm it down and he hit him. I'm pretty sure he was out on license n'all so he's probably going back inside".

A short while after the data collection has ended, I discovered Murphy had been remanded into custody after being charged with killing someone, with his fantasy quickly dissipating amidst his carceral reality. Gene continues that trouble in his area of Hillstown is more likely to occur when outsiders visit the town, as he mentions this about Murphy:

> Gene: “Thing is people from other places have started coming to Hillstown because a lot of other places are shit, like Murphy where is it he is from, Southville? The people starting most the time are not from Hillstown because everyone knows one another, its people from Stoke or Milltown who are coming and its started getting bad for it”.

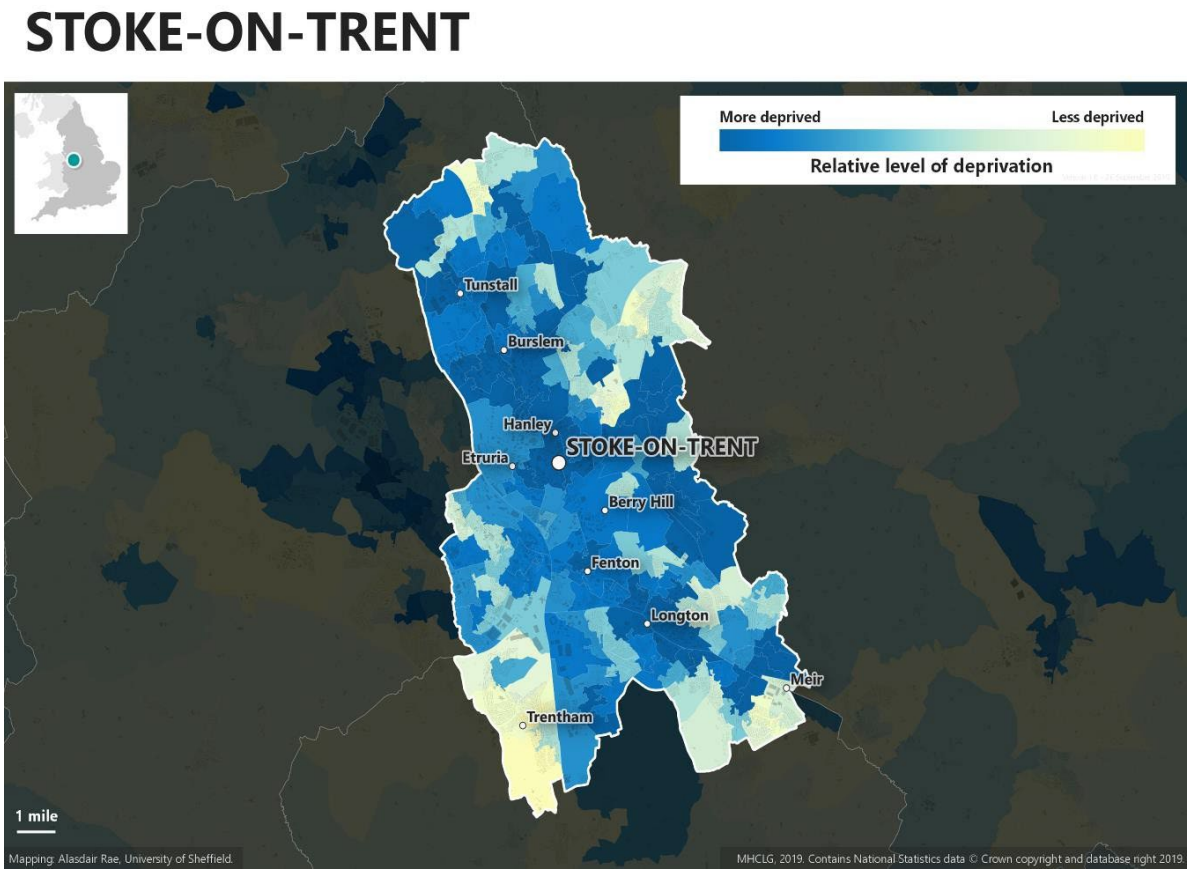
Here we see once again from Gene an aspect of hauntology within the violence that is created within the towns and villages of the Potteries through territoriality and the suspicion of outsiders. Long has the concept of the ‘stranger’ been feared and a point of conflict within communities, existing on the periphery of kinship as an outsider whose motives are opaque (Simmel, 1999). They similarly haunt the towns and cities of post-modernity as their dead industries do, with the threat of outsiders a constant cause for anxiety as they threaten what is left of the homogeneity of place (Linneman, 2015). This potential for the ‘darkness out there’ to be realised is exemplified in postmodern society with the decline of the structuring forces of the *Big Other*, while in its place there has been left uncertainty amidst the rise of individualism and the deregulation of market forces (see Bauman, 1995). Rather, past retreats from this reality has been offset by structural bonds, yet these ‘safety nets, self-woven and self-maintained, second lines of trenches, once offered by the neighbourhood or the family where one could withdraw to heal the bruises acquired in the marketplace, if now not fallen apart, then at least have been considerably weakened’ (Bauman, 1995:6). As such, the threat of the outsider is hauntingly profound.

Much of this territorial conflict that is often associated with areas is reminiscent of people’s school years and as young adults venture into the NTE. Violence for both Virge and Wayne growing up in the 1970s and 1980s was heavily tied to both geography and subcultural loyalties, which, as Tolson (1977) argues, was a core reasoning for violence amongst the working-class. Wayne explains that he had strong loyalty and attachment

to his area from a young age, which often meant fighting people from neighbouring areas and schools:

> Wayne: "When we were young that was just normal. We were always fighting. Bucknall and the bottom end of Bentilee were fighting Berry Hill and the top end of Bentilee, we'd fight Werrington, we did not have as much trouble with the Abbey [Hulton] cause a lot of us went school together you see. But Werrington all went East Side, and top end of Bentilee and Berry Hill, Eaton Park all went Mineside or Winchester. Them two [schools] would often join together against us [Bucknall High], and when Mill Green was open they would normally join with us. They could never get the better of us though, do not get me wrong, they had some handy lads, especially Winchester, but Bucknall High was the worst school in the city back then".

While Tolson (1977) makes this point more generally about the territoriality associated with different areas, I would argue that in the case of Stoke-on-Trent, this is intrinsically attached to its socio-historical culture of being six towns within one city. Due to the divisions and competition that were already found between the neighbouring towns during the *laissez faire* era in terms of capital accumulation as discussed in the contextual chapter, I would argue that this lead, and still leads, to the city being more divided than places of similar size because individuals feel attachment to much smaller conurbations. The places that Wayne talks about here all exist within one mile of one another, with their being very few signs to know where one area ends, and another begins. Yet, these relatively small areas would have their own factories and businesses that would provide work for much of the population, making clear differences between the areas more pronounced. There is also no clear division between affluent and impoverished areas that may be found in cities' such as Middlesbrough where which side of the river you live in is a good indicator of wealth, while in North Staffordshire there are small pockets of affluence existing amongst an almost universal permanent recession and poverty as illustrated by the IMD (2019) below.



What we do see is the territoriality of the past haunting the present, persisting within the social worlds of the Potteries despite the redundancy of the formerly competitive economies, with the competitive conflict now being between the post-industrial hard men of the towns rather than the dead industries. As has already been noted in the historical chapter, violence was present within the territoriality of the industrial period, but this was offset somewhat by the financial competition between places, effectively pseudo-pacifying the populace (Hall, 2012). Amidst the death of local industry, this pseudo-pacification process has become strained and is no longer capable of effectively sublimating the drives of individuals in legal pursuit of capital (Winlow & Hall, 2015). This breakdown of pseudo-pacification has been implicated in the rise in interpersonal violence within the historical contexts of territoriality which permeate the self and fail to be expressed in any legal, functional way.

The level of community cohesion in the areas where people like Wayne and Virge grew

up have impacted on their strong loyalties to one another at this time, with both highlighting how different it was when they were younger compared to today. Both highlighted that there was a lot of unhappy homelives at this point, but community could be found in the streets where they lived:

> Wayne: "Well I do not think any of us had a great homelife back then. There was never any violence in my house, but there was constant arguing between my mum and dad and it was not nice to grow up around so you'd spend all day every day with your mates who lived around your area playing football and that. We all just come from bad homes, broken homes, a lot of violence would've been taking place back then. I remember when my dad left that changed me, I was like 13, I always looked up to my dad and once he left that was it, I was just an angry young lad like the rest of us. But I was never in, I lived for seeing my mates and knocking about with them".
>
> Virge: "There was a proper community back then, things were not always great at home do not get me wrong, we never had much money, but we'd be out constantly with the other kids on the street, playing cricket, football, building gang huts, all sorts, it was good times with your mates back then".

As Telford (2022) highlights, while peoples' formative years during the post-war era should not be viewed through rose tinted glasses, as troubled homelives and violence in the family were somewhat normalised and could influence future violent subjectivities (Hobbs, 1994), there was still a sense of belonging amongst local communities, bred through shared culture, employment, union power, and life histories.

While the potential for violence historically should be noted, often encouraged by the need to negotiate violent encounters that one may come across (see Winlow, 2012), this was offset by the sense of belonging that could be found within their immediate community through institutions such as the pub. While many of the participants still frequent pubs, the role these venues play in their lives has shifted significantly from their traditional function. In the past the pub was a key institution for working-class men in particular — a space of routine, community, and continuity that often mirrored

the rhythms of industrial labour (see Dennis et al, 1956), embedded in the local community that had seen little demographic change for generations.

Pubs no longer serve as entry points into that same sense of community or continuity. Instead, they are experienced as more transient, commercialised, or isolating spaces, less about forming stable relationships and more about fleeting encounters, consumption, or escape (see Winlow & Hall, 2009; Hobbs et al., 2003). As such, while participants do go to pubs, they do so in a post-traditional context where those spaces no longer offer access to the kinds of shared moral frameworks or stable male roles that were once associated with them.

Infantilised Violence

Similar to the generation that came before, violence was a commonplace occurrence for Wayne's daughter, Alex, which was again tied very much to schools:

> Alex: "There was always trouble between the different schools really… It was not just the lads who had trouble either. I remember two times my friends had trouble with a group of girls from South High, and that was literally because they were from different schools, none of my girl mates would've gone looking for trouble at all".

Such levels of communal ties found within the various areas of the Potteries do not end in high school, with the transition to the adult NTE largely offering another avenue for territorial disputes to arise. Sully is a young participant who highlights this could often be the case in the modern-era:

> Sully: "You go to certain places mate, and you're asking for trouble. Somewhere like Milltown [another town bordering Stoke-on-Trent]. Good for a night out, but loads of lads from outside the area go there and you get bother. Everyone still knows everyone in those places, they look different, talk different, so you stand out and it's not long before you're finding yourself getting started on by a bunch of lads dressed like farmers. Happened to me when we were 18, went up there with a few lads from Hillstown, walking down the street and this group starts mouthing off for fuck all, I say something back not expecting owt to kick

off really, next thing I'm on the floor knocked out [laughs] and I just see lads above me kicking off. And that is over nothing".

Wayne highlights that this was often the case during his time out in the NTE during the late 1980's and the 90's, suggesting that little had changed in this regard:

Wayne: "Well, there was just always trouble between different sets of lads, so Bucknall had trouble with Werrington and Hanley and if we ever bumped into one another up town it would kick off".

OH: *What did this stem from?*

Wayne: "Could be anything, some one started talking to the wrong bird, kissed someone's missus, bumped into someone pissed up, it would just kick off. But when it kicked off with one lad from Bucknall all Bucknall would stick together, and we'd often stick with lads from Bentilee, the Abbey, even Berry Hill n'all in the end. So, it would end up being one area against another".

OH: What sort of places would this be in, the Dome and the Pound?

Wayne: "No not them, the Pound and places like Glitz never had any trouble really because it was the rave scene and everyone was loved up, and it was always full of Stoke's Firm so no one would try it in there. You'd get trouble in the Dome, but that was the gangsters fighting over the running of the drugs not the ravers like, people coming from Liverpool to try and muscle in on the business. The trouble would be in clubs like The Garrison and places like that, so just normal nightclubs not raves. It was worse in pubs though, like The Ship in Bucknall. Because again, everyone knew one another in these places. They'd have a disco on though so you'd get people from Meir or wherever turning up and it was guaranteed to kick off. I suppose we did not like lads from other areas coming to our place like, and it was full of game bastards. But it would be exactly the same if we went to pubs in Meir or Blurton that were their version of The Ship, you'd know there was a good chance of it kicking off, but you did not care, if anything that probably made you want go even more… I remember one time down The Ship and some Meir had come down and had been giving this lad from Berry Hill and his missus some shit. We used to be enemies with this lad, Gav his name was, because he was our year at Mineside, but we stuck together because it was lads from out of the area being out of order to him, so we both went outside and had it out with these lads from Meir, we were outnumbered like but they got fucking battered. We become good mates after that".

OH: Was it always out-of-towners so to speak who it would kick off with?

Wayne: "Most the time yeah, but there were the odd kick off between lads from the same area, usually a group of older or younger lads who did not know one another. Some arrogant hard cunt, or thought he was a hard cunt, [name] from down Bucknall thought he could give it biggun to Brendan one night, felt his missus arse I think, so he [Brendan] beat him round the whole fucking pub

with a barstool. I never saw him again."

Here we see within the NTE's liminal spaces of violence, the disorder found in early adulthood is largely replicated within the NTE, with the idea of territoriality, reluctant hero, and the concept of shame all influencing conflict between subjects. This is accelerated further once participants turned 18 by the legal availability and subsequent ease of acquiring alcohol, financial income if in employment, the ability to travel between different NTE districts, and the mixing of different territories within one area. As Wayne states, the rivalries between the different parts of the East End gradually declined once they left school and their tensions tended to come from further afield. This highlights the importance of spatial territoriality within violent encounters, with allegiances being formed through closeness rather than anything more instrumental.

Through visiting the nightlife centres where conflict is expected to occur, and going these places for this reason, suggests that the working-class subject is driven through an urge for excitement which they can satisfy through violence (Katz, 1988). Similar to that of football hooligans (Treadwell, 2010), the excitement and enjoyment that young men get out of violence through territory cannot be understated, and travelling to different NTE hubs can provide the same gratification as a successful away day as part of a football firm. But again, this comes down to the traditional territoriality associated with the area's working-class-culture (Tolson, 1977; Clarke, 1976) being replicated within NTE in an arena where the norms and restraints of sober society are loosened and are experience more freedom to act on their natural hedonistic impulses with, often, little consequence (Smith, 2014), while also providing confidence to act how they would not in the working week (Winlow, and Hall, 2006).

Alongside this is the similarities to how violence plays out within childhood, with many

NTE consumers failing to escape the childish mindset of aggressive conflict over trivial matters. The NTE more generally is an infantilising sphere, where the vitality of youth is central to its appeal and where those with responsibilities and 'adult' lives need not venture (Hobbs et al, 2000). For the consumers here, who are ever attached to an infantilising consumer culture that the NTE helps to maintain, have failed to detach from the youthful ventures of their childhood (Hayward, 2024), which are reflected through their violence.

What emerges from these accounts, and those that follow, is a form of infantilised violence: confrontations echoing schoolyard disputes in tone and cause, but played out in adult settings with adult consequences. These episodes are often sparked by minor slights, accidental contact, or perceived outsiders, yet provoke intense emotional reactions rooted in shame, pride, and group loyalty (Winlow & Hall, 2009). This reflects a developmental arrest, where adolescent conflict behaviours persist into adulthood within the NTE. Violence, pride, and territoriality were not strategic choices but instinctive responses shaped through long-term immersion in specific social and material conditions, expressions of a deeply ingrained habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The emotional logic of childhood disputes, such as defending reputation and asserting dominance, remain central in adult nightlife settings, especially under conditions of growing social and economic insecurity (Winlow & Hall, 2009). Masculinity, once anchored in work and family, is now often asserted through impulsive, affective acts of violence (Connell, 1995; Nayak, 2006; Winlow & Hall, 2006).

This occurs within a broader landscape of delayed adulthood (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Smith, 2014), in which traditional adult responsibilities are postponed or inaccessible. The NTE, by contrast, is a space that celebrates youth and hedonism. It

allows participants to inhabit an extended adolescence where conflict, territoriality, and group loyalty remain central, often encouraged by alcohol, the night-time setting, and the cultural codes embedded in local masculinity. In this sense, infantilised violence is not simply the residue of adolescence, but a key feature of a social environment that makes growing up structurally difficult and emotionally undesirable.

Codes of Violence & The Pseudo-Pacification Process

The violence in the formative years between schools, while not using knives or other sharp instruments, was noted for its rather brutal violence that would be inflicted, but at the same time both participants would play it down. Whitehead (2005) highlights that codes of practice when it comes to violence are normal within violent cultures, with certain unwritten rules being stuck by in order for a fight to remain 'honourable' and fair. For both Wayne and Virge, they saw their violence during their youth as remaining within this code, yet lamented that now these codes had largely fallen by the wayside:

> Wayne: "This one time Mineside and Winchester joined up against us, and you had lads who were 18/19 turning up who'd left school years ago just for this big meet. It went off and, you know Skel? [well known figure from the East End known for both his 'gameness' and his long history of running into trouble with the law]"
>
> *OH: Yeah*
>
> Wayne: "Well he was about 18 at the time, and he turned up with the Mineside lot and a lad from the top year at Bucknall High put a duster to the back of his head and cracked his skull open".
>
> *OH: Was it quite normal for weapons to be used in these fights then?*
>
> Wayne: "No, not proper weapons like knives and that. But things like knuckle dusters, sticks, chains, bats, people would use them like. Daft really but there was never anything too bad"

The normality of violence for both Virge and Wayne during their formative years is replicant of the traditional masculinities that had been formed throughout the

previous century during the industrial revolution and the *laissez faire* era of capitalism, creating hardened resilience and emotional dispositions amongst the working-classes due to their almost constant maltreatment by the owners of the means of production, typically embodied by toughness and physical strength that was demanded to prosper in the manual industries of the past (Ellis, 2016). While, in the era preceding Virge and Wayne's, the potential for violence stemming from such masculinity was offset through the *pseudo-pacification process* (Hall, 2012), but we see here the breakdown of this process amidst the cessation of community and one's work and dialectical power becoming less and less valuable under a neoliberal order that values the individual and cutting costs over all else (Hall, 1997).

Today, we see this breakdown clearly with violent crime in the area constituting 40% of all crime recorded, and is 17% higher than the national average (ONS, 2024). But as the participants from this era highlight, the capacity for violence was an ever present within these communities, and could earn respect and value where other avenues for acquiring admiration were gradually diminishing (Winlow, 2001). For people such as Wayne, this is a core part of their identity which brought value and recognition to people who lacked value in other fields (see Treadwell and Ayres, 2012).

Pete and Alex highlight similar themes of youth violence, but notes the gradual disintegration of the violent codes:

> Alex: "Courtney who I was best mates with growing up got jumped by a load of girls from Blurton and they were all kicking shit out of her basically… [another] time was probably the worst though, I was not there for this either, but two other friends were walking through Longton Park on a Friday night and again these other girls from Blurton were there in a big group and happened to start on them, but they got battered really bad. I always remember they were in a bad way after".

Pete: “My childhood was pretty happy really, I used to get battered constantly though once I went to the high school. Just because I went the wrong school, literally that is the only reason [laughs]… Quite funny really, because one of the lads who used to regularly kick my head, about ten years ago I put a gig on at the Underground and he says ‘look Pete, I’m sorry about how we treated you I hope there’s no hard feelings from when we were growing up’, and I never had any hard feelings its character building ain’t it, I’d had broken nose, I think the worst one I ever had was broken ribs, they chucked my mountain bike at me and broke me ribs but it’s just growing up innit, just because I went a different school”.

OH: Were there certain areas who were known as the having the hardest lads at the time?

Pete: “The Maybank lads who went West High they were all known as pretty handy and a lot of them went on to be Under-Fives Stoke hooligans and stuff, there were the rougher lads like Knutton and that, then lads from a school in Penkhull who were pretty handy and a lot of them went on to be Under-Fives, but you’d be running through Newcastle town chasing lads just because they’ve got a different school tie on”.

Here we see a very similar theme which Virge and Wayne discussed, where violence was largely based around territoriality and violence, but with the *pseudo-pacification process* breaking down further, with the traditional codes of inflicting violence (Whitehead, 2005) no longer holding as much weight as they would in the past amidst increasing individualistic social atomisation (Winlow & Hall, 2013). This is clear through the violence Alex highlights, where beating an equal via one-on-one means (See Armstrong, 1998) no longer mattered to those who were willing to inflict significant violence on to their opponent. Rather, what is seen here is the concept of avoiding shame and humiliation by any means necessary (see Winlow & Hall, 2009), where the Id increasingly overrides the superego and, as a consequence, traditional codes of honour in violence are forgotten. Further to this point, the superego carries its own brand of violence, as Lasch (1985:203) highlights:

> ‘The superego never serves as a reliable agency of social discipline. It bears too close a kinship to the very impulses it seeks to repress. It relies too heavily on fear. Its relentless condemnation of the ego breeds a spirit of sullen resentment

> and insubordination. Its endlessly reiterated "thou shalt not" surrounds sin with the glamor and excitement of the forbidden. In our culture, the fascination with violence reflects the severity with which violent impulses are proscribed. It also reflects the violence of the superego itself, which redirects murderous resentment of authorities against the ego. The superego, at least in its more primitive form, exemplifies a type of authority that knows only how to forbid'.

Winlow and Hall (2009) highlight how the subjects experience of shame through being defeated can influence their need to avoid this, and the memory of such vulnerability are employed when committing violence on an opponent. Hence, the fear and shame of being defeated is now much more pronounced than previous, with it being more likely to occur under more individualistic cultures (see Jones, 2012), and this has removed the importance of sticking to moral codes. Under this politico-economic epoch, instead of redirecting the powerful libidinal forces into more collective forms of action, the apolitical subject has nowhere to channel their rage, so it manifests in far more problematics ways - turned inwards or outwards into spontaneous episodes of violence (Ellis, 2017).

The nihilistic avoidance of shame by any means necessary is arguably heightened through technology, with the spectacle of violence (Winlow & Hall, 2006) potentially being repeated through the videoing of events by infantile spectators who see the harm of others purely though the lens of consumption (Hayward, 2024). As Elsaesser et al (2021:7) notes in relation to youth violence: 'if a video of the physical fight is not posted to social media, it is as though the fight did not happen', leading to the repeated victimisation and intensified humiliation of the subject. To the infantilised individual who has failed to leave their youth behind in exchange for adulthood (Smith,

2014), it is a reasonable expectation that this youthful humiliation could be repeated. The subject's own 'psychic survival' is reliant on not being subjected to this repeated humiliation, so they must 'do what needs to be done' to maintain their atomised image (Lasch, 1984). Through social media, their 'mirror' image can be reflected back onto them, either making or breaking their view of the self in the process (Zizek, 2006).

Pete further suggests that the resilience found in traditional masculinity (Elis, 2016) is still found through people's reactions to violence, with Pete highlighting that despite being badly beaten he would still get up nonetheless encompassing the idea of the 'reluctant hero', fighting on despite the likelihood of victory being slim (Slotkin, 2000). This resilience is further tied to the idea of shame, with the humiliation that staying down or walking away from possible serious injury not worth the stigma that is attached to showing fear (Winlow & Hall, 2009), while the willingness to be the so-called reluctant hero can bring equal symbolic capital within the habitus occupied by young men where violence is at its core (see Treadwell, 2010); although, as previously alluded to, this perception looks to have declined amongst the death of coded violence, with Pete's view arguably being a self-perception that exists to neutralise shame rather than a perception those around him would hold.

Pete also claims that violence during these formative years could lead to further serious criminality as people grew older through the joining of football firms in the city. While this largely replicates the violence experienced through childhood into a sphere heavily connected to the NTE through their shared spaces of drink, drugs, consumption, and violence (Treadwell & Ayres, 2012), these violent subcultures that exploded in prominence post- Thatcher (Treadwell, 2010) also offer an avenue for the subjects 'hardness' to be harnessed into economic acquisition that is no longer found

through traditional labour markets (Hobbs, 1995; Winlow, 2001). While Pete does not say that the hooligans in question turned to illegitimate acquisition, this is a clear possibility for those he mentioned to retain a sense of financial utility through their masculinity (Treadwell, 2010).

We see the dismantling of codes moving into the NTE, with code attachment once again being dependent on which generation you were from. While violence could stem from encounters that could possibly be justified, such as defending women or arguments, there was a belief amongst the older generations that violence was conducted by an unwritten code, where knives would not be used, fights would be expected to be one-on-one, and once one adversary was downed that was seen as the end of it. The following reflections from Kevin and Wayne illustrate how these values operated in practice:

> Kevin: "There would be fights in the Bell (a pub in the East End that has since been turned into a supermarket and takeaway restaurants), but you never heard of anyone using a knife or anything like that. I've seen people hit with ashtrays and glasses were known to be used, but never knives. And it was almost always one versus one, no kicking people when they were on the floor. A lot of the time it would end and then that would be that".
>
> Wayne: "If you used knives or fought in groups it was looked down upon, like there's nothing impressive about that. I had fights in loads of pubs and up Hanley, but nine times out of ten after the fight you'd get up and shake hands afterwards. You only had trouble with people who were looking for it n'all, like bullying someone who clearly was not a fighter was not on. On occasion people would gang up on one lad, and that is normally where there'd be repercussions down the line because it was not fair like… There was trouble down Joiners Square once with Bucknall lads, Nowak got done by a big group of lads from up that way outside the Buccaneer. The next week Bucknall went down there to get them back, but that would not have happened if not for them doing what they did. Nowak was a proper hard bastard from when we were kids, he was like a bloke from when we were eleven twelve, so him and his cousin would be fighting blokes from that age. But when he lost fairly, he'd be fine with it, like I say shake your hand and get on with it. He would not have gone back up there if they were not out of order".

While their drunkenness was not used as a technique of neutralisation (Matza, 1964),

where the traditional codes would still be expected to be enforced, this had seemingly changed for the younger participants, who highlighted that fights could kick off in the city over very little and it would often be inflicted with serious violence. Jimmy details how he was severely beaten in Hanley when he was 17, and how he found it to be unjustified:

> Jimmy: "Well, it started over nothing really, a misunderstanding. This guy's sister thought I'd called her a cunt over a message when I had not, and I'd seen her since and explained that I meant no offence and I thought we were sound. I'd bumped into her brother since in the toilets at The Pit and he tried start there but nothing come of it. But one night we'd went the Hut, it was only me, Cos and Clinton and then a few girls. We met this Chris who we went college with on Tesco carpark after and he said something about going a party after, so we start following him and turns out he's with this girls brother and all his mates. They start walking towards us, must have been a good fifteen of them. We stopped walking forward and I think we knew what was coming. Anyway they get closer and Ned [the girls brother] says 'did you call my sister a cunt?', I reply me and your sister are sound, his little mate chirps in, then Chris in fairness to him tries jump in and act as peacemaker saying I'm not looking for any trouble, then before I know it I've been hit round the side of my head, instinctively gone to pick up my glasses and as I go to pick them up he's hit me again and I'm down and getting the shit kicked out of me basically by a massive group of lads. Clint just stands there watching, Cos is doing what he can trying pull them off me and stop them from kicking me when I'm down and he keeps getting thrown in and out of it and eventually it stops. One thing I remember vividly when I was down was one of them saying 'who even is he anyway', it did not matter to them I was just someone to fill in. I would not have minded so much if it was just Ned as I suppose he had some reason, but the others were bang out of order. All my face was bruised, nose broken and one of my nostrils was detached from my face".
>
> OH: *Do you regret standing there and waiting for it to happen or do you think you should've ran off?*
>
> Jimmy: "We were never going run off mate lets be honest, I do not think I could do it. That would look much worse than getting a kicking. At the end of the day, you learn you're not made of glass, and if it did not happen then it was going happen another time, I'd just be delaying the inevitable".
>
> *OH: Has anything happened since?*
>
> Jimmy: "Funnily enough Ned is fine with me nowadays, but when I see him out I always go over to say hello purposefully, and he's always dead apologetic saying he deserved a criminal record for what he did to me. If anything, it's the others who seem to have an issue with me still, a lad who was involved has brought it up in the Hut before and started on me later that night, and has tried intimidate

> me since, I do not know why, if I was part of the group that did it I would not be walking around thinking I was some hard man, there's no honour in beating me up in a massive group".

What can be ascertained from this story, is that currently codes of violence (Whitehead, 2005) are seen as important to the victim, but as they explain, these codes are rarely stuck to by perpetrators, especially where intoxication is apparent. Further to this, Jimmy's reluctance to leave highlights his embodiment of a parasuicidal nature through risking physical harm to save face when confronted by a rival (Raymen & Smith, 2019).

Both the disintegration of the code and the parasuicidal behaviour evidences a somewhat 'nostalgic turn' (See Winlow, 2025) for the victims of code-breaking violence, seeking refuge in the fact that their defeat was not always acceptable in previous years. However, such nostalgia and the memory of an unwritten code that they never truly experienced is often deliberately manipulated, as Wayne evidences that these codes were too broken even during a time when many abided by them.

Rage Banking

Davo details that he has seen similar altercations with his friends in pubs, where what should be a one-on-one has turned extremely violent out of nowhere. He details how a friend of his, Josh, was involved in a violent encounter. Josh is a known but relatively small-time drug dealer from the South End of the city, and has been known to use knives when in altercations. He comes from a family who are involved in crime, with both of his brothers being professional criminals while his mum also deals drugs. Despite this, Davo explains that Josh is the most 'normal' of the family. This altercation lead to revenge attacks taking place on the perpetrators, and it is expected that more will follow:

> "It was when the football was on, the Euros, and Josh was watching it with us in the pub. You could tell straight away that he was in the mood for a fight because he was kicking off about the match and being a dick basically, kicking off. Him and his missus had split up that day so he was just looking for it [violence]. He started on this one lad already but he was having none of it, and then he goes outside and still carries on. But Fab is there with my brother and all his mates, and Fab is hard as fuck like, he's like my brothers age [early thirties] but everyone knows him for being handy, always done boxing, jiu-jitsu, MMA and that. Anyway, Fab tells him calm down, but Josh keeps mouthing off so Fab walks over and Josh hits him on the sly and tries run off. Fab grabs him and takes him down and starts to ground and pound him [strike while on top of his grounded body], but then Josh's mates come out and Deon smacks him round the side of the head with a glass, glasses him so he's got a scar and that now, Tre kicks him while he's down, and there basically trying all do him. They all end up doing one, but ever since Fab has been after them trying get their addresses like. He caught Tre the other day outside the gym with [his girlfriends name] and punched him like and was trying get him give up all their addresses. He won't let it drop now, and they've got no chance one-on-one. He said he was pissed off with Tre because he thought them pair with mates, but not anymore, he told him from the day it happens he's getting him. None of them can fight really, how can they? They do fuck all all day, never trained, never fought anyone of note. Josh went a couple of boxing classes when he was a kid, literally, but makes out he's a boxer. That is why they use knives and fight in groups".

This again illustrates that it is now more important to inflict serious violence on your adversary rather than defeat them fairly within the somewhat nostalgic uncodified rules of conflict. The shame and humiliation from being defeated by Fab, someone who could be described as a *violence specialist* (see Hall, 2000), is too much for Josh and his friends to experience. The quote also highlights the 'banking of rage' amongst those involved. Sloterdijk (2012) notes that the expression and management of rage has been left redundant under consumer capitalism which reproduces those very feelings through its atomisation and marginalisation, yet is not expressed against the system.

This in turn can lead to the deferral of violence until it emerges against those who had little involvement in the initial event (Ibid.). We see this on the individual level through Josh, who, as Davo mentions, split up from his girlfriend that evening, has stored this rage from a prior event which has been expressed onto someone else in the NTE. This

is largely the repurposed use of rage within post-industrial society, where rage has no structural, unifying purpose, instead it seeps through interpersonal relations metamorphosing into violence (Ibid.). But it is important to note Fab's role within the violence, and being unable to 'let go' of this past defeat. For Fab, his humiliation at the hands of Josh has remained with him to be expressed whenever he sees another member of rival group. Winlow & Hall (2009) note that the humiliation at the hands of a rival no longer has anywhere else to be dispersed other than onto the perpetrator:

> 'Most of these codes, rituals and institutionalised and politicised forms of conflict – from durable territorial gangs to assertive trade unions – have now all but evaporated, and the elite's relentless symbolic violence has erased the language and practices that once explained the sources and structured the responses to subordination and humiliation (Bourdieu, 1986; Hall, 1997; Wieviorka, 2009). Now the isolated individual is condemned to sense conflict as an individual problem and 'stew' it internally' (Winlow & Hall, 2009:302-303).

For people such as Josh and Fab who are from areas of permanent decline, they were born into the uber-humiliation of violence and the expression of futile rage that is only purpose is to rid oneself of their own internalised shame (Ellis et al, 2017). Growing up post-disintegration of the *Big Other* of social democracy (Winlow & Hall, 2015) and amidst the apparent rise in youthful, uncoded violence, this humiliation they must escape will be no stranger to them, as the data shows this would have formed a core part of their formative years.

Cultures of Violence and Deprivation

Doc is from a similarly deprived area to Josh & Fab, and recalls violence and crime being a normal part of growing up as a kid, claiming he knew from a young age his school was 'rough' due to 'parents taking their kids to primary school with a drink of stella in their hand'. He explains what it was like growing up in this environment:

> Doc: "You'd just be knocking around the streets and that, get in with the wrong people, it's a very different life living down there to what it is now living in Werrington, we had some good people, people with good hearts, but it was still rough, I think if I stayed down there it could have been a different path… it's a mile and a half away from Werrington, but it's completely different worlds. At that age people have got big mouths and that but no one is particularly hard because no one knows how fight and stuff, but there'd be fights every week, it was just that way of life like…"
>
> *OH: Did a lot turn out bad from down there?*
>
> Doc: "To be fair mate a lot turned out alright, like you remember Todd, he used to give it biggun and that but he ended up alright and did not carry on down that path because his mum and dad would raise him alright, but your people like Tyler [drug dealer from when we were young] they never had that. A lot of them do not work, just dole dossers or agency type work like labouring, whatever they can get their hands on".

This highlights that the growing disenfranchisement of young men in the current era is prominent. In areas of permanent decline such as the city's East end, there is little hope for the young men if they lack the socialisation from home to succeed, where violence and abusive tendencies can sometimes be promoted through those close to them (Winlow, 2012). As Doc explains, some of the people who grew up around this way of life fell into crime, while others have struggled to maintain jobs in an increasingly competitive and vulnerable economy.

There is clear evidence that the two are intrinsically linked (see Winlow, 2001; Ellis, 2016; Treadwell, 2010), with the rise of interpersonal violence and crime in general increasing exponentially as the socio- economic culture shifted from Keynesian

collectivism towards individualised free markets, where it has overwhelmingly affected the poorest areas in the country (Hall et al, 2008). This is evident in terms of serious interpersonal violence such as murder, with murder rate rises being concentrated in the most deprived areas (Shaw et al, 2005), while drug dealing has increasingly offered some semblance of financially viable employment amidst the permanently deprived locales of post-industrial England (Ayres & Treadwell, 2023). Stoke's current deprivation is evident, with the economy failing to replicate its past successes of previous eras, highlighted pertinently by Gibbs (2021:33- 34):

> 'Only 6% of jobs in Stoke are 'high income senior management roles'… half that of affluent areas like Milton Keynes and Reading. Additionally, Stoke's residents' average weekly income is £84 less than 34 the national average… whilst job density is 0.78, 0.4 below the Great Britain average… Further, Stoke was the 'debt capital of England and Wales' in 2017… as well as having the lowest workforce productivity in the country… Therefore, owing to the internationally acclaimed quality of ceramic products once produced by the city's now-derelict potbanks, Stoke-on-Trent holds a heritage not simply of industrial employment, but of highly skilled and creative jobs in a high-end pottery market that Stoke's current economy has failed to replicate'.

Davo suggests that within subcultures commonly found in deprived estates of Stoke-on-Trent, such as Chavs, serious violence is normalised for little reason:

> Davo: "I was in the pub with them one night, all the Blurton lot, and Josh's younger brother has just kicked fuck out of these two blokes in the toilets. He's a psycho, just like a fucking retard, he's too thick to know why he's doing it. Apparently, he did not like the way he was looking at him, so he left them bloodied. This is not two young lads either, this is two older blokes, guarantee they were not looking for any bother. I said to Josh I'm not knocking about with his brother again because of it, not walking on eggshells because he might take

> something the wrong way… its normal for them, one of them has come barging into a pub before now swinging a machete about after someone, fuck knows what for. Chavs are into that are not they, part of their culture, I do not know why".

Violence has also been linked to different subcultures by participants in previous generations, which would later spill into the NTE. Wayne was associated with the mod revival scene of the 1980's, while Virge was associated with various different cultures depending on the year. The attachment to these brewing youth cultures was often a cause of fighting between different groups at the time, as Virge, Wayne and other participants highlight:

> Wayne: "Well most of us were mods, few rude boys or skinheads like but it's basically the same thing. But we'd always be fighting with other cults, usually rockers and punks, and then the trendies who later become the casuals because they just wanted fight everyone. You'd get different groups coming down Mary Church now and then and it'd kick off 'cause we were all mods in there really at the time. I remember a big kick off with a big group of punks down there".
>
> *OH: Was there any reason or?*
>
> Wayne: "Not really, just because they were punks, and we were mods".

> Virge: "You'd get kicking off at times, a lot of the new romantics and goths would not kick off with each other, if it kicked off it'd normally be with the casuals… Some groups got on, but it was normally the casuals and the mods who'd start trouble with everyone else".

> Rob: "Growing up was a pain in the arse really, our estate was mainly skinheads and soul-boys, then rockers. I'd get the shit kicked out of me because my brother was a rocker. You'd also got hippies at the time, and everyone just used to kick fuck out of them because they would not fight back."

> Kenny: "In the early days of dance music ravers would get shit from everyone else because you looked different to everyone else. I remember walking through Hanley past a pub, I had like a PVC shirt on, it was like punk really, and I was just getting peltered from everyone. 'Faggot', 'fucking queer' and all this, yeah you could not walk into a pub like the Tavern dressed like how we did".

Treadwell (2010) highlights the move from traditional masculinity towards a

masculinity where status could be found within these different subcultures. While for Treadwell (2010) he focusses on the football firm as being an alternative for men who were increasingly finding their masculinity superseded within the new global order of consumption and decreasing solidarity amongst the working-classes, who instead found importance through the consumption of clothing, music, drugs, alcohol and of course violence through the camaraderie provided by the firm, the data infers that consumer symbolism continues to inform the behaviour of the respondents in this research within their respective subcultures. The differentiation made between the different subcultures through clothing and music would be enough for violence to be justifiable, with the confrontation between two rival subcultures often stimulated by simply crossing paths on one another's supposed territory which would require an aggressive response in order to prevent their self-worth and identity being threatened (Ellis, 2016).

Such identities were now encouraged to compete against one another under the newly transformed economic order of neoliberalism that trickled down into the cultural sphere, through the need to stand out from the crowd and form their unique identities (see Smith, 2014). In the context of men who had been raised within an increasingly redundant physical masculinity where violence was often the only rewarding function remaining, such competition was no longer pseudo-pacified, rather violence was gradually becoming a model for competition between working-class subjects (Winlow & Hall, 2006). Here there exists little rejection of society from the subjects, rather they largely conform to the norms and values which society reproduces (Elmsley, 2005).

While subcultures such as mods, rockers, and casuals are somewhat romanticised

throughout popular culture while modern-day urban cultures such as Chavs are depicted as a failure of Modern Britain (Jones, 2011), they largely perform the same role as other subcultures before them. But with Chavs on the sink estates of deprived locales where the common currency is violence, it is of no surprise that this subculture emphasises the violent *special liberty* that is prominent in localities that fail to provide legitimate capital (Ellis, 2016).

The Banality of Violence

While some subcultures earn a reputation for extreme violence such as football hooligans or Chavs, where feuds can be settled by increasingly violent episodes out of revenge (Jacobs and Wright, 2006; Marsh, 2020), the normalcy of violence amongst some consumers in the NTE should not be understated. Doc highlights how this first became prominent when he was a teenager and people were beginning to venture into the NTE, where parties and petty rivalries would create trouble amongst different groups of lads:

> Doc: "Well if you go enough of them [parties] like we did you always going see the odd kick off are not you… I remember a few times when we'd get friendly with a new group of lads and then all of a sudden one of them would just turn and we'd all kick off, that would be the typical thing that would happen. I do not think we as a group ever went out to look for fights".
>
> *OH: Would it be over things like areas?*
>
> Doc: "Yeah I think so, they probably saw us as posh boys from Werrington compared to, well the parties we were going to were not like very nice they were just a party to go to, and they were full of mixed people. And my group of mates will get along with everyone, but as drink gets involved people turn do not they… one time at a party where Ivan and Eric [two lads who Doc has had previous trouble with from another area in the East End] were, cause they were always there bouncing around and that, and we were being sound with them and they ended up getting on the phone to that Del, and a group of lads turned up in a car outside and they were all waiting for us. There was another down the Eastville Club, where a similar thing happened, these lads turned up outside and anyone who walked outside these lads were just pounding… I remember a big fat lad walking out and seeing a big commotion and he was just knocked out unconscious,

ambulance had to come. Anybody who walked out that door was getting it, can not even remember what it was about, just normal".

OH: How did your trouble with Eric start?

Doc: "So he was just a lad from down the Abbey, and I was hanging about with this girl at the time, and he popped up [to the girl] saying who is this guy and I said let me reply like, and we were just giving each other a bit of shit. Then he came up from Bucknall with his mates and I was like game, and we got into it, probably the hardest fight I've ever had where we were just punching each other's faces in, I come away quite badly bruised from that fight. They all come up with baseball bats in a big group and they all had weapons. There was a big crowd that night".

OH: So when you knew it was going kick off, why did you stay?

Doc: "I just did not have it in me to run away, in hindsight it was stupid of me to stay I should have just run off, but with pride and stuff you make these decisions. At the end of it we shook hands and that was it but there'd always be tension whenever we'd see each other".

The violence described shows the banality of violence, where violence can seemingly spring from nowhere, or at least on the surface as something minimal (Winlow and Hall, 2009). This is again linked to the prior concepts of shame and territoriality as discussed with the previous two generations, but with the addition of consumption of alcohol leading to violence between what could previously be two friendly groups when sober, but where alcohol is involved, there is the risk of confrontation within this habitus due to its ability to disinhibit the subjects decision making and offers a release from the regimented conformity of every-day life (Winlow and Hall, 2006).

As Doc highlights, when inebriated even at young age there violence can seemingly escalate to serious violence from minor beginnings (Polk, 1999). This is evident with people being dragged into the violence who were unwilling combatants, such as the boy Doc mentions at the Eastville Club, who suffered serious injury for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This is not to say that alcohol completely neutralises this violence and everyone would be getting along fine if they were not inebriated, with Jacoby (2011) highlighting the that much interpersonal violence is in

fact ‘fratricidal violence’. This is underpinned by the infantile narcissism of small differences where the subject in compelled to exaggerate the importance of the differences between one another when they are so similar (Freud, 2014). In the context of Stoke- on-Trent, this could be whether you support Stoke or Vale, or how far up a main road you both live. Consequently, alcohol’s role in this is the disinhibition of behaviours rather than an underlying cause for disorder, with the NTE largely being just a prime site for a cocktail of underlying drives to be acted upon. The violence within these spaces is perceived to help to satisfy the drive for status by the individual.

Marsh (2020) highlights that violence in Dublin’s drug markets is a necessity for dealers to earn respect and keep others wary of their reputation for and willingness to use violence if people are to cross them. The data suggests that the young men in this circumstance went through a similar process of violence to prove a point, a public showing of violence against someone who was at the same party to convey that they were willing and able to inflict violence on anyone who left the building (see Toch, 1986). While this may not be instrumental violence for economical gain, it is also not what Toch (1992) calls hostile violence, which will be inflicted over personal disputes. Rather, it bridges the gap between the two, as it emboldens their symbolic capital of violence without emboldening any financial reward, it settles their personal dispute without the appropriate target being attacked.

This use of violence on an unwilling combatant is pertinent in one of the first ethnographic observations I noted in the Hut in Hanley. I was with two participants: Doc and Jimmy.

Again, the night was for the most part unnoteworthy, until a friend of Doc’s, Billy, decided to assault someone who was noticeably not interested in fighting. Billy is a

fairly well-built man in his mid-twenties who, since he was a teenager, has fortified a reputation for being 'game' for fighting. Doc later described Billy in an interview as someone who would "Glady admit he goes out actively looking for a fight. If he does not have a fight on a night out, then it's a disappointment". He is having a brief conversation with a small group of lads who seem to be noticeably younger who are wearing what appears to be Mexican hats. Billy goes to grab one of the hats off of one of the individuals heads, when he snatches it back and says 'hold on a min'. Seemingly taken aback by the individuals unwillingness to secede the hat, Billy's fists start flying into the man's face leaving him bloodied. Bouncers quickly run in and grab Billy and take him through to the smoking area and chuck him out while myself, Doc, and Kieran look on. Sensing there may be more to this, I go over to the badly beaten man. Nose appearing to be broken and his white shirt covered in his own blood, I ask:

OH: What kicked that off there?
Man: Mate I do not have a fucking clue. He tried grab my hat and I did not give it to him and I tried to say there's another he can have, next thing he's piling into me [laughs].

OH: What so you did not do anything?

Man: Honestly, I did not mouth off or throw a punch or anything. I do not even know him.

OH: Are you going to press charges?

Man: Nah [shrugs nonchalantly as if to say the attack is little more than an inconvenience]. I'm pissed off more about my shirt to be honest with you, but I'm alright. One of those things.

The victims encroachment on Billy's right to consume and enjoy his self while disregarding the rights and feelings of others is telling. Amidst the normality of excess and hedonism within NTEs (Winlow & Hall, 2006), the mere abjection to someone's behaviour is enough for violence to occur. In a culture where social relations are

growingly fragmented and atomised (Bauman, 2001), amidst ever growing fear, insecurity, and violence, it is a rationalised decision on the behalf of the consumer to react with violence when the pseudo-pacified contexts which shaped violence in previous eras no longer holds ground. It is also important to acknowledge the victim, who laughs and is nonchalant regarding his encounter. It would be impossible to say whether he was telling the truth in this moment, but if he was and this was a genuine reaction to his assault, this suggests that this is both increasingly normal, and he is more concerned with the images of consumer capitalism and ruined shirt than he is over the fact he has been beaten for no conscionable reason. As Winlow and Hall (2006) noted, consumers of the NTE are largely unfazed by the violence that occurs unless they are on the receiving end of serious violence, while under consumer capitalism where image and brand consumption is important (see Smith, 2014) this is what was most troubling for the victim.

Conclusion

This section has highlighted how violence amongst young people in Stoke-on-Trent is rooted in their childhood and is normalised for each generation interviewed. Issues such as school, location, and subcultural differences have been noted as key causes of conflict before people start partaking in the NTE, and are expressed further when individuals enter the NTE through the 'infantilisation' of society and its consumers (Hayward, 2024). While there are slight differences, such as the expansion of 'their' territory once people leave school, the underlying causes of violence remain the same throughout the infantilised life course, childish disputes mirrored through the lives of grown men and women. Through looking at different generations, we see the gradual increasing of infantilisation on consumer in the NTE and how violence plays out

through the decimation of codes of violence and the heightened threat of repeated shame. We will now move to the cultures of individualism in the NTE which have encouraged the infantilised expressions of violence and the breakdown of the *pseudo-pacification process*, highlighting the consumers' internalisation of this worldview through the nightclubs and bars of Stoke-on-Trent after dark.

An Atomised 'Community'

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted how violence from three different generations has persisted and transformed alongside the macro-context of the world, and how histories of conflict influence violence within the NTE, where themes of tribalism, shame, and excitement feature prominently amongst the violent participants.

This chapter will show how the area's current NTE exerts atomised cultures through the heightened importance of the individual, and the decline in a sense of universalism and commonality. This will be highlighted through assessing the idea of individualism, work, the desire to stand out from the crowd, and the decline of wider community. These facets highlight that cultures which once rewarded community and loyalty are increasingly being eroded through the sybaritic appeals of nightlife.

(Mythical) paradise lost

The biographies of many of the older men and women I spent significant time with highlighted that a sense of community was once present within Stoke-on-Trent during the 'glorious three decades' succeeding the Second World War (Bauman, 2000), which they lamented had since disappeared. Communities were based around the tripartite of work, place, and leisure, where the three were almost intrinsically always attached. Kevin, Marie, and Dale are three siblings who grew up during the Thatcher years, and despite the financial losses associated with this period, and the growing social issues that come to blight their hometown, in their three separate interviews they highlight that there was a sense of community that was ubiquitous with their working-class life:

Marie: “It was the case back then that everyone on your street was either your uncle or your auntie, and all us kids played together. I knew a little bit about what was going on back then regards Thatcher because my dad hated her and that was kind of the norm where we lived, but I suppose the sense of community you had sheltered you from all of that because I loved growing up. We never had much money, but no one on our street did really… It was good then as well because I was from a big family, so we’d always be spending time with our cousins who all lived on the same estate back then… A lot of the parents worked in the same places like Masons or the Michelin”.

OH: Was the pub or working-men’s clubs popular with the families at this time?

Marie: “Not really the pub, that was just where the men went after work or on the weekend, so we did not really go there when we were young, but the clubs yeah. Every Saturday we’d go down Ubberley Club with my nan and grandad and they’d have entertainment on. I used to love that, and they’d have things on for the kids as well. But my dad’s work would do the same, like they would take the workers’ kids on day trips or the cinema on the weekend. It was great”.

Kevin responded to this with a similar reflection, building on the picture Marie painted of everyday communal life and its reliance on shared local infrastructure:

Kevin: “You were always safe back then and everyone knocked about with one another on the street, all different ages and that. And the folks all looked after one another n’all, say if next door did not have much money or whatever they could knock on ours and my mum would give them tea bags or food or whatever they needed really… Clubland [working men’s clubs] was booming back then, they always had entertainment on and it would be rammed, you just tended to know everyone in the area.

OH: Was family important at this time?

Kevin: “I was always close with my cousin Charlie growing up because he was not that much older than me so I knocked about with him and his mates all the time. Family parties were always happening round my aunties, or my grandparents and I loved it. My first date with my wife was bringing her around my grandparents when they were having a do for someone”.

Dale, the eldest of the three, added further context. Although his experience was marked by some more difficult personal memories, his reflection similarly underscored the centrality of family and neighbourly networks:

Dale: “Do not get me wrong, there is a lot of bad memories from that time, which I do not think my sister and definitely not my brother experienced as much, but I think you just have to focus on the good. You did not really notice how poor you were because everyone was the same, I knew my mum and dad were a lot younger than a lot of others but that was about it. Everyone was

> close back then on the streets, mum and dad would never worry about us because they knew we'd be out in a big group or around one of the neighbours houses… family was important, I was very close to my cousin Alice and my grandparents, and we would see them at least once a week but often more because they lived so close. I can not think of anyone in the family who did not live within walking distance".

Taken together, these excerpts paint a vivid picture of tightly woven, interdependent communities that endured well into the period of deindustrialisation and early neoliberal reform. Rather than signalling a sudden collapse of social bonds, these recollections suggest that working-class life retained a strong degree of coherence and mutual support, even amidst mounting structural pressures. This complicates narratives of abrupt social disintegration, instead indicating a slower, more uneven transformation, where communal practices and attachments persisted, even as the economic and institutional foundations that supported them began to erode. These accounts thus challenge any neat periodisation of decline, demonstrating that deindustrialisation's effects on community life were gradual, contingent, and unevenly felt.

Much like Winlow's (2001) *Badfellas*, which revealed both continuity and change within working-class masculine cultures, the data here shows a spectrum of experiences across participants, highlighting how while the world shifts under the weight of structural transformation, certain dispositions, values, and attachments can endure. Rather than illustrating liminal suspension, these narratives represent the stable ground from which later forms of ontological insecurity emerged (see Hall et al, 2008). The participants' ability to name what has been lost attests not to the absence of a *Big Other* during this time, but to its once-potent presence. In this way, their recollections serve as a vital benchmark for understanding the psychic and cultural dislocation that would follow: a fraying of a cohesive social fabric, not its sudden

disappearance.

For Kenny, who lived in Eaton Park after moving from the terraced houses of Hanley, he also idealised the sense of community, but remembered that there was poverty appearing at this time:

> Kenny: "It was great, you really felt like you were part of something bigger, especially when I was living up Hanley. It was the case where everyone knew one another, everyone would help one another out… I tended to get on more with the lads who came from Bucknall and Bentilee because they were still like that… some of the lads who were from Bentilee though had it rough. I remember going into a lad called Denis' house, and it was just dirty. Like they did not have a carpet just wooden floorboards, the house in general was pretty barren. But he was a mate, and we did not care".

Telford (2022) and Lloyd (2013) both discuss this way of life as typifying the *somewhat mythical* post-war era. While capitalists still maintained their financial exploitation of the working-classes to an extent, and there were issues surrounding racism and gender inequality, this was an era of financial betterment for the majority, or at the very least equal poverty for all. Telford (2022) highlights that the working-class became increasingly attached to the local area during this period, with neighbours often working in the same heavy industries, while social mobility was of little importance as most people could afford their bills and leisure, but also more achievable to a degree through remaining within the same industrial field to progress. At this time, an occupation was a great source of pride which communities would build their identity around (Lloyd, 2013), an identity which was intrinsically linked to communal leisure, such as working men's clubs.

The emergence of working men's clubs in particular can be viewed as a compromise from the political elites to deflate political discontent amongst the working-class, where they offered a leisure outlet for families while enabling a working-class

consciousness to form, grounding social problems within structural conditions (Tremlett, 1987). The participants views of this also highlight that deindustrialisation's influence on community life was a slow burning process and not one that can simply be distilled into the global economic crisis of the 70's and the miners' strike.

Wayne however laments that the world in which he grew up no longer exists, and sees the death of the working-men's clubs as the final nail in the coffin for the age of working-class solidarity and community:

> Wayne: "That is where all the problems we've got now came about with the death of the club. Since then, there's been no community spirit. The only places you get that now is out in the sticks really, but when we were young that was the norm. There was a shared sense of belonging, and you took pride in where you were from. Everyone looked the same, all the parents tended to vote the same, everyone worked the same kind of jobs. But we had that in the pubs n'all. Pubs like the White Lion were used by the same kind of people from the same areas. People you'd probably never have interacted with because you did not have much in common the surface, but in there you were drinking with them and having a laugh".

This idea of a communal leisure was prominent during the era of Fordism. Leisure and weekends offered a distinct break from the demands of work, providing industrial workers with a period for relaxation and replenishment. The physical labour required in industrial settings meant that workers were valued primarily for their bodily strength and energy output, so the separation between work and leisure time remained significant. This division allowed workers to disengage from their labour and participate in uncommodified activities unrelated to work (Berardi, 2009). This leisure was supplemented by the increasing disposable income during the post-war era (Tremlett, 1987), which was spent predominantly in the community in which workers resided, and on what was most important to them: family, friends, and place (Embrey, 2020).

Leisure was therefore intrinsically related to these, and, as Wayne highlights, the venue for this was more often than not the social club. The leisure of this period was

intrinsically linked to wider community practices through the working men's clubs. In the 1970s, the era that Wayne experienced, the clubs were spaces of public entertainment, hosting concerts and comedy acts (Schofield, 2023), where families often all shared membership within a single club. This was the case around the country, with thousands of clubs across the country to provide (often male) sociability and community (Schofield, 2023). Increasingly, working men's clubs grew larger, became more accepting of racial and gender differences and attracted big-name acts, with the club being a centre of community life, often remaining as a 'point of connection' for people despite the rising poverty and job loss as the neoliberal era approached (Schofield, 2023). This demonstrates for the older generation of participants, there is a feeling of a shared commonality between them and their people, suggesting communities had not fully been atomised by neoliberal practices.

Community in Recession – The Case of Sully

When compared to the experiences of younger participants, it is clear that this is a halcyon bygone era. While the 'somewhat mythical' glory days of post-war social democracy (Lloyd, 2012) had past, there was still an identity that was rooted in occupation, political, and, most importantly, geographical similarities. Those I interviewed did not find it too difficult to access social housing or buy their own house, trade unionism was dying but wages and purchasing power had not seen too dramatic a decline, and there was a feeling that friendship was based on more than just hedonistic pursuits of pleasure that typifies the contemporary NTE (Smith, 2014). The younger generation of late millennials highlighted that they were for the most part politically disengaged, in unsteady employment where they had little bargaining power, and the idea of social bonds were intrinsically linked to satisfying their libidinal urges to

engage in sex, inebriation, and violence.

Sully encapsulates this idea. While he was briefly introduced in the last chapter, he shall be discussed in much further detail here. Sully is from a family that historically, and arguably in the modern-day, held a lot of weight in the South End of Stoke's criminal underworld and the area's NTE. He has witnessed extreme violence from an early age, namely watching his dad try to kill his mum. However, this is an area where he has not engaged in himself to any serious degree, but he has many acquaintances through his large family and the reputation of his surname.

This has also meant that the usual territoriality that is found within Stoke-on-Trent does not fully apply to him due to his various connections to different parts of the city. While his family are known to be from a specific area in the South End, they have since dispersed to other areas across the Potteries. Sully himself has lived in various parts of the city, and was educated in Hillstown, which enables him to blend in to the various social groups with comparative ease. He acknowledges this, highlighting that he feels 'comfortable walking in to any pub in Stoke[-on-Trent]', a rarity amongst the participants. Alas, his confidence in transgressing the territorial boundaries only go so far as the city and its surrounding areas, as he admits he feels significantly more uncomfortable in the NTE's of other areas such as Manchester.

Sully was declared bankrupt in his late teenage years after amassing large debts after the death of his father and has only recently found work in waste management after four years of unemployment and living off benefits and his family's generosity, who he remains close to. He has little interest in politics, saying 'all I know is I like Labour', but struggles to identify why and his views often conflict with the political party as it manifests today, especially in regard to race. He does not view his work as important,

rather seeing it as a means to an end for him to legally make money. Rather, Sully suggests that he lives for the weekend, and the loosening of the restraints of his 9-5 life:

> Sully: "I like work, I get on with the people I work with for the most part, but as soon as it gets to Friday, I'm just focused on getting out of there and going out. I'll start by texting people I know, normally my closest friends but if they do not want to do owt I'm quite lucky because I know a lot of people from different areas who I can go out with, like lads from Tunstall or Hillstown… I'm going out one way or another, whether I'm with my proper mates or not, and more often than not I'll stay out until the morning and then waste my Saturday in bed. Might do something on Sunday depending on how I feel, then it's back to work Monday. It's been this way since I left college, but when I was not working, I was doing that every day".

The fatalism and the allure of the NTE is clear through Sully's sentiments. The idea of 'working to live' is fitting, in that it gives him the financial ability to spend time in the NTE, where his consumption of leisure can fulfil his libidinal urge to experience some semblance of joy (Winlow & Hall, 2009).

MacDonald (1997) highlights how work cultures prior to the expansion on neoliberalism offered security and a relatively straightforward transition from youth to adulthood. Since this period, the consumption of leisure has become increasingly commodified and directed at young people to such an extent that it has altered the working-class habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) to focus more on the financial rewards gained from employment and how these can be spent in leisure industries such as the NTE (See Lloyd, 2013 for an overview). While 'immediate gratification has long been acknowledged as a feature of working-class life… but its importance among some sections of the working and lower working-classes becomes amplified, distorted, and infected with a culture of consumerism and consumption influencing lifestyle and identity' (Winlow, 2001:68).

Without the structure of meaningful work to provide a source of pride and identity (See Lloyd, 2013), identities increasingly become tied to leisure pursuits such as activity in the NTE. Hall et al (2008) highlight how powerful the hedonistic urge is to consume under the current epoch, with the end of the working week merely an indicator that money can now be spent on indulging in alcohol and drugs in the NTE, and the data suggests that little has changed in this regard for the participants despite the decaying nightlife venues in the city.

Concepts such as political allegiance are an afterthought to participants such as Sully, largely existing as a subconscious hangover of the Lacannian *other*, where the past acts as the concept of *the name of the father*, protecting against the anxiety of *castration*, that is the powerlessness of modern life. *The name of the father* is the most fundamental signifier and confers identity onto the subject as well as positioning him in the *symbolic* order. If it is not included in the *symbolic* order, then the result is psychosis - the subject begins to come apart at the seams! Sully has no ability to impose his will upon the exterior world, and this will have instead been replaced by the *master signifiers* driven by *imaginary* desires of consumerism (Evans, 1996).

Yet, the remnants of how things once were linger within *the real*, becoming a part of the *symbolic* order, but a part that is overridden by the dysfunctional *symbolic* inviting a retreat into the lure of the *imaginary* and its realm of misidentification manifested in hedonistic imperatives to experience pleasure (Raymen and Smith, 2019). This has occurred due to the 'slow cancellation of the future' (Berardi, 2011), where life continues where history has ended. To Fisher (2014), Sully's inability to recognise that he is at odds with the values of the current political structures represents their disappearance and the hope that they offered but never emerged.

Sully shows little aspiration for changing this way of life. He acknowledges that it may not be a good way to live, but it is his 'way of dealing with things'. Sully, like many of the other participants as we will come to see, is fairly open about his struggles with mental health. He was diagnosed with a degenerative disease in his teens and has dealt with the physical and emotional pain of this through spending extended periods of time in the NTE, despite his acknowledgement that it is a venue of potential violence where he is at a significant disadvantage, such is the allure of the NTE:

> Sully: "When I found out mate it [going out] just took my mind off everything, I was in agony most the time and drink was the only thing that really soothed it. So I'd be going out on crutches because I could not walk properly, and that is a nightmare in itself because when someone bumps into you which they inevitably will you just want to kick off about it but there's not much I can exactly do. I'd have operations to make me better, and I'd be counting down the days until its safe to go back out again".

Community in Recession – Anhedonia and *Jouissance*

Sully's sentiments are not too dissimilar to the other young participants, who, while not having the physical ailments, feel there is a need for escapism of their dissatisfaction with their everyday life and the depressive elements that are associated with it. Jimbob expressed this directly, describing how nights out serve as a temporary release from the pressures of daily life:

> Jimbob: "It's a vicious cycle, you get down and you go out to get it out of your head, and then it just sort of delays the inevitable. I like going out, but sometimes it is a form of escapism from the stuff that gets me down, whether its issues with my family or whatever".

Frankie similarly reflects on a period of heavy partying and substance use as a means of coping with deeper emotional turmoil, including unresolved grief:

> Frankie: "When I was going out all the time [immediately following the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions], doing drugs and drinking, I do not think I was happy really, I'm much happier now. I'm more balanced now, I go out with the right kind of people. But yeah, I just think back then I was trying get over everything that had happened [a close family bereavement]. I think Dave

> [Frankie's brother] is like that as well. He's a proper alcoholic, drug addict, everything. I can not really say because it's his story, but I think he's got his own problems stemming from stuff that happened when he was young, so like he does not sleep at all. But he just drinks and takes drugs constantly."

Brogan also identifies nightlife as a coping mechanism, one often entangled in toxic cycles of romantic conflict and emotional distress:

> Brogan: "Literally every time me and [now husband] would have an argument or split up [in the mid- to late-2010s] and I'd feel like shit, my go to would be to text [friend's name] and ask her to go out because she was always up for a night out. But it does not change anything, he'd normally have gone out as well so you're just checking where he is constantly, trying make each other jealous basically. But I'd still feel like shit, it does not help at all".

There is a certain fatalism that is attached to Sully and the other's sentiments here, highlighting that the NTE is often all there is to help you deal with your problems, while they all accept they are just delaying the inevitable reality that nothing will change. Very few of the participants seem to actively dislike the NTE, but they recognise its rarely positive either, with a sense of lack often correlating in each interview. The narratives highlight that it is not only hedonism that they desire, but rather an escape from their pain to nothingness – a pursuit of anhedonia, or feeling nothing at all, rather than a distinguishable state of pleasure. This demonstrates that pleasure and anhedonia are intrinsically linked when entering the NTE.

Treadwell & Ayres (2012), Fisher (2009), Berardi (2009), and Harvey (2005) all highlight how the conditions of neoliberal society with its focus on individualism, competition, isolation and precarity lead to an anhedonic state, where there is an increased willingness to escape the realities of post-modern life to a state where they no longer exist. When conditions are increasingly unstable, and there is little viable alternative, it is increasingly seen as pleasurable to escape them into nothingness in search of some state of contentment (Freud, 1930).

The participants appear to be in a constant state of *jouissance* when consuming within the NTE. Their enjoyment within the NTE does not only have the potential to cross over into pain, but it is also intrinsically connected to it. While this will be applied to the inebriation chapter in greater detail, Zizek's (2006) application of Lacan's *Jouissance* shows how depression and a need for escapism from the sense of lack in their work week means they are willing to experience such pain if there is the slightest hope that they could feel pleasure. As highlighted by the data, this pleasure is not attained. Žižek (2006) highlights this inherently frustrating nature of *jouissance*, through remaining perpetually out of reach. Individuals may find themselves constantly striving to attain moments of enjoyment or fulfilment, only to be met with disappointment or dissatisfaction when their efforts fall short. This frustration is integral to the experience of *jouissance*, as it underscores the inherent tension between desire and its fulfilment. For the participants, their anxieties and lack that existed prior to entering the NTE will remain when they depart it, meaning their desire to feel nothing will not be extinguished through fulfilment.

Such lack and anxiety are unconsciously promoted within contemporary society and culture, being the core drivers of a consumer economy which are translated into a never-ending quest for the fulfilment of desire by consumerism's influential advertising and mediascape (Atkinson, 2019). The traditional values of hard work, sacrifice and delayed gratification have been replaced by consumption that prioritises pleasure, desire, self enhancement, fantasy, instant gratification, and competitive individualism (Ayres, 2019), nowhere more so than the NTE, but as we see from the data it is impossible for this lack to be satiated. Rather, the participants go through a process of *fetishistic disavowal*.

This relates to where the subject acknowledges the harms associated with their consumption, yet they ignore this and act as if they are not aware, as the world in which they exist compels them to ignore the consequences of their actions so they can continue to consume as this is key to their unconscious ideology (Zizek, 2008). Izzy offers a particularly clear example of this disavowal, recognising the ineffectiveness of going out to escape heartbreak, yet participating in it anyway out of social habit and expectation:

> Izzy: "[in mid-2023, aged 19] When I split up with [ex-boyfriend's name], I was low and sad and that is just the natural response from everyone, go out and take your mind off of it. So that is what I did, but I do not think it works, you'd see him or you'd see people he knows and it just gets you upset. If a lad tries to talk to you, you just tell him go away because you're not interested because your sad".

Jimmy's account similarly captures the contradiction at the heart of affective nightlife consumption, where emotional distress is both recognised and temporarily suspended through intoxication and hedonistic ritual:

> Jimmy: "I do not think I drink to numb the pain exactly, but there is a certain emotional element to it. You've seen me cry on nights out when were supposed to be having a good night, because of shit that is going on in my life… when I split up with my ex [in 2019, aged 20], Mo and Fionn spiked me with ecstasy, so I'd stopped being depressed basically. I was annoyed with them at the time, but I ended up having a great night so I suppose it can work in some ways, making you forget your troubles and that".

Building on previous accounts, the data suggests that this is more than a personal disavowal, but rather influenced by their acquaintances and friends. As Izzy and Jimmy highlight, their reason for entering the NTE after suffering heartbreak was at the insistence of their friends to consume, implying there is a limited array of alternatives for extending friendship within this context, beyond the pursuit of the excitement and satisfaction characteristic of the NTE (Smith, 2014).

Žižek (2008) demonstrates the intricate relationship between consumerist ideology and the unconscious desires of individuals within capitalist societies through unconscious beliefs, which highlights the disparity between what individuals consciously endorse and the underlying beliefs and desires that operate beneath the surface. Fuelling both the unconscious and conscious is consumer capitalism (Zizek, 2008). In short, the subject consciously adheres to consumerist norms and desires that the NTE offers, but is unconsciously aware of the emptiness and unattainable desires it produces. The power of capitalism's consumer lack fuels further consumption as it remains the unreachable *object petit a,* and the formation of identity around leisure means that this is the only thing their friends can offer in advice. Largely, this boils down to a rebuilding of an identity more heavily involved the NTE in the hope that this will bring pleasure. The depressed have the 'injunction to enjoy' (Hayward & Turner, 2019), and this does not disappear even when they do not feel like being in the NTE, nor does it for their friends, where it is easier to deny harm rather than face it (Atkinson, 2019).

The Injunction to Enjoy

The injunction to enjoy is described by Zizek (2009) as the rewiring of the traditional super-ego. The traditional super-ego that would feel guilt over issues such as causing different harms now feels guilt over not indulging oneself. This leads to a pervasive cultural imperative that compels individuals to pursue enjoyment as the ultimate goal, often at the expense of all else. As Raymen & Smith (2019:24) illustrate: 'this is enforced by the threat of cultural obsolescence that looms large in the background of our lives, captured by the popular social media hashtag 'FOMO' (fear of missing out)'.

This has transformed consumer society and the NTE from prohibition to unrestrained enjoyment (McGowan, 2003). Society expects this of the subject, creating an *objectless anxiety* to build a unique identity that should be effectively expressed against others, leading to a feeling of lack if they are unable to exert this (Raymen & Smith, 2019). For a number of the younger participants, their injunction to enjoy has delayed their turn to adulthood, stating that they are not interested, or rather incapable, in achieving traditional adult lives at their age, such as having children, owning a house, and achieving economic stability. Sully expresses a clear preference for prioritising youthful enjoyment over settling into long-term responsibilities, viewing adulthood as a state to be deferred:

> Sully: "I do not see the point in owning a house or having kids until I'm about thirty, I still want to go out and enjoy myself while I'm young. I've got years to settle down, and once I do that is where I've got to stop going out".

Jimmy shares a similar sentiment, though with a hint of ambivalence about the future. While he expresses a desire for conventional adult milestones, they remain distant and economically inaccessible:

> Jimmy: "Until recently I never wanted kids or a wife, but I think I do now, but not yet. I'm in no rush to get settled or owt, I want to do things while I can. Seeing the lads, going out, going away and that. And let's face it, none of us are going be able afford a house until our parents die anyway so its not like I can afford it anytime soon".

Davo takes a more strategic stance, portraying his resistance to fatherhood not simply as a matter of preference but of planning and financial readiness, shaped by cautionary tales from older men:

> Davo: "No offence mate but I just think its stupid having a kid at our age. I won't have a kid until I can afford to have three. Every older bloke I speak to says the same, 'do not make the mistake I did', and they know because they've lived it. I'm still young, I want to go on holidays with the lads, I want to do interesting things. You can not do that when you've got a missus and kids".

Gene offers the most candid articulation of this rejection of normative adulthood, embracing hedonism and temporary pleasures without ambivalence or apology:

> Gene: "I'm not interested in any of that mate. I'm out Friday to Sunday and I can not see myself getting that bored of it any time soon… I think I just love it like, getting fucked, seeing the lads, shagging birds. So to answer the question, I've not got any time for settling down [laughs]".

While the oldest participant here is 24, many of the older participants life paths have followed the same journey, with only Brogan out of the under 30's desiring to get married and have children. For people such as Marie, Gwen, and Jodie who are now aged between their mid-40's and early-50's, they had families by the time they were 24, but they again are the outliers:

> Laura: "I think it just sort of never happened. I did not meet the right person, so I was 40 when I had a child. I never really thought about it too much, but I was still going out sort of regular up until this point".

> Wayne: "Well obviously I had Alex when I was 19, but it did not stop me from going out. Me and her mum were never really a family even though I was with her on and off for seven years. What come first for me back then was going out and then fighting I suppose. So even though I had a kid I was still out more nights than not, going away to Tenerife and Greece, bit of a dick really, but I never thought that got in the way of my relationship with Alex. I think when I did settle down in my late twenties, I knew I had to or I was going to end up going prison".

This will be explored in greater detail when discussing the issue of relationships within the NTE in the next chapter, but this further highlights a delayed onset of adulthood within both the older participants and the younger. As introduced previously, Smith (2014) highlights in his study of the NTE the *infantilisation* of society, where traditional norms of adulthood are ignored while the prerogative is to consume more. While childhood is decreasing in length, with the urge to grow old as a youthful consumer, the time it takes to become adult is increasingly becoming longer as the capitalist system disables the individual to achieve this through its restricting economic instability, unstable post-industrial work, and the decline of loyalty in an ever growing

morally relative world (Smith, 2014). Craine (1997) notes the deferred transitions into adulthood and careers in general in his study of young people in post-Thatcherite Manchester, with very few participants transitioning into 'adulthood' at a relatively young age, with the majority delaying adulthood due to lack of income and precarity. In this case, young men fell back on an exaggerated version of working-class masculinity and the locally available alternative opportunity structures while women generally retreated into home based domestic careers, while both struggled to maintain long term relationships. An exaggerated emphasis on hardness, emotional detachment, and machismo from the men often inhibited the developments of a lasting intimacy with women (Craine, 1997).

While Smith (2014) notes that this is due to a capitalist culture that denotes pleasure, greed and selfishness as important features of life, a fact that this data also supports, I would suggest that this has increasingly become the case since the rise of the post-68 'New Left', that has supported such breakdowns though its permissive culture, but this shall be discussed in the next chapter.

But what can be noted here is the fact that the injunction to enjoy rarely, if ever, leads to happiness, as highlighted by both the depressive elements of the NTE as discussed previously and the lack of actual success in attaining what is promoted as key to a good 'night' (also see Smith, 2014). Participants such as Gene would often experience mediocre nights where excessive amounts of pints would be ingested and cocaine would be snorted sat in a pub, but other measures of enjoyment such as sexual success were a rarity. Reflecting on these shared events in interviews with the participants begs the question, what was good about these nights? Other than socialising and inebriation to excess, there was very little notable about these situations. Raymen & Smith (2019)

highlight that subjects in the NTE often experience 'hedonic amnesia', returning to the same venues in the pursuit of the mythical 'great night out' that is rarely satiated. It is also apparent here, but in the sense that these events are looked back on fondly even though in reality there was often nothing special about them in the first place.

Further to the idea of the injunction to enjoy regarding adulthood, it does not suggest they are consciously seeking hedonistic leisure over more traditional routes. Rather, it is a rejection based on the prohibitions that modern-life places upon adulthood. For participants such as Jimmy, Davo, and Sully, they are left with one option or another, they do not see a life offering adulthood while simultaneously fulfilling their cultural urge for individualistic enjoyment. This is pertinent, as this suggests that if it was financially and culturally viable to exist in both orders they possibly would. Society has undoubtedly placed increasing pressures on family life at the expense of the injunction to enjoy.

As Winlow & Hall (2016) highlight, consumerism has worked its way into previously organic aspects of adult culture, such as family and community, and gradually receded all traditional aspects of culture. It is increasingly more expensive to become an adult (see Smith, 2014), with 4.9 million adults living with their parents amidst rising rent and mortgage costs (Skopeliti & Packham, 2023) and the total cost of raising a child is the highest it has been since calculations started in 2012 (CPAG, 2023). Meanwhile, the *symbolic* order still drives the injunction to enjoy within the NTE through promoting hedonistic practices through promises of cheap drugs, drink and sex (Smith, 2014), which can be sustained through credit if needs be (Raymen & Smith, 2019). In this context, it suggests that this is merely an illusion of choice for the individual and the 'unfreedom' to leisure as the subject is compelled to choose (Lasch, 1985). Under the

current epoch and its societal restraints, it is clear that is more attainable than the other.

Standing Out from the Crowd

For most of the participants, what was most important to them was to stand out from the rest of the crowd. While this is presented in various different forms, it is often most visually highlighted in terms of fashion:

> Jimmy: "Well it tends to be Stone Island that a lot of the lads wear, or that kind of football style clothing. Never really been my thing I'll be honest, more into the sort of mod style if anything, but with my own sort of spin on it I suppose. I like dressing smart and not just looking like everyone else".
>
> Pete: "Even in school on non-uniform day I think that is where it started, you wanted to look the bollocks like. I remember wearing this Stone Island shirt thing that was about four sizes too big for me, but it did not matter because it was Stone. Then that was just the same in the clubs, spending money we did not have on Burberry and Stone. I must have had thousands of pounds of it, and I do not know where any of it is, because I'm certain I did not give it away".
>
> Sully: "Well when we started going out it was all about Stone Island really. For a lot of lads it still is, it's not really a football thing anymore but I think that is why everyone still wears it. I was dead bad for it, spent all my money on Stone Island coats I probably could not afford. But I've gone off it now because you just look like everyone else. Not like you stand out anymore when the spice boys are wearing it".

The individualism and one-upmanship associated with clothing is well documented in literature. Veblen (1965) highlighted that prior to post-industrialism, wealth and status are more determined by the subject's ability to display their wealth and leisure. This 'conspicuous consumption' would be shown through displaying lavish goods that had little practical purpose. This display of wealth and status is to distinguish between the higher class and the lower class rather than genuine interest as it reinforces their social position. Redhead (1993) focussed moreso on the fashion of the working-classes in the NTE, noting the vibrant and eclectic fashion choices at raves allowing individuals to feel as if they were showcasing their unique styles and identities. Marie highlights similar

themes when discussing her time attending Glitz in the mid-1990s:

> Marie: "You never wanted to wear the same dress twice, especially in places like Glitz, and we were going every week, so you'd have to buy a new dress every week and they were not cheap, they were all like 80 quid or more which was a lot. Even if you wanted to wear the same dress, you probably could not because they'd all be ruined for fag ash and condensation from the roof".

Oxley (2023) highlights how important clothing such as Stone Island was to football hooligans, and how it festered a culture of one-upmanship within the scene in in Stoke-on-Trent, yet she also notes how, similar to the sentiments expressed from Jimmy and Sully, that it was increasingly becoming a uniformed outfit rather than sticking to the scene's values of outdoing your friends and rivals. This in turn has created a need to form new identities through clothing in the NTE, with fashion being the cultural bulwark of late capitalism (Frank, 1997). Veblen's (1965) concept of 'pecuniary emulation', where the 'leisure class' engage in competitive consumption to outdo one another through displays of wealth, can be applied now to a much wider setting, with this now becoming the norm for swathes of working-class men and women within the NTE as it is a signifier of a consumptive identity.

Masculinity in particular is seen to be increasingly predicated on matters of how men look rather than what men do, with style, self-presentation, and consumption opposed to a masculinity centred on work and production being significantly more important (Edwards, 2006), whereas with women this need is the same, rather than pursuing traditional gender roles of bearing children or being a housewife. As 'Western capitalism's real economy became increasingly predicated around consumption, the leisure and consumer industries moved into the void left by these obsolete structures of modernity as the primary bases around which the subject could construct a coherent sense of self' (Raymen, 2018:64), clothing has been seen as an integral part of identity formation. This has been further animated by the expansion of credit – a

more acceptable term for debt – with consumer culture encouraging the subject to take on further debt while young in order to support their injunction to enjoy and identity formation (Horsley, 2015).

Nowhere else is this seen moreso than within the fashion industry, with designer clothes being more accessible than ever with the proliferation of credit companies such as 'Klarna' and 'ClearPay' being front and centre on websites, providing the allure of 'buy now, pay later' or 'pay in three' plans to support ones' spending and stand out from others. Where fashion becomes uniform in an era of 'cool individualism', it becomes increasingly imperative to separate oneself from the rest of society (Raymen & Smith, 2019). In Stoke-on-Trent, it is difficult to do this purely within the NTE, as all hubs of consumption are strikingly similar to the next and are ever dwindling in number, therefore fashion is a core place to differentiate from others:

I'd met with Sully shortly after this interview was conducted in a local snooker hall, where one of his friends, Ged, had asked him why he'd took off the badge from his Stone Island jacket. Without him answering, it was easy to see why. The room was busy, full of what I assumed to be working-class men drinking cheap lager, and playing pool, darts and snooker, while occasionally glancing over at the football playing on the television. Amongst the different groups of men, it was clear that Stone Island was the clothing of choice for most under the age of forty, while clothing associated with the traditional football casual culture in general was worn by all of this group. Ged himself was wearing the standard Stone Island overshirt that many in the snooker hall and the various pubs and clubs around the city wore in different colourways, while the other man who was there, Shane, was dressed in a Fila tracksuit top. Sully's responded to Ged's question:

Sully: "I've gone off it mate"
Ged: "Why?"
Sully: "I dunno, just everyone is wearing it now, I do not want to look like everyone else"
Ged: "Yeah I know what you mean actually, can not look in a room without seeing a badge now can you"

It almost seemed as if the brief conversation had caused an epiphany of sorts for Ged, now realising that the money spent on standing out from the crowd was not gaining the individualistic image that he had desired.

A few weeks had passed, and I saw Sully once more, along with a number of other participants. He was now wearing a vintage patterned shirt and a cardigan, a far cry from his previous attire that relied on high-end branded fashion. It was not long before he was labelled 'James May' by the other participants who were wearing designer labels, providing the new individualistic image that he sought.

For the working-classes prior to the rise of post-war individualism, fashion was relatively uniformed and there was little to differentiate between people, but, as Frank (1997) highlights, that by the late 1960's fashion was seen by consumers as a core distinguisher, attempting to reject the conformity of mass society but becoming increasingly obsolete in the process. As Lasch points out: 'The idea that you can be anything you want…has come to mean that identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume' (Lasch, 1985: 38). This throwaway approach to identity formation and the false presentation of infinite variety 'amounts in practice to an abstention from choice' Lasch (1979:29-30).

We see the obsoletion of fashion with Sully, who realises that his choice of fashion had become increasingly obsolete, and hence needed to reinvent himself with a new identity formed out of the old, to set himself apart from the pack (see Raymen, 2018).

Yet, despite his shedding of his £600 coats and designer trainers, he is in effect the embodiment of 'hip' capitalist consumption (Frank, 1997), forging a new identity through clothing that is strikingly dissimilar to other young men and women who I encountered within the NTE.

Borrowing from Raymen's (2018) discussion of subcultural authenticity in relation to parkour, to consumers such as Sully, he is the authentic consumer who is standing out from the rest who are merely following the crowd by wearing the same kind of expensive outfits. The reserve army of consumers as highlighted by Winlow and Hall (2013), where the economically more secure can demonstrate their social distinction from the poorer consumers may not be completely the case moving forward, as the expensive clothes worn by the masses have been rejected by those who could afford it, to spend less money on unbranded clothing while standing out as an individual all the same.

'I'm Better Than You'

Not only was it where fashion was concerned where individualistic personalities come across, it could be found in inebriated conversation amidst the NTEs' locales:

I was in the NTE in the city's south end, with the participants Davo, Jimmy, and Izzy, amongst others. In one of the pubs we entered, we met three acquaintances who I had not seen for a number of years but knew them relatively well. I started to talk to one of them, Finn. He was clearly under the influence of cocaine and alcohol and significantly intoxicated. He asked me what I was 'doing with myself nowadays'. I briefly tried to explain what I was doing regards work, education, and family, but after roughly fifteen seconds he interjected with 'I've just got back from the states with work, I'm a manager now, making good money, thought I'd come out and spend some of it' he

laughed. To Finn, he did not care about anyone else, he just wanted to boast that he was earning a better wage and could afford to come out whenever he pleased.

While this could appear to be an example of Finn competing against my own accomplishments, it was largely brought upon without me detailing anything noteworthy to do with myself as my own input was so minimal. Rather, I had only mentioned I was still at university (no mention was made of the PhD or what subject I was studying), that I was living with my parents and that my family were doing well. Seemingly, Finn took little interest in whether I was successful or not, instead taking the opportunity to boast regardless of my situation. This sort of interaction was fairly normal in interviews with the younger participants, who claimed these interactions were somewhat common and occurred regardless of any perceived competitive stimulus:

> Jimbob: "Spoke with some lad who would not shut up about being [premier league footballer's] mate and had a brief chat with Fats who was trying to justify putting someone's head through a pub window. People are hard work".
>
> Jimmy: "Certain places you go, certain people you'll see and all they want to do is basically tell you how good they are. Brag about jobs, money, how much of a bad man they are, and how many girls they've shagged. Basically, any way that they can make out they are better than you".

While these interactions are somewhat annoying to the people on the receiving end, the individualistic aspects of people's lives that, at least in their own minds, make them unique and superior to everyone else. The NTE offers a venue for these identities that have been forged in other areas of life, such as financially or in the gym, to be expressed to a wide audience. This is evidence of what Lasch (1979) termed a culture of narcissism, where friendships based on mutual commitment and interest have been waylaid by the drive to succeed and prosper. This has occurred under the failure of the Left to offer any meaning alternative to the Right's embrace of free-marketism, while

also emboldening the disappearance of traditional family and work structures (Winlow & Hall, 2022; see the literature review for a more detailed overview). This 20th century historic shift from an identity based upon work, community and family to the items we can afford to buy, the things we are good at, and how successful we are, has gradually led to consumerism co-opting the terms 'freedom' and 'liberation' (Raymen & Smith, 2017), where the subject is free to enact his *negative liberty* – the unprohibited pursuit of individual's enjoyment, which can be provided through the free market (see Berlin, 1970) – to outcompete his opponents without contemplating the harms associated with their actions.

The data suggests that the NTE is a primal venue of competition between acquaintances, where the mass collective of people, with their personalities lubricated by alcohol and stimulants (Winlow and Hall, 2006), are given free rein to outshine their counterparts in the name of hedonistic consumerism. Whereas for Irwin-Rogers' (2019) participants they displayed their wealth, excess, and consumption through the means of social media, here the participants use the NTE as there is not much glamour to be found in Stoke-on-Trent.

Doc highlights how these identities are worked on in the gym to then be released into the sybaritic venues of the local NTE:

> Doc: "[Talking about his friend] It's a bit odd like, cause he's in a relationship, got a house, should probably be thinking about settling down and having kids. But instead, he's always in the gym and on the juice [steroids] like he's trying to impress someone. Like he gets his haircut pretty much every week, he was on about getting Botox at one point. He always gets his brother [19 years old] come out with us now n'all I think he's trying to relive his youth through him like… we're going Butlins before I go away, and he wants go fancy dress I'll show you what he wants to go out [proceeds to show me a picture of a shirtless fireman] like why would you go out like that if you did not want attention off girls?".

The focus on the consumption of Doc's friend's style here highlights how this is worked

upon in areas of leisure outside of the NTE to then express within the city's nightlife despite already gaining what many of the participants have not: a house and a committed relationship. Regarding the gym, this has been noted as a core avenue for style consumption, where individuals will go to the lengths of using anabolic steroids to perfect their body image (Antonopoulous & Hall, 2016).

'Bodily capital' has the ability to garner a valuable currency in sectors such as the NTE, where the individual can harness hyper-masculinity to identify as the post-modern hard man, which has been reinforced by the consumption of media this desired aesthetic (Kotze & Antonopoulos, 2019). This can be especially useful in the NTE, where, as we have seen, violence is commonplace and a refined image of physical prowess can give the user a feeling that they 'won't be messed with' (Kotze and Antonopoulos, 2019), while the drive to look good in a culture that increasingly links hyper-masculinity with images of sexual success, which steroid use is thought to acquire (Kotze et al, 2023). But it also begged the question to Doc, one of his closest friends, what is the point in this when he has already achieved a long-term partner who he lives with?

Liberal materialism is attractive to many consumers, who need this to become devoid of their anxieties (Kotze & Lloyd, 2022), and the cultivation of the body is a prime way to avoid this anxiety (Hall, 2015). As Smith (2014) has shown, the power of capitalism's consumer drive is so powerful that issues such as these are often still important when the individual has reached traditional adulthood, still clinging to materialistic dissipation after this point has been reached. The data suggests that Doc's friend is still clinging to this through his brother, who remains at his peak of youthful hedonistic consumption.

The participants, despite being from different generations and social circles, highlight how being unique is important to them and their friends self-image, and sets them apart from everyone else. Kenny's vivid recollection of the rave scene captures not only a desire for hedonism, but a deeper yearning for transcendence from the perceived limitations of traditional working-class life. His account positions himself and his friends as avant-garde figures who sought self-expression and aesthetic sophistication in contrast to what he describes as a more primitive local masculinity:

> Kenny: "For us [in the late 1980s-late-1990s] it was not just about going out and getting on it so to speak, like we did not have a local, our local was town, no one understood us. I looked like Jim Morrison on acid, I did not fit in… Walking past the Pig [pub] get called fucking gaylord, faggot, they were a bit like Neanderthals you know. But in that scene [rave] everyone was beautiful, the women were in catsuits, the men were pristine… We were trendy compared to the hardcore scene, we were the thinking man's raver, we were cool… we were fighting to get away from all that hard shit that we'd been brought up with, we'd come through the eighties and from having fuck all… we were seen as the black sheep of everything, but we wanted to expand our minds, for once we were living, motorbikes, holidays, illegal raves in central park. The Place and Maxims, people were getting pissed up and brawling at the bar so we looked at them as Neanderthals, we were like the future, modern people moving forward. One minute we'd be in a rave sweating our tits off and next thing you know we'd be sitting around eating a gourmet meal drinking wine, we were experimenting with life. Seeing a side of life we'd never been allowed to see, never thought we'd see. I remember being very young going Rick Steins and paying 400 quid for a meal, but we could do it we'd got the money. Everybody was happy, we'd all got houses, cars, went on holiday wherever we wanted, going clubbing, we all wore the best clothes, listening to this fantastic music. It was about being a bit more enlightened, a bit more cultured, we had films like Clockwork Orange and Withnail and I, go to Greece and have Mezes. We went from being deprived kids to doing whatever we wanted".

Dale similarly highlights fashion as a means of individual distinction, even in the face of economic hardship. His recollection emphasises the pressure to innovate one's appearance as part of a shared aesthetic culture built on visibility and uniqueness:

> Dale: "I seem to remember people [in the mid-1990s] wearing Rupert the bear trousers, really out there… it was about looking really garish, like gold satin trousers. You'd buy clothes that frequently because you did not want to be seen wearing the same thing often, despite not really being able to afford them".

Alex's highlights the subtle dynamics of self-presentation and judgement within the 2000's nightlife scene, evidencing how self-image was still policed and scrutinised, particularly among women:

> Alex: “[in the mid- to late-2000s] Satchmo’s was ace… Everyone was just dead happy, the music was mint, you’d be dancing on the tables and the bouncers were fine with it, just a really good atmosphere… Satchmo’s was a really happy place, I do not think I experienced that anywhere else. There was a bit of looking people up and down a bit… Maybe the lads are different, but you’d be checking out what they were wearing and either judging or thinking yeah that is nice, just girly bitchiness I suppose”.

Building on the ideas of ‘clubcultures’ (Redhead, 1997) and ‘divisions in the dark’ (Hollands, 2002), the data suggests that there is both a hedonistic approach to dealing with hard times while feeling that one’s own, and their wider individual groups, hedonistic behaviour was/is more enlightened than other consumers. While Hollands (2002) overstates the class divisions between the consumers – the data suggests that the class divisions in the NTE are not overly emphasised, with working-class consumers able and more than willing to enter corporatised and expensive NTE venues and arenas – Hollands (2002) nonetheless highlights the social divisions his participants made between themselves and the other. This has possibly been influenced by the disintegration of Stoke-on-Trent nightlife post-Covid and the subsequent lack of venues to attend (see Knapper, 2024; Tariq, 2020;). Yet this was still the case for the previous generations.

There also exists little divide regarding other characteristics such as race and gender, rather they are divided by how they consume and what they consume. For individuals such as Kenny, who is from a working-class background and held a working-class job, he did not look down on others due to any other characteristics other than how people spent their leisure time; where he saw his consumption as an expansion of his mind through expensive meals and watching art films, he saw others as stuck in the past. This has emerged as an arena for the working-classes to socially climb; where they are restricted in their ability to climb economically, they can gain social status through the development of their nightlife subcultural identity. The data suggests that this is

perhaps a working-class method of attaining status through doing as the middle classes do.

Utilising Fanon's (2021) idea regarding black people building an identity based on whiteness in regards to race – an idea that is problematic in the modern-day where these identities are encouraged to be embraced (see O'Neill, 2023) – but when applied to the context of class, the data suggests a willingness of working-class people to adapt to the styles of the middle-classes, such as spending £400 on food as Kenny did during his peak years as a consumer. Through this we see more evidence of a departure from previous modes of living based around togetherness, community, and attachment to place and class. While to the older participants these sentiments are shown to have been important during their formative years, but by the late 1980's it is clear that people had begun to engage within consumer capitalisms individualistic competitiveness of outdoing one another, seeping in from the initial financial competitiveness to competing on the grounds of identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has built upon previous work within the fields of criminology, sociology, philosophy, and economics to highlight the birth and growth of 'cool individualism' within Stoke-on-Trent, which is being expressed through the venues of the NTE, while demonstrating the impact the macro-contexts of consumer culture and neoliberal capitalism has had on this. Through utilising Lacannian and Zizekian application of concepts such as *fetishistic disavowal*, *jouissance* and the 'injunction to enjoy', we are able to highlight how consumer culture has reworked the psyche to compete as an individual consumer of identities within the NTE. Those under study can be best described as 'steadfastly conformist' to the principles of consumerism despite their

conscious embodiment of individualistic identities that are promoted under neoliberalism (Raymen & Smith, 2019). This is evident through the competitiveness of the NTE through fashion, music, and the general one-upmanship evident in the data. This chapter has also largely approached individualism as an individual practice, highlighting how these communities have gradually become atomised through the adaption of the norms of the free market. This will be built upon in the next chapter, where the participants 'selfish individualism' within the NTE shall be explored through assessing its impact on those around them through their attitude to friendships, relationships, and sex.

Expressive Individualism

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted how individualism was internalised by the participants, and manifested through their behaviours in the NTE to embody a conformity towards 'cool individualism'. This chapter will build upon the previous findings and theoretical analysis of individualism, to uncover how this internalised individualism is expressed onto others, damaging relationships, friendships and one's sex life.

Scenes & Pseudo-Communities

Amidst the divisions in the dark and the hedonistic individualism that the participants engaged in, the idea of friendship was a tentative one at best. Friendships are formed within these divisions, often exclusively, where people think their fellow consumers are equally cultured and enlightened. Nonetheless, such friendships were shown throughout the study to be increasingly atomised for the most part, metamorphosised into instrumental opportunities for egoism and to impose special liberty in an attempt to highlight their symbolic superiority through consumer proclivities. Similar to participants' childhoods in relation to their violence, bonds and friendships are formed within the NTE based largely on place and space, but also within the divisions. For many of the participants, they still remained in contact with people around their area through local drinking culture, while belonging to separate social groups based on their 'unique culture', but the so called 'unique cultures' such as ravers and casuals were often not as tightly bonded together as some would suggest.

Wayne highlighted the splintering in allegiances amongst those present in the football

casual scene in the 1990s, and how bonds were largely a matter of achieving mutual goals of football violence rather than anything that could compare to the bonds forged in their local community:

> Wayne: "So all the lads who I saw as my proper mates who I saw regularly, they were all the lads from Bucknall. All the Stoke lads [members of the city's football hooligan firm] were never really my proper mates, we knocked about with each other because we had that shared interest at the football: fighting, drinking and taking drugs. I would not go on holiday with them like I did with the Bucknall boys… The idea of it being this tightknit community is wrong, there was loads of infighting between different areas, like Longton and Trentham. One of the times I got done was for fighting with a group of Stoke lads from Longton who were starting on Bucknall, that was where your real allegiances were really… I remember seeing [well known local hooligan] twat Lez at the bar for fuck all, I thought to myself 'he's stood side by side with you against every firm in the country for the best part of ten years, and you're willing do that?'".

Rob highlights how pseudo-loyalties are maintained in the alternative scene years after,when in reality the consumers are loyal to people who feel no need for their 'loyalty':

> Rob: "You think back to Pepe's, it was all these outcasts together, goths, new romantics and what have you. But when we put nights on at the Bouge which is basically a reunion for it, you get people who won't come because I'm DJing and not the bloke who was the original DJ. I speak to Dave [the former DJ] and he does not give a fuck, but he tells me he gets people coming up to him saying they won't go to my nights out of loyalty to him, which is bollocks really because neither of us care".

Marie and Frankie highlight the similarities in the dance scene and indie scene respectively, where loyalties are a façade that thinly veils the social harms and instrumentality of friendship in the NTE:

> Marie: "I think at the time you think everyone's really good friends, because there is no fighting and everyone is loved up, but that was just because of the drugs really. After a while you start to realise it's not all that… There was a girl who I became friends with in that scene, and she was my boyfriend's ex and basically become my friend because of that and once we split up she got back with him. There was a lot of underhandedness, a lot of people thinking they were better than others which you probably would not have got with the friends I grew up with as much. Like how Tracie used to speak to Gwen was horrible, like a piece of shit, and were all supposed to be best mates. Even

> things like people borrowing your dress and never give it back, does not take long to see the reality of what it was like underneath it all".
>
> Frankie: "Obviously when I go the Hut I know everyone and I feel safe and I will because I'm in that scene, but some of the people I knocked about with were just a bit much. Like fighting other girls because they are staring, constantly after drugs, being a proper beg for drugs as well, like they could not afford it. So, they'd start offering [sexual] favours to get coke or whatever. I think that is what the indie scene revolves around really".

While Beate (2020) argues that the dance and rave cultures of the 80's and 90's formulated tight-knit communities and long-lasting friendships because they would all chip in for fuel when driving to raves, this is clearly not the case for many of the participants, and highlights that the idea of community does not actually mean true friendship. While it is also in contrast to the various 'hoolie-porn' of Chester (2003) and Oxley (2023) that suggest a sense of communal togetherness in Stoke-on-Trent's hooligan scene. This also challenges the work of Nicholls (2018) and the supposed togetherness of female nightlife, with Marie and Frankie both acknowledging the social harms that are ever-present aspects to nightlife scenes. As Frankie says, there is a safeness to some degree in the different scenes, but it is under a blanket of competitiveness and violence. This is not to suggest these are not communities in themselves, but beneath the mutual drive to consume and forge an identity, there is little remaining in terms of significant bonds. Rather, friendships tended to remain stronger in the areas of life where traditional friendships would be formed – family, school, area – due to the significant time spent growing up together, where the importance of consumer identity formulation and subcultural allegiance was not as central.

As Smith (2014) also highlights, friendships have become increasingly commodified by the hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1984) of identity commodification rather than any real sense of kinship. In ways, the participants highlight how their friends within their

unique cultures are more than willing to utilise their *special liberty* to undercut their acquaintances in order to further their consumer identity in the NTE. As Winlow & Hall (2013) noted, the working-classes want to elevate themselves above those around them, and this data suggests that in these liminal spaces of nightlife indulgence where a marketised identity is of upmost importance, the willingness to override another's pleasure is commonplace.

'Real' Friends

Following on from this, the participants highlighted that they had a significant lack of real friends who they would see outside of drinking in the NTE. Most participants I spoke to could only name a limited number of 'close friends' who they had meaningful bonds with, with most participants stating they have no more than four friends who they would interact with sober (the maximum being ten for Jimmy, who puts this down to living in two different cities and being forced to form new relationships as a consequence).

Jimbob embodies this. While he has many acquaintances and is well known for being an ever-present in the cities' nightlife, his friendships are limited outside of this sphere:

> Jimbob: "There's not many people I see outside of drinking [laughs]. I see Cos, play tennis with Ron occasionally, and I'd go for a kickabout with the lads from the Captain's when I can, but its not really close friendships. I've got people within that circle I've got long term friendships with, but, I can give an example, it kicked off with the neighbours a few months back… after that happened I did not want to stay where I was, I wanted to fuck off, and Cos was the only person who offered to put me up and I would not forget that, cause he offered. I said to Jacob [a close acquaintance of Jimbob's who he spent a lot of time with growing up] could I come and stay at his if I need to… just for a night or two tops and he says sorry mate, no can do. Not to throw nightlife under the bus, but you can have a friendship within the NTE and not outside of that".

Virge also acknowledges the lack of friendship amongst the older cohort. Having been unemployed and in ill health for a number of years, he has found that friendships are largely tied to going out, and has sunk into an inertia of loneliness and alcoholism in the succeeding years:

> Virge: "Since I've been stuck at home not in work, there's not many people who come round to see me. Guigs is round often, but that is about it. Few others come around now and then, but we're always drinking when they do [I was offered a can of Special Brew as soon as I walked through the door]. But when I'm well enough to go out at the gigs and that I see everyone and it's like old times, but it can be lonely when you're in the house".

For the younger participants however, this is not necessarily seen as a negative by the participants however, with Gene acknowledging that this is just what they mutually all enjoy amidst the lack of options to do anything else:

> Gene: "Mate honestly, I do not see anyone without drinking [laughs]. Like we all like seeing each other, but we are not going go out for a coffee or anything, we're always just in the pub or out. We might do other things occasionally, going out for food or whatever, but drinking is always a part of that… I just hate staying in the house, so as soon as it gets to Friday that is why I want to go out, and the pub is the only place you really think of".

Sully embodies this reality. Through spending time with him, it is clear that he is very well known in the NTE and has no shortage of people to talk to when he is in pubs, bars, and nightclubs. Yet, he has few close relationships outside of the sphere, highlighting his conflicting dual identity of popular but lonely:

> Sully: "I literally just see the three boys if it's not drinking. Even lads who I see quite often like Shaun, there's always drink involved, and we do not have the kind of relationship I have with the boys, you know I see them lot as brothers. I suppose that might be my fault in a way because I always want to go out, but I do not know… I think that is why I go out though is to socialise with people, I like talking to people and meeting new people, and that is the only place to really do that".

As Smith (2014), Winlow & Hall (2006), and Lloyd (2013) have shown, the idea of friendship in the NTE is one that rarely transcends the hedonistic world of consumption into meaningful friendship, with the basis of most friendships boiling down to a mutual

agreement to consume leisure. But this begs the question of what it means to have a meaningful friendship outside of a vague construction that is the antithesis of harmfulness? As Hall et al (2008) highlight, the good has become undiscussed outside of its avoidance of mistreatment, and there is consequently little reason to abandon what is left of friendship when there is little positive construction of an alternative outside of pursuing personal and individual desires (also see Raymen, 2022). Rather, under the current epoch, the participants believe they find the good through their conceptions of personal pleasure that disregard the harms of others (Ibid.). The relationships of the participants are similar to those that Winlow & Hall (2006) highlighted, where relationships are formed based on what can be gained from them. But the data also suggests how the individuals exist within a dual identity, where their friendships do not provide the symbolic meanings to stop one from being lonely.

Effectively, the loose bonds formed in the NTE creates a *lack* in the individual, the same *lack* which is experienced when driven to keep consuming (see Zizek, 2006). Friendships are therefore to be consumed, as an object, that hold out the promise of pleasure but fail to deliver it (Winlow & Hall, 2013). Few of these friendships make it out of this phase of driven libidinal enjoyment due to the 'injunction to enjoy' imposed by liberal capitalism through its constant nurturing of desire but rarely transforming it into legitimate pleasure. As Winlow & Hall (2013:68) argue, 'we must invest heavily in the symbolism of consumer experiences and strive to attain them, despite being forever incapable of fully realising the condition of ultimate pleasure for which we are taught to yearn. We are compelled to seek enjoyment in an endless repetitive loop, and failure to be actively involved in the search for pleasure ensures the ignominy of cultural inconsequentiality and causes deep social anxiety'.

Under this fragmented *symbolic order*, friendships exist within the same milieu.

The Last Venue Standing for Socialisation

The social relationship between the NTE as a means of meeting people is well documented (Smith, 2013; Winlow & Hall, 2006), and this is something that is reinforced by the participants, who say this is the best and sometimes only way to enjoy socialising in the current era. Jimmy and Frankie highlight that this is important to them currently, often forming the primary reason for entering the NTE:

> Jimmy: "Well you meet new people, and you have a laugh with your mates and that, so I think that is more of a reason to go out over pulling. For some reason it's easier in that environment, like when we go out, we spend the whole night in the smoking area, smoking and talking to people we've never met before, you are not actually there for the music or dancing".

> Frankie: "Before I started going out, I was with my boyfriend so that was why I always stayed in, but going the Hut and the Deck meant that I started meeting new people and knocking about with different groups. Like I do not see many people who I went to school with, I only see two, then my best friend was my cousin, so it was a way to see more people".

For Gwen, the dance scene in the 90s allowed her to develop bonds and socialise outside of her negative homelife, offering a form of escapism from her week life discontent. For people such as Gwen, this meant knowing a significant number of people, even those who were from separate and conflicting groups:

> Gwen: "You were meeting new people who you would never interact with if it were not for the dance scene. You had our main group of girls but we met through work, but then you'd go out and you'd know all these different people who you could speak to through similarity basically. That was my main reason I think, because I was not happy at home with my daughters dad, that was the way to see people and socialise with people who I actually liked. But you'd know loads of different people just from being there. There was a killing in Hanley by a group of lads and we knew all of them, but we also knew the guy who they killed because we were always in the same places as them".

For Dale, sociality was dependent on the club. The gay clubs that he attended allowed

him to be himself and meet people who were like him, whereas a more rave inclined venue such as Glitz offered a different kind of sociality where it was largely smokescreen of euphoria masking instrumental individualism:

> Dale: “I suppose it was a way of meeting people, especially as a gay man going the Bar [gay club in Hanley] this was a place where you could meet people who were the same as you really, because everyone in there was actually gay, and people were not as open about it when I started going out. Places like Glitz were largely straight so you’d feel, not out of place, but you knew individually you were, I had not identified as having any sort of identity at that point… but there were not that many safe places that gay people could go and be yourself. But in Glitz, do not get me wrong it was very individualistic, like you’d go up with your friends but you did not have to speak to them all night, but you’d get a sense of community through the euphoria it created”.

The use of the NTE as a venue not just for solipsistic self-indulgence, but as one of the only areas available for people to interact with new people – outside of the digital sphere which increasingly dominates as the only forum for new 'friendships' – where it is enabled through the relaxation of people’s anxieties by intoxicants and the relaxation of legal and social restrictions (Smith, 2014), where concept of the carnival is marketised to the consumers. While the carnival traditionally would relate to the seduction of seeking adventure where social constraints are increasingly blurred (See Presdee, 2000), the data suggests that the anxieties caused by consumer capitalism and its drive to consume (Winlow & Hall, 2006) and friendship as an object of desire means that meeting people on a night out has become part of this carnival experience, as the potential to meet a wide range of people out of this zone tends to be limited.

While the participants were quick to acknowledge that these relationships were not based on close bonds, the few strong relationships that people have tend to still be strong. Here, as I have touched on previously, these friendships tend to be very similar to industrial capitalist friendships, formed on the basis of space, place, and a general sense of biographical similarity (see Winlow and Hall, 2006), but to a much less

frequent extent. I would again argue that this is a hauntological hangover of the past, where it would be normal for these bonds to be built, and such the remnants of this linger in the *imaginary*, but are rare for the overriding effects of individualistic consumerism.

Despite the acknowledgement of harm within the NTE, many of the participants remain tied to it as their withdrawal from can easily sever bonds that have been forged, as they no longer fit their instrumental purpose (Smith, 2014). Friendships are largely sustained through social media connection rather than in-person, meaningful encounters, where these friendships are largely non-existent (Cometta, 2023). This is representative of most spheres of commodified leisure, where the individualistic social behaviour is reminiscent of the economic market competition that is doxic to late capitalism, where atomisation is paramount unless there is a fundamental capital benefit (Hall et al, 2008). Where friendships do exist within the NTE, they are largely representative of 'amour-propre' (Hall et al, 2008), where competition is internalised to the extent where the subject can only feel 'psychic security' when he achieves dominance over others. This is prevalent amongst some of the participants. As mentioned previously, Nicholls (2018) suggests that bonds are formed through the NTE, reinforced through drinking, lubricating their slip into sociability. It is notable that there is an absence of critical discussion to why alcohol is desirable in this sphere, and why bonds fail to be sustained outside of it, failing to reflect the social dependence on the NTE as its consumers fade into irrelevance when they depart this social domain, despite her acknowledgment that they falter away from there.

Depressive Consumption

It was not unusual to see participants talk about issues such as depression when in the NTE and lean on their friends for advice and counselling, while others would be protective over their friends. This suggests that a dark underbelly of social life comes through in the NTE, with participants using this as a form of escapism from ill mental health, depression, and relationship woes. It is no surprise that young adulthood is linked with depressive elements such as these, as the capitalist system thrives off of the *objectless anxiety* – an impending sense of doom that threatens the subject but can not be placed (Hall, 2012) – due to the sense of social insignificance they experience in a culture that rewards consumption and rejects real community, driving them closer to the anxieties of *the real* (Hall et al, 2008). Such objectless anxiety has become a primary stimulant, informing the subject and their behaviour, with Kotze & Antonopoulos (2019:695) highlighting:

> 'At its most basic, this constitutes an irrevocable feeling of impending loss that must be guarded against. Devoid of a recognised object, a number of surrogate subjects emerge upon which the cause of anxiety can be successfully pinned… Crucially, within what has become 'a fractious society of enemies'… these surrogate forms are made up of equally anxious and competitive-individualist 'others' who pose a real threat to the dignity and identity of the self'.

The NTE here is used for escapism from the realities of life and the pains associated with (see Treadwell & Ayres, 2012), reverting to the *imaginary*, A realm of misidentification and trickery, and its urge to consume, unable to make sense of the woes due to the complete lack of coherent *symbolic order* (Hall, 2012). Jimmy and Sully in particular have become emotional on nights out on numerous occasions while I was

in the field with them, opening up to the friends they are closest with. For Jimmy, this has often been the case regarding his troubles in relationships, while for Sully it has been issues with his health and the feelings of loneliness.

The depressive elements associated with the NTE, and more specifically inebriation, shall be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but what this does highlight in regard to friendships at least, there is still a perceived close bond and expectation of support amongst the few close ties that exist. Whether the response from the friends is supportive or not is a different matter. I'd heard Davo for example on numerous occasions, offer little support to his close friends when they are depressed in the NTE. Jimmy highlights that when he mentioned his feelings of depression to him, he got a negative response:

> Jimmy: "Well considering he's someone who has had mental health problems himself he's not the best person to talk about this to. I was going through it, and I mentioned it to a few of the lads when we were out, and he just makes it worse if anything. I suppose he thinks he's helping maybe, but I do not think it does. You're sat their supposed to be having a good time, but you can not stop thinking about hanging yourself, and he's just like 'what have you got be depressed about, there's loads worse people out there than you and they are not depressed'. Like I do not know mate I just am, and being told that there is starving Africans does not exactly help".

This supports Winlow and Hall's (2006) thesis that even perceived close friendships are often fragile and reliant on injunctions to enjoy rather than anything deeper than subjective desires. This is merely an impeachment on the subjects' consumption, where he does not want to acknowledge the depressive elements of the system for this would in effect be acknowledging *the real* themselves. For the dismissive subject, it is better to remain in the *imaginary*, and cling onto it through desperation while sailing perilously close to *the real*. It is preferred to *fetishistic disavow* this, and not think of the consequences of the system and the NTE that thrives off it.

The Death of Friendships

On a similar note, it is not uncommon for close friendships to end or become splintered in the NTE. Sully noted how he acted aggressively to one of his close friends after being told by him that he had enough to drink:

> Sully: "Last week when I went out, I did not even remember properly until I next spoke to him, but I'd started on Ethan in the toilets of the Hut because he was trying say I'd had enough [drink], and we needed go home. Saying I was going bite his nose off and all this [laughs]. We're alright now obviously, but yeah just being a dick".

Wayne had previously acted violent after experiencing 'piss-taking' from one of his friends, an act that can quickly turn from jovial to violent when reputations are at stake (see Ellis, 2016):

> Wayne: "I was in The Garrison one night and a lad who I was mates with, Andy, started giving me shit about not going on holiday with the lads, just taking the piss out of me like because I could not go away with the boys because I'd just had our Alex. If it was the odd comment, you laugh it off but it was not and he kept on going on and on, so I told him to give it a rest but he did not. So, I just banged him on the dancefloor and put him down. It was a bit out of order really because I was his mate, but I did".

Jimbob highlighted further how putting a barrier on another's desire can lead to confrontation and fall outs within venues:

> Jimbob: "Well I fell out with Ron during a DJ set because the DJ's were not playing the music that he wanted, he wanted house and disco on, but the event was at a Caribbean bar so you've sort of got to play to the crowd and he was kicking off and started throwing pint glasses at taxi drivers in a tantrum, so after that I just thought fuck him. We've been alright when I've seen him since but yeah falling outs like that are semi-regular on a night out".

The sort of issues between close friends were somewhat common when it appeared to be stopping someone's consumption within the NTE. I'd seen a similar issue play out in the field between two participants who were close friends, Jimmy and Sully…

The night had been relatively uneventful as most nights were in the NTE. The three of

us had travelled to the south of the city to the nearby town of Southville and were in The Sail. There was a Ska cover band on in the pub that night and it was relatively busy. There was somewhat of an atmosphere between Sully and Jimmy, not that anything, at least to my knowledge, had happened between the pair other than Sully initiating the night out when Jimmy was not in the mood for nightlife. Sully was seemingly agitated, he had been having trouble with his ex-girlfriend at the time and was out in the NTE even more frequently than usual. After being in the bar for two pints he says 'its fucking wank in here lets go somewhere else', to which Jimmy replied 'we'll see in a min'. Sully went to the toilet and Jimmy says to me 'I do not know what's up with him, for once there is something on that we like and he's just wanting go somewhere else, I'm not being funny but I are not just going some shit hole that neither of us want go when we're enjoying it here, only reason we're out in the first place because he would not stop going on about it'. Sully comes back and says, 'right are we off then', to which Jimmy replies 'to be fair mate I'm enjoying it here, like it's our music I do not just want go somewhere else for the sake of it', I interject 'yeah it's alright in here like it's the type of music you do not normally get this anywhere else. Why do you want to go?'. Sully decides somewhat confrontationally 'right fine I'll go somewhere on myself then I'm ringing a taxi'. About a minute of brief and tense conversation succeeds this and I head to the toilet. As I walk back from the toilet to the bar Jimmy and Sully are engaged in a confrontation:

> *Jimmy: "Mate just fuck off; I do not know why you're kicking off because we're in a pub that you've decided you do not like for no reason".*
>
> *Sully: "Fuck off you're being pricks".*
>
> *Jimmy: "I'm not being a prick because we want stay here, we have go wherever the fuck you want to go all the time. You're just being a selfish cunt".*
>
> *Sully: "You what? Come on then".*

At this point I try to interject and get between the pair as Sully attempts to square up to Jimmy, this has little effect as he then tries to start on me. After what seems like a few minutes, he walks away and cries to himself at the bar while I try to ask what that was all about and what's brought this on. He tells me to leave him alone and leaves. Me and Jimmy sit back down in the beer garden, and I ask what started that:

> *Jimmy: "Well as soon as you left, he started saying you're a fucking dick and all this, basically just trying to start an argument, he'd do the same if I'd have been the one to get up. I just said he's not and he's carried on trying chat shit, so I've told him fuck off trying start shit because we do not want to leave. Just being a selfish cunt mate, why the fuck have we got go the place he wants to all the time, and he kicks off when we do not. Its proper bang out of order, I can not be arsed with it. I'm supposed be his mate not just a lift to a different pub".*

A few minutes later he returns, accuses the pair of us of bitching about him and goads me with the phrase 'take me down then big man'. He leaves and sends his apologies to the pair of us at 6 A.M the following morning.

Here we see further proof that the obstruction of consumption is merely enough for the splintering of friendships. When identities have been forged completely on the premise of the *imaginary* importance to consume, coupled with the expressive *special liberty* to not consider others in the furthering of their own interests (Winlow & Hall, 2015), this should be an expected response within the NTE. It also highlights that these drives override close friendships in the NTE, emphasising how fragile these connections between the participants are. The NTE is increasingly a sphere where such individualism has seeped significantly into the psyche so much that friendships largely only exist within these liminal spaces (Smith, 2014).

The nature of life is largely characterised by an Uber-individualism, where social interaction is largely met with suspicion and disinterest (Winlow & Hall, 2013).

Hollands (1995) highlighted decades ago that friendships were gradually faltering, with regular socialisation being increasingly rare. Now, friendships remain transient and fragile, only connected through a mutual desire for consumption (Winlow & Hall, 2006), which, as shown by these vignettes, can disintegrate upon mutual desires collapsing.

Relationships & Betrayal

Building on from this issue, is also the threat of close friends betraying one another in the NTE, especially when it comes to relationships. Both Wayne (1980s) and Jimmy (2020s) have tales of this type of betrayal from two different generations…

> Wayne: "We were down the White Lion it was something do with Stoner's missus at the time, and him and Doug had trouble over it. But she was a right bloody slut. Basically, I think his bird had got with Doug who was meant to be one of his best mates down the Pen and Stone has lost his head in there and he fucks off pissed up. But he'd gone home to get his dads shotgun to come back and fucking shoot him. I went with him and talked him out of it. If I were not there I do not know, he might've come to his senses or he might've come back to the pub with it… That sort of stuff did go on [friends going with people's ex or current girlfriend], it did happen quite regular, but it was always frowned upon, considered that you shouldn't do it especially amongst those of us who were supposed to be best mates. Leo [one of his closest mates at the time] went with Alex's mum once we finished, and we were not the same after, it sort of split up the Bucknall lot really".
>
> Jimmy: "Well my best mate at one time slept with my ex, on numerous occasions when they went on nights out together. I was with her for three years, lived together and everything. I would not have been as bothered if it was a girl who I was not that serious with, but I was. He went with her and obviously did not think of me like I did of him. Selfish fucker mate. I did not find out for ages, and since I've known him be smirking to people when she's been brought up when I'm there, so he's got no shame. Scumbag. I'd fucked him off by the point I'd found out but that solidified it for me, that is not a friend. When I found out I was on a night out and just started caning loads of coke, I was fuming… it's weird though, because you had some lads in the group who were trying to defend him, they knew and did not tell me, all sorts so that was another effect of it. And I do not know why because it's a shady thing to do and you shouldn't want people around you who'd do that to you".

The issue of relationship trouble and cheating was a common occurrence for the participants, with many of the participants from different generations having tales of

cheating or being cheated on while in the NTE. Jane reflects on how the very space that brought her and her partner together ultimately contributed to the breakdown of their relationship, highlighting the NTE as both a site of romantic connection and betrayal:

> Jane: “Well, I met my first Husband up The Garrison on a night out. That was sort of a reason to go out for a lot of people. He ended up carrying on going when we together and met someone else in there, that is why it ended”.

Similarly, Gwen speaks candidly about how dissatisfaction in her domestic life led her to seek intimacy elsewhere, using the NTE as a temporary escape from an unhappy relationship, despite the moral conflict it provoked:

> Gwen: “Well when I was with my daughters dad like I say I was not happy, so I used to meet other lads in Glitz. It sounds bad but I was not happy at home but I did not want to leave because of my daughter”.

Doc offers a broader commentary on the prevalence of infidelity among his peers, including himself, framing such behaviour as regrettable yet recurrent. His reflections expose the emotional toll that often follows these actions, even if they remain unspoken in the aftermath:

> Doc: “I’ve seen all my mates probably cheat on their missus at least one time. One of my friends is still seeing a girl now who he cheated on his last girlfriend with on a night out, so yeah it does happen, and from people you do not expect I from. They go out and do that and it changes their relationship. Yeah, I’ve cheated on a couple of girls since I turned 18, you feel like absolute shit next day and you realise what you’ve done and what a fool you are, but you’ve still got to go to your girl and be nice to them. I’ve been a coward and never told them and them relationships fizzled out”.

Pete’s admission, though laced with humour, underscores the temptation and moral ambiguity present within nightlife spaces, particularly for those in positions of social visibility like DJs. His comment reflects the normalisation of infidelity in certain NTE subcultures while still distinguishing between past and present behaviour:

> Pete: “Yeah I’m not going lie I’ve cheated before now, when you’re a DJ and that you sort of feel like you’ve got girls throwing themselves at you so I’m not going

> turn down a blowy behind the decks like [laughs]. But that is not right and I would not do it on my current missus".

There is often a form of moral disengagement that comes with cheating, exemplified through Dodds. I had asked him how he met his current partner after admitting to cheating in the past, and despite his description of her as an angel he offered a fatalistic belief that cheating is part of who he is which he cannot help:

> Dodds: "I used to see her where she worked at the time and I knew who her fella was and he used to treat her like proper shit like… I saw her on a night out after I split from my wife and I thought she was beautiful, like I could not believe her bloke would treat her like such shit when she was like an angel to me. We ended up chatting and then she ended up leaving her fella and we got together. But genuinely I've never felt this way about anyone I do not think, she's put a bit of weight on since like but do not we all."
>
> *OH: You're getting married soon, aren't you?*
>
> Dodds: "Well that has been put off for the time being, but we will. She caught me messaging other girls. I know, I just cannot help myself mate".

The issue of cheating and fragile romantic relationships can again be linked to the theory of infantilisation, and how it leads to an expressive form of *special liberty* – the embodiment of neoliberal tenets of greed and immediate gratification (Kotze, 2024). The 1960's saw the nuclear family as an ideal, and benefitted under the Fordist economic system (Smith, 2014). While participants are facing obstacles in their transition to adulthood due to economic instability (See Hollands, 1995), much of these obstacles are somewhat self-inflicted by their inability to form meaningful relationships due to their willingness to succumb to their desires (Zizek, 1991). As Smith (2014) highlights, the Freudian superego has gone through a process of reorientation to no longer inhibit the desire for narcissistic pleasure. A relationship merely acts as a physical embodiment of the superego, restricting the drives of consumption within the NTE and a distant reminder of larger commitments. This has largely been supported by

the post-1968 New Left, who have fought to see that sexuality and its permissiveness become part of the flexible structures of neoliberal life; a battle that has been more than embraced by consumer capitalism's embrace of libidinal drives.

Since the late 1960's and the gradual rejection of Keynesian economics after the cracks in the system begun to show (see Winlow & Hall, 2022), lead to a questioning of traditional Marxist dogma's such as Marx's dialectical materialism which predicted the internal contradictions of the logic of capitalism would lead to revolution (2012), but post-structuralism rejected the rigid class structures and economic determinism.

Amidst thinkers such as Marcuse (2012), the New Left interpreted the repression of such sexual urges as a form of totalitarianism that lead to fascism and would do so again. For Marcuse (2012), these repressed instincts should be liberated in the name of 'freedom'. Capitalism was happy to utilise this position to undermine the solidarity of the working-classes, with the traditional structures of the family, alongside school and work, being gradually eroded and exploited for consumer gain (Winlow & Hall, 2022). Rejection of the traditional grand narratives, which were by no means perfect, lead to an end of worker solidarity, and a sexual revolution leading to women being embraced into the workforce for no additional purchasing power and caused declining birth rates (Perry, 2022), which capitalists have exploited through getting foreign workers to come and replace them (see Winlow & Hall, 2022).

The Left liberated where the capitalists were given a mass of commodified consumers who had no loyalty to their kin or any belief system, the traditional universalism of the Left has been commodified by both neoliberal capitalists on the right and sub-dominant cultural liberals on the Left. The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments and relations of production (Marx and Engels, 2011),

and no longer are capitalists blocked in their endeavours from the working-class' perceptions of morality and national interest.

Infidelity & John's Special Liberty

The case of John is a noteworthy one, as he had cheated numerous times in the past, an act he claimed to feel guilt over and had confessed each time he had done so. John had also had an ongoing fling with an older woman who he worked with after they went on a night out in Newcastle-under-Lyme to the city's west. This occurred on numerous occasions after nights out despite the woman being married and having a small child. He stated that this ended after she had asked a friend for advice and what to do, and after being told by her friend that the behaviour was wrong, she cut John off. But he felt a more pronounced sense of betrayal after his friend cheated with his girlfriend when he was younger, and also when his closer friend slept with his ex, both situations occurring after a night out in the city-centre. Having spent time with John in the field, I had noted that this was a behaviour that was unlikely to stop unless he entered a committed relationship based on traditional notions of loyalty:

It was a Sunday afternoon and there was a band playing in a pub up Hillstown. A number of my participants were attending, and they had asked me to go with them. Despite being a Sunday and many of the participants and their acquaintances having work in the morning, the pub was full of young men and women gradually getting intoxicated and as the night drew close cocaine was increasingly being used. A girl was in the pub who John recognised and him, Sully, Davo and Jimmy, began speaking about her.

John: "Proper fancy her I do".

Sully: "She's mine mate you cannot have her [laughs]"

John: "She does not look like she does on her pictures but she's still fit. See how many pints I down and I might go over and embarrass myself".

Sully: "Nah you cannot do that I fancy her".

Jimmy:" She's single she is, but she's cheated on her last two boyfriends".

Davo: "She keeps looking at you [John], I reckon you're in there".

Sully: "When I saw her last week, she was looking at me all night, that is all I'm saying".

This led to an eyeroll by Davo who began to jest Sully over his apparent infatuation with claiming that girls are after him when his mates fancy them, after which he claims to only be joking. A few hours pass and John has since spoke to her a number of times and brought her a drink, but it does not seem like she is overly keen on his advances. It is clear there is a number of other men in the pub pursuing the girl, and Sully starts claiming that he has been rejected by her, which John says is not true. An hour before I leave, John advances have led to success as he has got the girls number and has kissed her. Both John and Sully are in relationships. I saw John a few days later. He explained that not long after I had left, himself, Sully and Davo had gone back to Sully's and carried on the evening until the early hours of the morning, fuelled by a bottle of rum and cocaine:

OH: Did you take that lass back with you?

John: "No, but I text her sister and she ended up coming up instead and I got with her. Poor pull from me. She ended up coming back mine in a taxi n'all but nothing happened and she left".

OH: Did anyone say owt?

John: "Nah not really, Sully was saying in the kitchen like how can I expect him look Jade [John's girlfriend] in the eye again and all this, well he was saying exactly the same thing earlier in the night".

This embodies the process of *special liberty* in relation to sex in the NTE, where shame

and guilt felt the next morning for a sense of betrayal, which can easily be neutralised by the intoxication and carnival within the NTE (see Matza, 1964), are not as strong as those felt when you do not give in to the libidinal desires to get whatever it is you yearn (Zizek, 1991). The *special liberty* imposed when being responsible for these acts is not felt when having these acts done upon you, highlighting the moral relativism within the permissiveness of sexual relations in the NTE. The NTE remains a prime venue for sexual infidelity, fuelled by a cocktail of alcohol and/or drugs combined an uber-individualist desire to seek instant sexual gratification (Briggs, 2013 b). The nightlife settings offer a prime venue for adulterous behaviour, with its availability of alcohol and drugs reducing inhibitions, which can help excuse their own guilt while still remaining positive about their encounters (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999), while the venues promotion and acceptance of visible sexuality (Nicholls, 2018) under a sheet of transient anonymity is arguably fertile ground for sexual betrayal for the individualistic consumer.

Casual Sex as a Social Transaction

Casual sex has been highlighted as a norm for youth and young adults in general (Currie, 2004), and as a way for young men to display their working-class status through sexual prowess (Beynon, 2002). There is the argument that sexual permissiveness has recently declined (see Wellings et al, 2019), although the prevalence of this amongst the compatriots of the NTE is arguably not consistent, as sexual advances remain relatively frequent if not always successful (see Nicholls, 2017).

The topic of sex and relationships was always frequent in the NTE, with relationship loyalty often being tested, while the single men and women saw this as the main area in which they could meet someone or engage in casual sex with someone new. This

has not seemed to change over the generations whatsoever, and was also the case for boys and girls alike, with girls not seeing this as an 'act of resistance' from the restraints of traditional gender roles (see Craine, 1997), but rather an expected and normalised part of nightlife culture with evidence suggesting that young women seek casual sexual encounters at rates not too dissimilar to men (Garcia & Reiber, 2008). This is despite perceived negative associations with female sexuality within the NTE, such as loss of social status compared to improved status with men (McKeen et al, 2022) and the potential for sexual violence (Quigg, 2024).

Kenny reflects on the highly sexualised nature of the rave scene, where 'pulling' was a central component of the night out, despite the ironic effect of ecstasy sometimes inhibiting sexual function. His account also reveals the social dynamics and informal hierarchies that governed sexual relationships within this subculture:

> Kenny: "Everyone was horned up [in the rave scene when on ecstasy] … never worked for me I could not get a hard on for a week afterwards, but a lot a people got the horn, it was all about pulling. And again, there was a hierarchy, there was certain lads and certain girls that absolutely stood out and everyone wanted to be with, and I suppose it was a little bit incestuous you know, there was a lot of people who would cop off with other people's missus, that is how it made you feel. But in between all that there was people trying have proper relationships so that got airy. It was very much of a free spirit thing, like hippies".

Marie articulates how male attention on nights out—while not always openly acknowledged—often served as a confidence boost, and she frames meeting her husband in such a setting as unremarkable and entirely ordinary, reinforcing the normalised role of the NTE as a matchmaking space:

> Marie: "You might not admit it when on a night out, but it's always a nice feeling when there is lads coming up to you trying to talk to you. It makes you feel good. I met my husband in The Place, it was quite normal".

Frankie, speaking from a contemporary standpoint, normalises the idea of going home with someone after a night out, highlighting a cultural shift where such behaviour is not inherently stigmatised, especially among women in her social circle:

> Frankie: "It's quite normal for us to go back with a lad who we've met on a night out, whether something comes from that is a different story. But we would not see it as someone being a slag because they've gone home with someone".

Doc's perspective underscores how the pursuit of casual sex is often a primary motivation for young men entering the NTE, especially in their late teens. His framing of a 'successful' night as one where he brings someone home reveals how masculinity is still often validated through sexual conquest:

> Doc "I think for me that is one of the main reasons to go out when you're single. Especially when you're like 18/19 it's the case for most lads. You go out to enjoy yourself but that is the main part of it really. It's a good night if you've brought a girl back home."

Yet, it was noted that sexual success was not always guaranteed, as Doc highlights:

> "It's easy to pull a girl, just like kissing them and that, but bringing a girl back is few and far between".

The death of traditional bonds and identity formation has led to the disintegration of positive relationships within the NTE, with the urban landscape promising the fulfilment of individual desires above all else. The sexual permissiveness increasingly mainstreamed by post-68 capitalism was further incorporated into the NTE, with casual sex and relationship seeking becoming an integral part of the NTE (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). The acceptance and prevalence of casual sexual encounters in alcohol settings are well known (See Hughes et al, 2011; Bellis et al, 2008; Plant & Plant, 2006; Measham & Brain, 2005), with sex replacing marriage as the main driving force behind

approaching the opposite sex (Hollands, 1995). This is evidence of casual sex becoming a mere social transaction in the NTE, where it is expected and normalised to pursue this mutual desire as a point of immediate gratification rather than the beginning of a long-term relationship.

Sexual Failure

For some of the male participants, this was harder than others. While the NTE flourishes off of the appeal of easy sex and a leisure activity that gives many opportunities to seek out potential partners for relationships or sex, for Jimbob and Davo this was not something that occurred. This seemed to effect men more than women in the NTE, as Jimmy highlighted in a field note:

> Jimmy: "it's different with girls because they do not find it hard to get laid. We have to try, they do not. they can get it whenever they want. Look how many lads go with girls below their level, everyone does it, I have, but girls do not because they do not feel the need to. If they're just shagging anyone its worse".

This is evidence of the potential for post-night out regret being higher for casual sex encounters over romantic connections (Fielder & Carey, 2010), with women more likely to feel regret than men (see Campbell, 2008).

Through time in the field, it was clear that for some participants, and also people I had met but not interviewed, it was normal to go through sustained periods of involuntary celibacy. Davo has been sexually active, but has slept with one woman since I started the study, a sex worker who he paid for while on a foreign holiday, while Jimbob remains a virgin, despite both being 25. Through the interviews, it was clear that this was due to personal anxieties that were not eased by entering the liminal spaces of the city's NTE, but arguably worsened by it.

Davo: “I probably pulled in pubs more, I was always better with girls that I know, I’m just more myself around people I know, if I do not know you I’ve got to be in the mood to speak, it takes me a while to break into people… if it happens it happens, if it does not it does not. I’m not that interested… I liked a girl who was my mate’s missus, we get on really well and she’s the type of girl I’d go for anyway… But yeah we were talking all the time and kissed and that but that is about it but I like Ray [her boyfriend] so it’s not happening again… I think I just want a nice person now really, like there was this girl I saw on this hike and she was just like ‘hi’ [said very enthusiastically] and I just thought she seemed like a really nice person, I want something like that. But I’d shag anyone really if the opportunity come up, but I just are not very good at talking to people. And I do not feel confident to shag someone until I’m pissed, I probably overthink it more than I should. But people ask all the time like ‘have you got a missus yet, like I do not want people thinking I’m gay obviously, just a self-conscience thing.”

Jimbob illustrates how involuntary celibacy can stem from internal anxieties and a sense of disconnection from the sexualised norms of the Night-Time Economy, where the pressure to perform masculinity clashes with his introverted nature and desire for meaningful connection:

Jimbob: “I’ve never thought to myself right I’m going out tonight because I’m going pull and if I do not pull, I’m not going home, but I know people are definitely like that… I’d like to see people face-to-face rather than text them over a screen, sort of get some chemistry with them and then go from there.

OH: *Why do you think it’s never happened?*

Jimbob: “I do not know, probably ego. I got good grades academically, I play a few instruments, my social media looks cool, it should be a given that girls want to chat to me, but it does not work like that. I’m introverted as well. I think if I drink it makes me be an extroverted introvert and be myself, I guess, but being introverted and having deep thoughts but not knowing how to process them without sounding like a pillock when I’m sober that is a bit if an obstacle for me to get over in terms of getting laid”.

OH: *Do you want a missus?*

Jimbob: “Yeah, it would be nice… I’m not interested in one-night stands, it’s just aimless fucking to me. I suppose you want to a bit first, but you’re not going meet your wife that way. On the surface it just seems throw away to me. A few weeks ago on a night out someone was giving me signals and her fella was literally metres away… she knew the DJ and we got chatting for a bit, turns out they found out that day her fellas mum’s got stage four cancer… but she was giving me signals and saying her and her fella are quite open-ended, I was like appreciate that but he’s just had some sensitive news so you should tone it down a bit. Probably should have said not that I’m not interested. Tried to follow it up but I do not know where I stand with it currently. But the politics

> that would follow that night if I did, like a one-night stand, to fuck someone and then have nothing do with them is just empty to me it's just noise".

For Davo and Jimbob, it was clear there was still some connection to traditional working-class notions of the family and traditional family life highlighted by their hope that something more permanent would come out of their interactions within the NTE. But the data suggests that this could be due to lack of success rather than close ties to this way of thinking. The NTE thrives upon the *pseudo-pacified* competition between different people, competing to outdo one another through sex, physicality, fashion, or through drinking and snorting copious amounts of inebriating substances (Winlow & Hall, 2006), and those who are left behind are left with little else other than their anxieties that resulted in their failure in this sphere. The pursuit of relationships are often waylaid by the perceived availability of future casual sexual encounters (Winlow & Hall, 2006), but when these are not forthcoming, the traditional sexual relations fortified within committed relationships can be an outlet that are pursued as this will steady the pursuit of libidinal urges somewhat rather than because it brings mutual kinship and love.

While, for researchers such as MacInnes (1986) who saw the growing tide against men through the liberation of traditional outlets such as work and the family as a 'thoroughly good thing', fails to consider the effects this has upon those who completely fail in the *imaginary* sphere of consumption. The participants highlight that this is a debilitating process which plays on the insecurities produced by the system and attacks participants self-confidence when they fail to live up to the norm (Bauman, 2000). This highlights the debilitating process that consumerism causes in the NTE when people are socially excluded from consumption where this is the main place to

seek sex.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented the fragile concept of community within the city's NTE, building on the previous chapter of individualism by contextualising the issues of egoism in regards to expressive *special liberty* in regards to friendships, relationships, and sex within the wider context of neoliberal consumerism and its effects on these facets. The chapter has highlighted the growingly atomised individuals within the NTE, who are still driven by pursuits of casual sex, transactional friendships, and unloyal relationships, highlighting their willingness to enact their *special liberty* to override the pleasure of those they are meant to be friends and in relationships with. In conclusion, this has shown the idea of community is dead, and the venues of nightlife establishments act as an arena to express this. The next chapter shall highlight the role of inebriation in the NTE, and how this has become a core part of the participants social lives, while looking at what drives them further into the hedonistic consumption of drink and drugs.

Inebriated Leisure

Introduction

The previous two chapters have highlighted the growth of individualistic, hedonistic behaviours present in the NTE, and how they are rooted in the wider structures of a consumer culture that promotes individualism through its 'injunction to enjoy'. The data and analysis has highlighted that these attitudes have had an effect on relationships and friendships within the NTE.

This chapter will build on the previous chapters by looking at individualism and hedonistic behaviours through participants attitudes towards inebriation. While alcohol and drug use has been touched upon in previous chapters, as the NTE largely revolves around these two issues, this chapter will explore the issue in greater depth. This shall be done through drawing attention to the drive for consumption through becoming inebriated, while also highlighting the nihilistic behaviours that the participants express. This will again be explored by addressing the wider context of consumer culture and neoliberalism.

The Death of Night-Time Leisure Venues and the Rebirth of the Consumer Drive

The older participants that I spent time within the NTE, highlighted that Stoke-on-Trent once had a vibrant and eclectic NTE from the 1970s until the mid- 2000s. While the participants' experiences were each from different eras, it was clear that there had been a shift from the largely social drinking environments of the 1970s, to the increased marketisation of nightclubs and its' seemingly positive correlation with

increased exposure to recreational drug use, in recent years. Yet, despite some differences and gradual alterations, venues remained consistently busy.

Jane highlights the traditional drinking practices that were present in the city during the 1970s and 1980s, with working men's clubs and community pubs being present alongside the rise of nightclubs:

> Jane: "Well it was the norm for most people to go the [working men's] clubs. Then you'd go underage discos… I was married young, so we used to go the Anchor pub but I'd been the Garrison before then… 'Castle was good as well. When I was with my husband we'd go Ocean which was a big nightclub. It was always busy, having queue to get in. Always a lot of stag-do's and hen-nights up there in the week as well, so it was always busy… It'd start at 7 and be done by about 1. Nothing like nowadays when they do not go out until 1 and stay out until 4".

Robert highlights how the NTE at this time was enabled the inexperienced consumer to enter a world that was unbeknown to them prior to entry, such as prostitution and homosexuality:

> Robert: "There was always things going on up Hanley or even just on the estates. Loads of pubs that are not here anymore. And in them days the streets were full seven days a week… There'd be pubs and bars that were connected to different scenes. the Mirth which was like a rocker pub, same as the Black Lion and the moon… and the Gazelle [all demolished pubs on the same street in Hanley]. It was full of prostitutes, gay men. Even the guy behind the bar was gay. Completely different set of people. After going in there for about three or four weeks, guy behind the bar says, 'if you want a late drink, I'll take you somewhere.' We were only fifteen, so we were naïve at this age. He took us to this old factory, down through this door and then this other door, and then this hatch opens, and they let us in to this dingy room with lights going everywhere. We clicked in when we saw men kissing men that it was not what I was normally exposed to. Not saying its wrong but it's not for me. We got thrown out because my mate hit a bloke who was coming on to him, but we're getting thrown out onto the street and next minute we hear. . . 'queer bastards', 'fucking queers, get em.' Bunch of rockers coming to queer bash us. So we got quite the introduction into the gay community, rocker community, and prostitutes."

Virge, Jodie & Alex all highlight the different options in the cities NTE from the 1980s to the mid-2010s, offering the consumer choices between different venues to attend and

attach their identity to:

> Virge: “Well, we lived for going out back then [early 80’s until the 90’s]. The clubs were always rammed. You used to have to have membership cards to get in places like Pepe’s. We went the first acid night up Hanley, all sorts. There was something for everyone”.
>
> Jodie: “You’d go down The Ship from the age of like, fifteen [late 1980’s], and everyone you know was in there… Then, when I got my boyfriend at sixteen, we’d go up Hanley. Places like Marsh’s, Blues House, Taylors’. They were more like trendy bars. Thought we were dead good. Trendy people. Did not get alternatives like you’d get in the Garrison. Then I started going Dome in 91’. Saw loads of people I grew up with and I started going every week on a Saturday. Sometimes go Erratic or Move as well on a Friday. And when Dome shut in October 92,’ we started going Glitz”.
>
> Alex: “You know like when you’re on holiday. . . and the streets are rammed? That is what it was like then [mid-2000’s to mid-2010’s]. Loads of clubs. They were all busy. People trying get you into different bars with different offers on. It was great”.

The data above highlights that the Potteries, alongside other areas around the country, was exposed to a rise in leisure consumption based around drink and, increasingly, drugs, from the 1970’s onwards (see Smtih, 2014). This was a new and exciting time. A new *Imaginary* had been produced based on supposed freedoms: the youth were no longer beholden to the restrictive post-Fordist *Symbolic Order,* with its emphasis on attachment to place and its reinforcement of traditional and rigid structures of the family, sexuality and race (Telford, 2022). From the late 1960’s, there had been a clear move to reject this traditional way of life, infiltrated by an increasing consumption of pop culture. With films of the *New Hollywood* era, such as ‘*Easy Rider,’* portraying the traditional Western norms as repressive; an attack on the liberated youth who had to break free from the restrictions (Tarantino, 2022).

When participants speak of a NTE, they are not speaking of what had been the traditional NTE, such as communal centres of tight-knit-estate leisure. Although these did still exist, it was the corporate locations of the town centres that they had clearer

memories of. Where new identities could be formed outside of housing estates, making the traditional, communal pubs increasingly obsolete (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). This was proceeded by the decline in the traditional values of industrialism. Work would become increasingly precarious, ununionised, and poorly paid amidst the state managed decline of mass industry (Lloyd, 2013), while simultaneously, the nuclear family would become increasingly unstable as new drives for desire would supersede the longing for meaningful relationships (Smith, 2014). This is not at the behest of the marketised state however, on the contrary this has been supported by the neoliberal project, only restricting those who overstep the blurred boundaries of acceptable hedonistic behaviour, while supporting capitalist's ventures in the NTE to offset the death of prior notions of community (Smith, 2014). As Hall et al (2008:201) highlight, from this period, 'more and more individuals were enrolled into consumer culture, becoming ever more active in its reproduction and less interested in the politics of social democracy'.

While for Marx, religion was the opium of the masses, with its distorting qualities numbing the oppressive nature of capitalism; the rise of neoliberalism highlighted, it is in fact, consumption of individualistic hedonism that offset the anhedonia that would be felt by the loss of traditional political, work, and family life, appearing as a thin veil covering the increasing post-industrial exploitation (Winlow & Hall, 2006). This can be explained by the concept of *Infantile narcissism*, where a sense of helplessness and insignificance influences the individual to acquire whatever they desire without the restraining influence of moral prohibitions or wider societal expectations. Under this epoch, where pleasure is attained through consumption, the drive to consume is imperative. This could previously be restrained by the symbolic order that put

emphasis on other passions, but with the destruction of this order and the lack of a coherent replacement, consumer culture became dominant (Hall et al, 2008). The capitalist industries were more than willing to exploit this infantile drive to consume (Frank, 1997) with its seductive offer of both freedom and pleasure that the New Left were also championing. And such freedoms were found in the ecstasy of the rave scene or the *carnival* of busy high streets offering inexpensive alcohol. In essence, consumer capitalism has during this period, provided the means for hedonistic pleasure in the NTE while embracing the offset of traditional systems of identity and value (Hall et al, 2008).

This capitalisation of alcohol-based leisure can be clearly seen throughout the data increasingly as the years go by. With Jane, the venues of the early 1970's largely mirror the experiences within traditional working men's clubs and pubs of her estate, but with the upside of listening to different musical genres and meeting people from beyond the local area. In effect, broadening one's choice to experience largely the same thing. But by the time we get to Robert, Virge, and Jodie, this was significantly more intense. Now, rather than having similar experiences in different settings, the consumption was established with the intentions of experiencing what was at one time off-limits. Whether it be prostitutes, homosexuality, acid, or ecstasy, there was something to be consumed that had not been before. It is also telling that this was the zenith of the neoliberal project that had left industrial areas such as Stoke-on-Trent a shell of its former self, as its main sources of economic production were abandoned with little to replace them (see Telford, 2022; Winlow & Hall, 2022; Winlow et al, 2017).

The *Jouissance* as discussed in the previous chapters, is once again present here. Poverty, that was increasingly prevalent during this time, was largely an afterthought.

Participants developed signifiers of wealth through their consumer identities and embraced the emerging 'counterculture'; as long as they had a good time, that was all that mattered. It did not matter if they had very little to show for the little money that they earnt during this time, as the money they had was spent on consumptive pleasure that was the infantile desire (Hall et al, 2008).

For people like Virge, 'fun' candidly epitomised existence at this time. He now has very little to show for his hedonism during this era: with few lasting relationships; a strained relationship with his son, - that he did not wish to talk about at any depth - and navigating life alone while struggling with alcohol dependency. This is the result of *Jouissance*. The never-ending quest for the fulfilment of desire has not, and cannot, result in its actual fulfilment, and a clear lack in anything of meaning that he has been left with (Zizek, 2006). Again, this is *fetishistically disavowed*, as it is better to exist within the *imaginary* of consumer pleasures such as drugs, alcohol, and nightlife than it is to expose oneself to *the real,* where the reality of his situation is clear (Zizek, 2008).

By the time Alex started to enter the NTE in the mid-2000's, the venues of inebriation largely acted like any other capitalist business, attempting to entice the willing consumer into any number of venues with offers and deals that remain the same week-by-week yet exist to make the consumer think they are getting a better deal, like a never ending DFS sale in the marketplace of nightlife consumption (Frank, 1997). A *Disneyized* (Bryman, 2004; Hayward & Turner, 2019) experience, where the high streets in the area's NTEs compete with one another to offer similar, but different, experiences within the nightlife. The *hybrid consumption* that the NTE offers means that the distinctions between each venue are largely obsolete (Bryman, 2004) since

they all are dependent on the same hedonistic pleasures.

While in Hayward & Turner's (2019) data, what set apart each of the different clubs would be its exclusive experience. For Alex, this is the 'vibe'. When choosing which club to go to, they all largely fulfil the same principle desire, while, at the same time, in the consumer market, they all represent a different alternative to the user, one of which they feel a compulsion to enjoy (Bauman, 1999). This also allows the consumer to be fluid with their identity, depending on what offers the most 'social clout' at the time. No longer is identity split between the 'alternatives' of Pepe's and the 'ravers' of Dome, whose marketing was based largely on the identities of the consumer, as the consumer often feel little meaningful attachment to the identities. As Hollands (2002) states, there are still divisions in the dark, but these are malleable, dependent on what is being marketed (Frank, 1997).

There is a clear decline from this point to the modern-day post-covid city nightlife where the field data was collected. The younger participants highlighted that this once extensive nightlife scene had diminished to such as degree that it was no longer recognisable:

> Jimmy: "I think its terrible. So, even compared to when I was eighteen, and I'm only twenty-four now, the amount of places that have closed down. There's less options. The city centre's a lot quieter than it used to be just a couple of years ago. You can walk around and not see anyone outside a club. People would rather stay at home or in the pub later for cheaper than they would in the club. A couple of venues are probably worth going to, but you could not do them all the time… There is just less choice. I'd still go Hanley if we're going to a club,because I do not think Newcastle is good at all. It's just shit. Literally no variation at all. Same sort of daft pop music.".

> Jimbob: "We had the Pit, the Hut, the Switch were always good for music. It was dead busy, and I met lot of new people… places like Manhattan, Ozzy's, Amnesia, Rio, but half of them are gone now. It's not as busy is it? Back then most clubs were busy to some degree, and there'd be slightly different vibes.

> There is new places like Tiki's and the Deck, but it does not really offset what's been lost… I'm not satisfied with the state of nightlife. I tend to be going the Deck every week when I'd prefer to be exploring a few places if I can. It could be more populated, specific events can have a cracking turn out… so I know there's a network for it but it's a complete lottery. It can be dead on a Friday and be turning people away the next night because its full".

> Sully: "It would have to be something serious for me not to go out on a Friday night, and it's never just a quiet one either. Might start off in the pub straight after work, but I'll end up in either the Hut or Rio and come back about 5. I know it's not great, but I can have a dance and I can socialise with people. I just wish it was a bit more lively and we had the options that we did when we were younger."

Despite such feeling towards the current NTE, it did not stop the participants from entering this sphere, even if when interviewed, they criticised it. Davo was one such example. He decried the Hanley of the 2020's as 'wank' and its consumers as having a 'small town mentality, but we're just a big town', and for this reason he would not enter the city's main NTE again. Despite his issues with the nightlife, he has since returned, and I predict will continue to do this in the future. This has been a recurring theme throughout the data collection: the rejection of the NTE and claiming you would not return yet doing so after a few weeks.

This happened almost every time I entered the field with Davo and happened on numerous occasions with others such as Jimmy and Doc. Jimbob was interesting in this regard, as he would continuously claim that he is 'calming down' from his frequent engagement with the NTE, but it was hard to see how this was a case when entering the field with him did not decrease. Jimbob explains what he meant by 'calming down' in his interview:

> Jimbob: "I feel like its largely to do with living situation. So, when I was living with Jude in Southville I could be out every night of the week if I wanted because I was living right next to the bars. It just all became a bit too much when you're living with someone who is that way as well. We'd be out without fail all weekend and it

> caused problems between the pair of us. It can be fine, but I do not want it being brought back to where I'm living and being woken up at five in the morning because he's come back pissed… I still go out every weekend now. Both days of the weekend . . . probably twice a month".

The need to still consume in the NTE, despite not enjoying it or having a limited desire to take a step back from hedonistic behaviour can be explained through the aformentioned restructuring of the superego. In traditional societies, the superego was rooted in religious and moral codes. In consumer culture, however, it becomes entangled with desire and consumption (Zizek, 2002). As argued throughout this thesis, the superego now indulges the subject, urging constant consumption in pursuit of fulfilment and validation from the Other (Lasch, 1979). Guilt no longer stems from moral failure, but from the failure to enjoy; a demand placed upon the subject by the consumerist superego (Winlow and Hall, 2015).

Cities such as Stoke-on-Trent have attempted to reinvent themselves from post-industrial arenas of leisure and excessive consumption (see Hayward, 2004) to provide for the reorientated superego and the drive to consume, which has been reinforced through the delivery of images and media of marketised pleasure (Winlow & Hall, 2006). This had previously worked in the city, as highlighted by the older participants anecdotes. The clubs and pubs of the town centres offer a location where excessive desires can be (un)satisfied and the 9-5 societal norms can be transgressed (Winlow & Hall, 2006). This drive to consume is compounded by the consistent Lacanian '*object petit a'* that is encountered, as the consumptive leisure pursuits of nightlife revellers fail to fulfil their impulse as it is the *unattainable object of desire*, superseded by the next impulsive desire, in an endless cycle of consumption (Hall et al, 2008). Hence, this explains the self-perpetuating drive to engage in a NTE where enjoyment is so elusive.

However, the participants allude to the fact that their needs are not only not satisfied, but rather they are not provided for. Smith (2013) highlights that his participants within the NTE have limitless opportunities to consume varied subcultures in their construction of a consumer identity in the NTE, fluidly converging from one scene to another and acquiring a cocktail of identities while remaining loyal to none (see also Bauman, 2007). For the participants here though, capitalism has not kept her end of the bargain, for the drive to consume has been instilled within the participants through the *imaginary*, where it must choose where to indulge in the *stupid pleasures of consumption* or feel the shame of the commodified superego (Zizek, 2008), while the post-industrial leisure facilities that capitalism promised have come and gone.

No longer is Stoke-on-Trent renowned for its rave clubs and the diverse choice of venues to attend that the older participants discussed. Instead, the nightclubs and pubs are dying frequently, with one club closing down less than two years after opening (Andrews, 2023). The 2008 financial crash, brought to the surface the reality of neoliberalism and its faulty symbolic order, but what followed was very little change. Instead, years of recession and austerity measures exacerbated the issues as the NTE begun to slowly die. The next financial and medical disaster, Covid-19, all but put the nail in the coffin of a once thriving nightlife as it became clear that there was little left (Tariq, 2020). The industrial smog had finally lifted to reveal a skyline of takeaways and derelict buildings.

While consumer capitalism justifies hedonistic and excessive consumption through legitimising the idea that 'greed is good' (Winlow & Hall, 2022), it has not been good for the consumers who buy into this world view in their urge to escape *the real.* But there also remains a negative and depressive sense that nothing can change this

(Fisher, 2009). For many participants they do not hold the economic capital to indulge in the greed that some others could, such as weekly trips to the epicentres of hedonistic nightlife in Manchester or London, or 'doing Ibiza'. No. They are trapped within their own liminal space that has failed to deliver in its promise of decadent consumption. Fisher (2014) when discussing London, highlighted that 'London is a wounded city', haunted by the ghosts of what its nightlife culture used to be. If London, one of the epicentres of nightlife in Europe (Saddler, 2021) is haunted, the Potteries is cursed.

Sombart (1998) highlighted that capitalism cannot birth its successor and is declinist by nature. The modern-day Potteries is now evidence of his prediction as it continues to reproduce the drives while failing to provide an acceptable path for it to be explored. But, how does the Stoke-on-Trent subject react to the inability to succeed at what it is driven to? It is clear that the participants have not rejected the consumer drive and retreated into the old stabilising structures of strong social bonds. On the contrary, their drive remains the same, but they are no longer of use. They have become *redundant drives.*

Consumer capitalism created a culture of consumption where individuals' identities and social status became closely tied to their ability to acquire and display 'luxury' material wealth (Sombart, 1967). The system has failed to provide the security of family and friendships, while displays of wealth and consumer capital overrides character and deeds as a source of value and status (Hall et all, 2008). The drives inherent to the system simply cannot be met, nor can they be counterbalanced by superficial bonds (Winlow & Hall, 2006). When the drives are redundant, it runs the risk of exposing *the real* and the anxiety and dread that it causes (Zizek, 2008), which

will lead to *psychic insecurity* where the subject will be compelled to seek solace in the *imaginary*, (Lasch, 1985).

Psychic security refers to a sense of inner stability and emotional well-being (Lasch, 1985), which is secured through traditions, shared histories, strong bonds and ties to social systems (Briggs, 2013b). This can no longer be fully attained, but if the culture of narcissism that replaced it is now redundant, that will create even deeper *insecurity*; the subject experiencing real consequences, including but not exclusively, serious mental health problems, feelings of isolation, and recourse to more drink and drugs. Hence, the subject continues to indulge in the NTE as this is all that is available to them and one of the only places where identity and meaning can be formed through its abundance of drink, drugs, sex, fashion and violence (Raymen, 2022).

Illicit Drugs

A core part of the modern-day NTE in the Potteries is the drug trade. While in the past this was a somewhat rarer occurrence – Jane states 'back then (the 1970's) you did not really see anyone doing drugs, you would not know where to start in terms of getting any.' Throughout the ethnographic research, it has become clear that drug use is normalised and has been since the 1980's (Moyle 2023). However, it is not to say that drug markets have not changed in recent years and this has impacted which drugs are being taken.

In previous years, from the 1980's up until the mid-2000s, cocaine was used, but less so than other drugs such as ecstasy, amphetamines, and LSD. Participants who were in the NTE during this period highlight the prevalence of these other drugs:

> Kenny: "For every genre of music there's a drug . . . and for us it was E's [Ecstasy]. Coke [Cocaine] was once for the elite but now everyone can have a

> line of coke whenever they want. I was 21 when I first did cocaine, and it was quite a big thing then. Like you did not really know if you should take it or not because it was not what we were used to. I was surprised when my mate got it. I was 50/50 on it but I had a go and it was fine, but brown [Heroin] I would never do. You'd do ecstasy, phet [Amphetamine], acid [LSD], magic mushrooms [Psilocyibin], if it was the right season, because that is what we knew".

Alex shares a perspective from high school from the 2000s, describing the range of drugs popular at the time, and how cocaine was rarer due to its cost:

> Alex: "We started in high school and it would be whizz [Amphetamine], tabs [Hydrocodone or Dihydrocodeinone], pills [Ecstasy], ket [Ketamine], and then Mkat [Mephedrone]. Some people used to do Geeb [GHB] in the pubs. Coke was rarer because it was more expensive".

Marie notes the mid-1990s drug culture, where ecstasy remained the most prevalent drug while amphetamine was a cheaper alternative to cocaine:

> Marie: "Everyone was on ecstasy, and then speed [Amphetamine] was big as well. Coke did come in, but it was never as popular because it was seen as a rich person's drug and most people could not afford that".

Jodie similarly notes the prevalence of drugs other than cocaine during her participation in the city's 1990s nightlife:

> Jodie: "I took my first pill third time I went Dome… and that was that then, and that progressed on to whizz, so we'd have a wrap of whizz and drop an E when we were in there, and then sometimes we'd have trips [LSD], and I was like that for four years… 25 quid for a pill, tenner for a wrap of whizz, trips were a fiver".

This is vastly different to today's drug markets in Stoke-on-Trent. This is not to say that such substances are not taken at all – although amphetamines and LSD have seemingly fallen out of favour with the populace and are harder to acquire – but cocaine is much more widely used than in previous years.

Throughout the fieldwork, I spent time with people under the influence of various drugs. It was clear that for most people cocaine was the drug of choice, but also the venues in which drugs were being taken had changed. While ecstasy would be taken

by the cohort, this was usually at raves, which were often few and far between and normally out of the city. Cocaine was seemingly a drug that could be taken almost anywhere by the participants. While everyone made jokes about Gene's brother being half passed out in a pub in Hillstown after taking half an E, very few took issue with the almost constant stream of intoxicated men shuffling into toilets in twos and threes and coming back looking less affected by their alcohol and more confident in their stride. This is not to say everyone used cocaine or drugs at all, both Brogan and Izzy had no interest in taking drugs of any kind, but this was the exception rather than the norm.

Jimmy and Sully note that cocaine has been normalised, while they prefer to use it in a more social environment over somewhere where they would be dancing due to its impact on sociality:

> Jimmy: "It's completely normal, and I think that is vile. It's as normal as having slightly too many pints because its so available and everyone knows someone who also takes it… Coke has always been seen as all the movie stars did it in the 70s, all the rock stars did it in the 80s and 90s. It's available for everyone now but its still seen as quite upmarket even though it's quite a grim thing to do. I think a lot of people would look at it as quite classy. But there's people who go out and have a pint and crave getting a bag in. I think I take it because I've got a bit of a propensity to binge drink and I know if I'm out drinking all day. I will not make it, or I will make a fool out of myself and it sobers you up. There's times when I've taken it because I just feel like fuck this, to almost make myself worse. Might as well get fucked out my head… but I want to be in an environment where I know I can talk to people: in a house, in a pub, in bars. I've never understood people who take cocaine and go out clubbing and dancing because it makes you want to talk to people".

> Sully: "You would not take ecstasy really, other than at raves. It's just coke really… or ketamine but it's a bit too heavy for me. The other week Gregg gave me some powder that I thought was coke but it turned out be Ket… Went to my car, tried to put key in the ignition, stripped off and threw up everywhere. Woke up the next day at three in the afternoon. If I'm out with lads who do not do it [Cocaine] I wont do. But if it's with Davo, Jimmy, I'll almost definitely do it. . . But I'll never buy it myself. I'd rather do it in a pub because its social. It makes you want to talk loads of shit. You can not go anywhere without it. Like Hillstown never used to be massive on drugs but now everyone is on it, everyone who takes it will be on it. But it's nice doing it in the pub because you can just chat shit with your mates all night".

Doc highlighted how cocaine become part of his night out ritual, stating that as soon as he had his first drink his craving for cocaine would begin:

> Doc: "My first time was in the Casino and I was curious so I had a bit of coke and it fucked my head all night. I was drunk anyway so my head just went fucked up. We started getting into the rave scene, me and the lads… and people would be popping Gary's [Ecstasy] and we started. Drugs never used to work well for me. I used to lose my head. But because I saw all my mates doing it, I used to carry on doing it and it became the norm to drop three or four Gary's in one night… As I got older and got a bit more money, Coke got more frequent and I normalised it. Before it used to make me lose my head, it got to the point where it would sober me up. If I was too drunk, I'd bump some coke and it would keep me at a level. It become part of my routine of going out even though I never had intentions of doing it on a night out. As soon as I sat down and that drink hit my lips, it was game on… It became part of the night. Every week, a vicious circle. I'd feel like shit after until Thursday, then Friday, I'd feel fine so I'd be back in the pub and we start again… but MDMA [Ecstasy], ket and that, that is what you'd do at raves or Creamfields. We haven't done that for years. It became Coke that we were doing frequent".

Gene has similar issues with the drugs, arguing that alcohol makes him want to use cocaine in his hometown where it is more widely accepted than most other areas in the data:

> Gene: "I was doing a fucking shit-load of drugs mate at uni. It was ridiculous… Sometimes I'd just go round my mates and sniff a load of gear, and all we were doing was sat in his living room with some music on, and then I'd come back on the weekend and get on it then. On Friday and Saturday… I still haven't really stopped. I just do not do it as much. As I grew out of raves and pills and that, just go the pubs at the weekend, everyone in the pub does coke. Coach & Horses in the town where I live, literally every person in there is doing it. There's drug dealers in there, people standing around keyed up, queuing up for the cubicles to rack a line up, and this is just the 18-year-olds. When I started going the pub at 18, I never thought it was that big unless I were not paying attention… My brother got into it when he was like 17. Probably worse for him because he did not want to feel like he was missing out because he was out with the older lads… That is just a normal Friday though. Everyone is fucking on it. What happens is as soon as you go out and you've had a pint, two pints, someone mentions coke… but no will do it on their own. They'll only do it if someone will do it with them… Just a wreckhead town really… It was too expensive to do a lot at uni but when I finished and I started earning a bit more money, when I came back home I started doing it. Get a text every Friday, 3 for 90! One day only! But its not one day only because I got the same text last week n'all. And you spread that out, so its cheaper because you're not going to keep that all to yourself… But I'd never have taken it if I did not drink. Its drinking that makes me want it. If it was that addictive I'd want do it in the week and wake up and do it. Alcohol is the worst drug because I would not

want to do it sober. I did it in Benidorm but I would not again.".

While Spicer (2023) is quick to label cocaine use as being a 'Generation X' problem rather than 'Generation Z', this was clearly not the case for the participants I interviewed. While some of the older participants still used illicit substances, cocaine use was completely normalised amongst the younger generation of participants. The drug people choose should be seen alongside the venue in which they are be consumed and not separated from this, as this is vital to understanding current drug markets.

As previously discussed, in the Potteries there is a declining NTE based around nightclubs and raves, where drugs such as ecstasy and acid would be more normalised. However, there are still an abundance (albeit dwindling) of pubs. Cocaine has long been popular in pubs (Measham & Moore, 2009), as cocaine facilitates the consumption of alcohol far beyond normal limits and for this reason is a core part of hedonistic behaviours within the NTE (Ayres & Treadwell, 2011). While ecstasy, acid and ketamine have been taken by most of the younger participants, once they hit their early twenties, they have 'drifted' (see Matza, 1964) away from this deviant activity. The participants highlighted that this was more likely to be done in nightclubs when they were in their late teens when these were more available throughout the Potteries or due to them moving to a different city for university. When pubs outnumber nightclubs in the city, it would make more sense for the participants to take cocaine where they are expected to drink alcohol as well – not as expected with drugs such as ecstasy. This has led to cocaine being as integral to the NTE as alcohol, as it facilitates the binge-drinking associated with the NTE (Smith, 2014). It is also more suitable to an environment where you can be social (Thurnell-Read, 2021). Ayres & Treadwell

(2012:87-88) highlight:

> "The most popular function fulfilled by cocaine was the facilitation of social events, particularly the pursuit of leisure and socialising in the NTE. Cocaine was mostly used to improve aspects of users' leisure and recreation, especially social interactions with both friends and strangers. However, males reported more hedonistic reasons; cocaine was used to enhance the effects of other drugs, including alcohol".

The pub has been highlighted as a place where social interactions are exemplified (Thurnell-Reed, 2021) and for this reason, cocaine has usurped ecstasy as the drug of choice in the Potteries since there is now a preference to socialise as opposed to dance. This again highlights a recurring issue within the NTE and wider society: the need for friendship as an object of desire.

While in previous generations, the transgression of the norm was to consume dance cultures and utilise ecstasy, acid, or amphetamines as a lubricant to enhance this experience (Redhead, 1993), the consumer now transgresses the norm by simply socialising with people. Building on the points made in the last chapter, cocaine mixed with alcohol often acts as the social lubricant to enjoy socialising in a world where friendships are receding (Winlow & Hall, 2009). Yet, this is merely *jouissance* (Zizek, 2006). The idea of friendship is increasingly becoming *the lost object of desire*. Where it is increasingly desired, the more it recedes from the norm. The inebriation that one indulges in to sustain conversations and seemingly meaningful interactions are merely a façade that can often only be delivered through drugs and drink. To Zizek (2006) drugs promise a purely autistic *jouissance*, freeing the individual from symbolic constraints.

Ayres (2019) uses this to highlight how drugs for intoxication is both desirable and unpleasant; this is the same for friendship. The data shows that socialisation with wide groups of people transgresses the norms of regular society where friendships are absent. In the current epoch of competitive individualism, friendly socialising with wide ranging groups of people serves little purpose, and can, in a sense, be seen as counterproductive to the pseudo-pacified subject (Dean, 2008). But at the same time, it is something that is intrinsically craved as the need for friendship and meaning lingers within the old, fractured, symbolic order that is yet to be replaced with something equally structural. Hence, cocaine is used as it can facilitate socialising *as an act of jouissance* outside of consumer societies regular constraints.

It is highlighted by Jimmy and Gene that cocaine still carries the illusion of being both high status and expensive. This is despite it being increasingly inexpensive and available to the working-classes even if it is not as cheap as MDMA (Hall & Antonopoulos, 2017). Notwithstanding, it is still alluring to the consumer for this reason. Through the consumption of simulations such as TV media and films such as *Scarface* and *The Wolf of Wall Street,* the image of cocaine being the drug choice for the rich and famous persists through the distorted hyperreality of consumer capitalism rather than direct experiences (Baudrillard, 1984). In a world that is dominated by achieving status through wealth, conspicuous consumption and fashionable individualism, this is internalised by the consumer as the drug of choice (Hall et al, 2008). This allure enables the subject to taste what he will never truly experience: to pretend to live a life that has reached the *lost object of desire.*

Trading Violence

The drug trade does not always carry the allure of pleasure and celebrity since the trade within the NTE is notable for the high levels of violence that subjects are willing to engage in through their *expressive special liberty*. The following data excerpts highlight the extreme levels of violence within the drug trade which is symptomatic of the breakdown of *pseudo-pacification process* (see *Violence* chapter for an overview) enabling violence in the NTE to flourish.

Pete works at a NTE venue currently and highlights the issues with drug dealers using the venue he works at as a place for transactions to be made, and the consequences that come about from this:

> Pete: "If I had a lad I'd be fucking petrified from the stuff I've seen here. We've had incidents that are nothing to do with the club-night, where stuffs gone on with weapons. . . Where the venue is situated, it's so close to the M6 so we have a lot with county-lines. Drug dealers up and down the country use this [venue] and not every drug deal goes right so there's spill-out from that. So, we had a lad who was attacked with an axe while we had a night going on in the building. On the car park there was an axe attack. I had to go out with my staff and see an axe sticking out of someone's back. . . was terrifying. He was a drug dealer from Liverpool on the run. It'd gone wrong and he'd tried have them off and they'd fucked him. . . It won't be long until someone gets stabbed in this venue."

Kenny was a drug dealer in venues such as the Dome in the late 80s/early 90s, and states that he left the life after fearing the violence that was an ever-present threat in the business:

> Kenny: "What brought that on [leaving the drug trade] was Liverpool coming up one night and they wanted a big off on Dome car park because a deal had gone wrong and I refused go. For what I earn from this, I'm not going up there to get shot at and I'm out. . . I waited for them [the top dealers he was selling for] to come back and give me a beating but it never happened. . . I just got told if I ever got caught dealing on the patch, there'd be consequences. . . but back then [during dealing] I would not say I was untouchable, but I had a hell of a back up. They knew what I was kind of attached to".

There are similarities between drug use during these two periods, highlighting a

normalisation of violence within drug markets since the late 1980's, in contradiction to the rise in dealer-to-user violent crime (See Marsh, 2020). The violence between dealers in the drug trade exists as part of *the real*. Where the self-indulgent drives of the NTE's consumers must suppress the reality and remain in the *imaginary* realm (Hall, 2012). The superego will not inhibit the desire of the consumer to feel guilty about using drugs and inadvertently funding the violence between rival drug gangs; but, it will inhibit the consumer with guilt if they consciously address this reality and decide to not consume (Zizek, 2008). This is what consumer capitalism is based upon after all, as Raymen (2022:195) highlights:

> 'The good life increasingly became one in which the subject had denied themselves nothing, tasted extreme indulgence, experienced new thrills and sensations through sex, substances, and other lifestyle activities, and checked off places and experiences as items on bucket lists'.

To acknowledge the morality of one's actions would be to destabilise and unveil the liberal-capitalist shortcomings that create mass social harm (Raymen, 2022). The liberal individualist is justified in their activities because they find pleasure in them. It does not matter about the social harm they could be playing a part in (Raymen, 2022). While some embrace this liberal consumerism as a consumer, some, such as the individuals mentioned, take on the *undertaker* role (Hall, 2012). The *undertaker* has utilised the breakdown in the *symbolic order* and has subsequently become willing to impress their *special liberty* onto those who may inhibit their progression into success (Winlow & Hall, 2015). With the *pseudo-pacification process* fractured and breaking down, the drug trade *undertaker* is more than willing to commit extreme acts of violence, in order to get what they desire (Hall, 2012).

While the role of violence within the NTE has been discussed at length (see Winlow, 2001; Winlow & Hall, 2006), little has been highlighted regarding the role of the drug trade and the violence between the different criminal gangs within the NTE, while simultaneously considering the moral role the consumer in reproducing these acts. Ellis (2019) highlights that drug dealing in post-industrial locales provide income, status, reputation and reduce shame, but violence is also more prominent. This is due to the competitiveness of the illicit business, which cannot be regulated through the legitimate systems that would restrict (at least on the surface level) the actions of the *pseudo-pacified* capitalist and are instead, regulated through the implementation of violence (Ayres & Treadwell, 2023). At its root, competitiveness and violence are the same as is administered within the participant's youth (see the *Violence* chapter; Marsh, 2020). While most of the participants merely found their status through administering violence in area-to-area rivalries and blood feuds, some would advance from the status earnt through reputation to status through illicit economic capital, supported by more extreme forms of violence to advance their position in a frequently turbulent criminal milieu (Ellis et al, 2017; Silverstone, 2006).

Within the NTE, this offers a domain for status and identity to be formed through consumptive and hedonistic leisure, which can then support entry into the drug trade for violent individuals who are willing to become the *criminal undertaker* (Hall, 2012) and supplement their legitimate income. Violence is normalised within the NTE (Winlow & Hall, 2006) and some of the most intimidating violent individuals, such as bouncers, can utilise their physical capital to engage in the drug trade (Hobbs et al, 2023) to individuals who desire the hedonistic abandonment that drugs deliver. This makes the NTE a prime venue for the trade to flourish through violent acts (Sanders,

2006). For the user, this violence must be *fetishistically disavowed* to allow their consumption to continue guilt-free (Zizek, 2008).

Drinking the *Jouissance*

The following anecdotes from the field will highlight the level of *Jouissance* the participants and their associates will go through during their time in the local NTEs: where conversations range from the absurd, to the discriminatory; to the reminiscence of past nights where they were even more inebriated, and holidays away where they proved their drinking and drug taking prowess over a sustained period of time:

I'd travelled to the South End to meet Davo as he had invited me up to the East End to see a few of the other lads. Conversation during this period range from the nonsensical, – the majority of my time I had one individual, Jay, talking to me constantly while I said nothing in response – to financial success, to drugs.

Heading to the next pub . . . We head through its door. A group of heavily tattooed blokes congregate outside and one raises his hands and sings 'Vale' songs as we enter, potentially trying to antagonise.

Words like 'queer' and 'Paki' are said semi-regular, while the odd 'nigger' is uttered. The cocaine induced constant conversation comes to the topic of selling and buying cars. Jamie begins to tell us how he would not sell his car to a bloke with an Asian name as 'they are just known for being a nightmare when selling stuff to em'. Jamie and Gene say they kept just saying 'Paki' down a microphone when doing karaoke in Portugal. Jamie mentions that he did the same but with the word 'nigger' in Budapest. They tell how when pissed up, Jamie walked into a bar just to kick over a table and chairs, a metal bin, and then randomly punched a Dutch bloke before exiting.

Jamie details his recent trip abroad and how it highlighted his drinking prowess, while also giving him a fervent story to tell to anyone who would listen:

> *"I was in Benidorm three days, and I only had two meals. Literally, I ate twice. Just on beak [Cocaine] the rest of the time".*

A few months prior I had been on a similar excursion with Sully, this time in a different area of the East End. . . The conversation inevitably gets to the topics of drugs after Sully mentions his nights out in a local Gay Club. A member of the group ,Ryan, interjects:

> *"You have to be careful in there. We went in there, few years back now, on a night out. Started speaking to these Black lads did not we. Thought nothing of it like. Probably have dozens of conversations like that every time you go out. We're stood at the bar and the lad I'm talking to says I'll get you a bottle of bud like. Again, to me that is normal on a night out. Anyway, I get it and before I take a swig, I notice it fizzing up from the bottom and the fucker has obviously put something in it and tried spike me".*
>
> *OH: "Did you say owt to him?"*

One of the other men, Wes, interrupts:

> *"Well I just said fuck it I'll have it so I necked it. I do not give a fuck, its free drugs intit".*

We depart shortly after, and arrive at a bar that Jimbob is at in the city centre. . . He tells a girl who he recognises when we arrive, that it's his birthday. She tells him to come around the corner and says she will give him some 'birthday coke', which she then proceeds to place on a house key and he snorts the powder. 'Let me know when you need some more. Do not worry about the money . . . its your birthday,' she says and she walks back into the venue.

The anecdotes here highlight several pertinent issues within the city's NTE and many of the issues discussed throughout this thesis such as antagonism and cocaine fuelled

socialising. As has already been noted, the nightlife in the city is predicated on an almost constant hedonistic abandonment of regular social norms.

Here the nightlife acts, "as 'a time out of time' that encourages participants to abandon normative components of their home selves and regular routines and responsibilities" (Briggs, 2013 b). While Briggs, talks about this in the context of a lads holiday, the data here suggests that this is a normal part of the Potteries NTE for those who do not have strong social ties to anything but the nightlife.

The participants mentioned here, for the most part, are: not in relationships; nor, do they have families of their own; do not own a house; nor, have close ties to religion or shared history, and work in increasingly fragmented workplaces not too dissimilar from Telford's (2022) participants. The drive to consume is the most significant and to consume at increasing levels of extremity in their drive for *jouissance* (Winlow & Hall, 2006) as they do not possess the economic capital that segregates the working-classes from enjoying the same consumer culture that those with more economic capital can, such as trips to Ibiza (Briggs, 2013) and excessive spending on marketed consumer products (Hobbs et al, 2005).

Instead, the Potteries consumer is limited to the transgression of 'normality' and a release from its overbearing constraints in an almost carnivalesque manner (Parker & Williams, 2003; Pearson, 2012). This is pursued through identity formation via the NTE (Winlow & Hall, 2006), one of which being the excess of drink and drugs taken. This is exemplified by Wes's *parasuicidal behaviour* (Raymen, 2019) when taking a drink from his friend despite the fact that it had been spiked by someone who was trying to cause him harm. An intense drive for excessive consumption hinders other feelings that one might have during this matter, such as anger or fear at being the potential victim and

unwillingly ingesting an unknown substance. Instead, it merely allows the individual to reach hedonistic self-gratification without spending money and highlights the drive for *jouissance* present in the modern-day NTE. The data suggests that this is indicative of *jouissance,* further exemplified by the woman giving Jimbob coke because it was his birthday: Jimbob should feel driven to embrace the hedonistic drives that are around him (Winlow & Hall, 2006).

As Briggs (2013b) highlighted, a measure of a good night out for those who do not have access to economic capital is by 'how fucked up they get' and an indicator of this is by how much they 'transgress' society's moral expectations. Through using discriminatory terms like 'Paki', 'queer', and 'nigger', it would appear that this is evidence of Stoke-on-Trent's NTE being a hub of white, nationalist, xenophobic, gay-bashers. On the contrary, after spending significant time with those in the field, I would argue this is too simplistic. While racist views were inevitably held by some – it would be fair to say that a number of them had a fractured relationship with the local South Asian community to say the least – very few had any interest in political ideology even as a *fantasy framework* (see Zizek, 2002) and would engage in leisure pursuits with people of different races and sexuality. However, what this does highlight is a transgression of the liberal *imaginary*. Within the NTE, this is the consumer performing what is expected of them within the consumer market, for they are attempting to stand out from the herd and reject the normality of everyday sensibilities through marketed resistance (Heath and Potter, 2006).

This is not a return to nationalism or a deep held belief in far-right policy as Winlow et al's (2017) participants conveyed, but rather an embodiment of the liberal-individualistic psyche where they reject the status-quo of post-modernity as a form of

jouissance. It is harmful, and they are aware that it is harmful, and this is why it exists as a 'norm' to be transgressed in the hope of finding pleasure through the painful transgression (Zizek, 2006).

These points of transgression embody part of the consumers identity (Smith, 2013): increasingly pejorative insults positively correlate with increasingly transgressive and harmful acts representing a competitive signifier that he stands out from the rest of the pack. His transgressive competitors. In this context, Gene might say 'Paki', but Jamie will take it a step further and say 'Nigger'. The more extreme the insult, the greater the transcendence from the group he is beholden to. It is the nihilistic result of liberal-capitalism, where all structures and meaning have been overridden by *hyperconformity* (Zizek, 2002) and the moral relativity of leisure (Raymen, 2022). The hate expressed here is narcissistic *Jouissance* through the 'thrill of hate' to serve their *libidinal treasure*, which is in this case the contravening of wider societal norms by competing against one another in upping the ante of transgression (Hook, 2018).

Each of these transgressions serves a purpose within the NTE. They provide a memory to be discussed and shared amongst a group as they build up to their final inebriated form. Data has highlighted that people in the NTE engage in acts of *hyperconformity* to create memories which significantly impacts the construction of identity (Briggs et al, 2011). Malbon (1999) highlighted that such acts only exist in a material sense within the NTE and stay separate from the everyday self, but the memories of events and behaviour are a further integral source of identity formation.

Such memories formulate identity in the *mirror stage*, where the subject sees a more complete sense of self (Zizek, 1989). The image becomes a reference point for memories and experiences throughout the subject's life, with memories not being just

a collection of disconnected events; they are instead integrated into a narrative that revolves around a coherent self-image established in the constant *mirror stage* that spans throughout the course of life. Under consumer capitalism there is limited resources to provide a sustainable sense of self outside of consumer leisure pursuits (Hall et al, 2008). As such, individual memories formed within the NTE exist to form collective memories tied to the temporal spaces that they and their acquaintances indulge in. Within the 21st century's new cultures of intoxication, where hedonistic and excessive consumption is prominent (Measham & Brain, 2005), such memories of transgression are often the topic of conversation. These conversations often act as a replacement for deeper, more meaningful conversations, where instead of bonding over shared working-class interests and collectivity, the role of memories in a conversation are to engage in narcissistic competitions to highlight who is the most transgressive and hedonistic (Lasch, 1979). They occupy the subject's language before they have reached their next stage of hedonistic *jouissance,* which they could reach the more inebriated they become.

Conclusion

This chapter has built upon the previous chapters work to highlight the motivations and behaviours of those within the NTE in relation to arguably its most fundamental aspect, inebriation, aiming to move beyond the existing literature and explore the issue on a psychanalytic level in an environment of recessive decline.

Within this chapter, four themes have been highlighted as being prevalent: the death of the city's NTE venues while the drive to consumer still persists; drug usage being dependent on the venue and consumer image; violence within the drug trade being normalised and *disavowed* by users; and the area's nightlife being largely an expression

of *jouissance* and a 'conformist transgression' of every-day values. I argue that a thorough understanding of the Potteries nightlife ought to be grounded in the Lacanian notions of drives and desires. The chapter has utilised Zizek's application of Lacannian concepts to highlight that these aspects can be intrinsically linked through such ideas under the macro-context of consumer capitalism.

The consumer drive that persists as a capitalistic necessity has been unable to be satiated under stagnant economic growth and eventual decline amidst the rise of neoliberalism. Venues have declined to a degree where there are few nightclubs still available, with pubs mainly remaining albeit at a lower frequency. This has enabled cocaine to grow as the foremost drug of choice amongst the participants as the venue facilitates the use of it more than other substances, while it affords the users a consumer identity to be formed in the absence of alternative nightlife venues as it was once associated with the upper-class and glamour. To take part in this, the consumer must morally disengage from the social harm that the drug trade causes, where the 'criminal undertaker' is willing to provide them with illicit substances.

Within these venues of both legal and illicit inebriation, social interaction is based upon transgressing the norms of society, where the consumers compete to up the ante within their transgressions. Consequently, the Lacannian drive to consume is an ever present within the participants motivations for inebriation, and despite the changing face of the NTE and the participants general dissatisfaction with its quality they still desire to participate in it.

Conclusion

Contribution

The thesis has in essence built upon the back of the NTE research that come before it, and it makes no apology for doing so. The thesis lends heavily from the work of *Ultra-realism, Deviant Leisure,* and psychoanalysis, with this forming the bedrock of the theorisation of the study, the use of these concepts have been used to highlight different themes and issues in the research.

As I have revealed throughout the thesis, the neoliberal consumerist model in which the NTE exists is abound with harmful behaviours and perpetuates social insecurity for its consumers despite their active involvement in their reproduction (Hall et al, 2008). While work such as Winlow & Hall, (2006), Hall et al (2008), Smith (2014), and Ellis (2016) all touch on similar themes to the research presented, there are notable differences.

Firstly, the contextual background the study is the key difference between this thesis and others, with the city of Stoke-on-Trent being utilised. Stoke-on-Trent is a largely under-researched locale that, while being similar to other Northern and Midlands deindustrialised locales, it is notably different. The historical background of the city, its geography, and its formation has been noted in chapter 2 as both a unique contextual setting and an influence on the lives of its inhabitants in the generations since it became an industrial powerhouse. Further to this, its modern-day makeup is vastly different to the urban locales that were studied by other NTE researchers who describe their cities' nightlife as sprawling post-industrial centres of venues of nightlife consumption. Stoke-on-Trent could not be more far removed from this. While a

relatively large city, its nightlife, as the thesis has shown, has become relatively absent and entered a period of *post-leisure*. Hence, the research notes the importance of examining the lives of those who exist in not only post-industrial localities but also the peripheries of nightlife consumption. The culture of Stoke-on-Trent has largely ignored by much ethnographic research bar a few recent *Ultra-realist* informed researchers (see Gibbs, 2021; Braithwaite, forthcoming), with much work being done by the media in desk-based articles discussing the decline of the city's economy or its illiberal views regarding Brexit and multiculturalism, which I believed to neglect the lived realities of those present within the locale.

The data analysis has highlighted several themes in each data chapter that add to its originality. Firstly, the thesis has highlighted how the roots of nocturnal violent biographies are sown in childhood and passed on via each generation, mirroring the issues that could be found within teenage life. The data has highlighted the ever-increasing infantilised cultures of late capitalism that has had a debilitating effect on the violence conducted by men, with each era's violence increasing amongst this wider societal backdrop of permanent adolescence. In essence, there is very little meaning to the nocturnal violence that plays out amidst the nightclubs and pubs of Stoke-on-Trent, largely being reflective of narcissistic actors whose heightened sense of self is threatened by another. While aspects of this violence are reflective of previous work, such as Winlow & Hall's (2009) and Ellis et al (2017) utilisation of shame, and the coded aspects of violent behaviour (Whitehead, 2005), the thesis builds on these in several ways, such as by placing the research site central to the actions of the individuals.

Stoke-on-Trent's 'myopic provincialism' (Williams, 2006:183) has heightened a sense of territoriality amongst its inhabitants that is deeply rooted in its competitive history,

that has no doubt influenced the actions of the territorial individuals in this study. Furthermore, the data has evidenced a breakdown in the *pseudo-pacification process* and therefore the codes of violence that were once prevalent in violent confrontation.

The thesis has utilised the concept of 'rage banking' to show the how rage is held onto and often expressed at a later time within the NTE. In conclusion, the violence the data has presented highlights that the NTE is but one venue for violence to occur, lubricated by the relaxation of supposed social norms and inebriation, with many issues highlighted being present in the participants lives outside of the NTE. The NTE is merely an easily accessible venue to express them willingly.

The thesis has highlighted the growth of 'cool individualism' and how this is internalised by participants to form some semblance of identity that will be visually articulated in the NTE. In a similar vein to prior NTE ethnographies (Winlow & Hall, 2006; Smith, 2014), the thesis has evidenced that consumer culture is an integral part of consumers lives, with the participants' identities competing against one another in order to stand out from the crowd. The data has also highlighted that the participants feel compelled to enter the NTE, and much of their lives at one point or another revolve around venturing into this sphere, despite their acknowledgement that it is at best imperfect, and at its worst wholly negative. But yet, its offer of an escape into nothingness (Freud, 1930) is often more appealing to the participants than other aspects of their existence.

The thesis has also shown how individualism is not only internalised but expressed onto others. While this is also no stranger to *Ultra-realist* works, the thesis notably discusses this in relation to sex, relationships and adultery in the NTE, that has been somewhat neglected in previous research. The thesis highlights how the NTE is

generally a damaging force on relationships, with infidelity being rife amongst consumers. The data has evidenced the issue of sex more generally in the NTE, and it being both a reason for participants to venture into the NTE, and a cause for anxiety amongst those who experience sexual failure. Further to this, building on the work of others (see Lloyd, 2016; Smith, 2014) the data suggests that friendships are not only fragile, transient and lack significant meaning to the participants, but are also a constant source of potential betrayal, with issues consistently arising between supposed friends within the liminal spaces of the NTE.

Finally, the thesis has offered an insight into the inebriated identities within Stoke-on-Trent. The data suggests that despite the permanent and unmanaged decline of the Potteries' NTE, the individual drives and desires of its hedonistic heyday remain prevalent, yet they are increasingly unable to be fulfilled amidst the city's venture into *post-leisure*. In essence, the city has experienced not only a decline of industrialism, but also a decline in what was meant to take its place. Not only can people not secure stable work that was offered in the Fordist epoch, but they are also struggling to find a suitable venue to fulfil their hedonistic drives. These drives are prevalent despite what other recent data suggests. Contrary to the supposed reality that drug use is declining amongst the present youth (Spicer, 2023), the vast majority of the participants and those interacted with in the NTE are drug users, particularly users of cocaine. The thesis notes that cocaine is prevalent amongst young people in Stoke-on- Trent and its surrounding area, forming a core part of the NTE experience and becoming as ubiquitous as a pint of lager. The inebriated self has become ever tied to identity amidst the leisure decline, with type of drugs and drink ingested being an identifier of image and concept of the self. Finally, the data suggested that *jouissance* and

conformist transgressions of the daytime norms remain prevalent, with inebriation offering the subject the 'thrill' of acting differently to his regulated daytime self.

Together, the chapters highlight issues within contemporary capitalism have mutated amidst the continued decline of marketised leisure in post-industrial cities and towns across Britain. The mutated expressions of violence, consumption, individualism and inebriation evidence that notwithstanding the derelict nightlife in post-industrial Stoke, they continue to persist. The psychic drives of liberal consumerism continue to produce social harms amidst increasingly atomised individuals, as there has been no reinvention of a solidifying *Big Other* to replace them. This will continue, for there is no other viable symbolic order to drive individuals towards a new morality or collective good.

Reflections

There are no doubt a number of potential criticisms to the work undertaken, foremost being the way in which it was conducted. My relationship with some participants prior to undertaking the research, as noted in the methodology, was present with a number of them knowing me through mutual friends and through years spent in the same NTE venues. This no doubt influenced the interactions I had within the NTE and whether participants would be willing to partake in the research, having both a positive and negative impact. This of course meant that I easily accessed a number of participants and was welcomed into their social life, offering an insight that I do not believe would be granted to complete outsiders (Ancrum, 2013). Over time, I was able to build rapport and develop a degree of trust with participants, to the extent that I was often perceived as 'one of the lads'. This positioning was not without complexity and

required ongoing reflexivity around my role and the dynamics of insider/outsider status.

Whether I was able to remain neutral when this deep into ethnography is important. I felt a sense of belonging within the group, and still do to this day when I have seen them across the city. Did I ever act as one of the group moreso than an impartial outsider? Probably. Probably more often than not in fact. Did I go Native? No, purely for the fact that I was native to this environment and culture prior to the fieldwork. I still have never willingly taken cocaine, ecstasy, or ketamine despite being offered on several occasions. In fact, as the fieldwork continued, I began to drink less in the field as I became gradually disillusioned with being drunk in the field.

Did I act aggressive in this environment and get involved in confrontation? Yes, but again this was largely the weakness of my own personality coming to the fore rather than being influenced by the participants around me. This aspect of the fieldwork in particular I struggled with the most, as I was well aware of the potential for confrontation to occur when spending most weekends in this inebriated environment. As my bond grew with the participants, I struggled to separate myself from the emotional connection I had forged with them, and I increasingly felt an urge to stand up for those around me and 'back them up' as they were willing to do with me. I could have acted differently, but despite what ethic boards may say I do not think that would have been the right course of action, as I would lose respect of the participants and also lose their willingness to engage in the research process. But being a researcher in this environment meant that I would inevitably interact with people I knew previously for better or for worse, and how these people would be with me would be largely determined from past interactions.

Despite this, I highlighted the experiences within this realm as accurate as possible regardless of my role within the research environment (Briggs, 2012). Doing so, I ensured that accounts in interviews were as verified as they could be, confirming details with others present and gatekeepers, often being confirmed without me needing to ask any questions. Hence, I believe the data captured is an accurate depiction of the men and women's lives as possible, with very little information seemingly being kept from me.

I also accept that this work is merely a microcosm sample of people in the Potteries, and is not necessarily generalisable to society, or even the city, as a whole. Yet, by being part of several different groups within the field, I believe I have offset this by noting the themes shared between the groups, which are also shared by the participants of other nightlife ethnographies (see Winlow & Hall, 2006; Smith, 2014). These micro-worlds of the participants I have been privy to all remain informed by the same hegemonic macro-forces of post-industrial neoliberalism & consumerism where differences are present in diverse locales, often haunted by their distinct but now all but dead industrial pasts, but the underlying drives often remaining the same (Winlow & Hall, 2015).

There are aspects that I wish I had investigated further in interview, often only coming to this realisation in the transcription phase. At times I managed to come back to several of these points, but I did not always have the time or resources to draw more from their views. There are several topics that may seem undeveloped within this research, such as harmful sexual behaviours in the NTE, a more distinct discussion of the differences in motivations for men and women, and the issue of race and racism within the NTE. These were themes that were never set out to explicitly uncover,

despite having findings that correlated with these topics.

Further to this point, there were opportunities to write a chapter based on some of these issues as a chapter in themselves, especially regarding race and women's role as both perpetrators and victims of violence. The role of women in violence is notably not prominent in the violence data chapter, with much of the data from the female point of view coming through Alex. This was largely due to the women participants being significantly more likely to be a victim of violence, rather than having the dual role of victim/perpetrator as the men did. This would have led to an abundance of data and analysis which could have been a chapter in itself. However, the issue of violence more generally, individualism, and inebriation were significantly more prominent in the data than anything else, meaning that they were the chapters' primary focus over issues such as violence against women and race. While I have attempted to touch on these other underdiscussed issues within these chapters, I feel this is a site for potential future research and publications and in need of deeper exploration.

Another issue I found, similar to much of academia (see Raymen, 2022), is the inability to successfully address the issues found within the behaviours of participants rather than merely evidencing their cause. Future research is needed to uncover how to counteract the harmful causes of behaviours influenced by post-industrial consumerism. Neoliberalism is here to stay, and most are unwilling or apathetic to change this as we are unable to imagine a different social reality (Fisher, 2009). There must be an urgency to move past the narratives of the past and merely attempting to solve one aspect of a much larger issue, to build a better future that can rid the world of the underlying drives that shape our cultural landscape and materiality, causing much of the conflict and social harm within the NTE.

This is unlikely to be done, with policy makers and researchers seemingly focussed on introducing more regulations such as regulating the size of drinks to combat excessive drinking (see Mantzari et al, 2024), which will no doubt be ignored by the consumers. Such practices may see slim successes, but will ultimately fail to challenge the structural and psychic conditions that captivate the participants to seek hedonistic *jouissance.* As Raymen (2022) argues, we must begin to develop and build around the concept of the 'good' to create a symbolic order rooted in human flourishing, for this is the only real way of combatting the negative forces of liberal capitalism and escaping the erosive imaginary of consumer capitalism that compels us further towards the trauma of the *real* (Bushell, 2020).

Afterword

It was a largely uninteresting Friday night when I received a call from Jimmy asking if I'd like to join him and a few of the lads for a curry in an hours' time. Knowing that what normally starts off as a madras and a few beers at the local curry house can descend into I accept, seeing this as an opportunity to delve deeper into the field. I'm greeted on my entry to Jimmy and six others, including Sully, Davo and Jamie. The food is nothing to write home about, nor is the conversations had, which range from 'banter' (see giving each other shit) to Davo showing the rest of the lads a girl's OnlyFans page who the group knew. We are a few beers in, and Jimmy says that he fancies going out, to which the rest of the lads reject. Having an incline, and somewhat hoping, this would happen, I told him I'd go with him. We head back to mine to change clothes and we set off for the city centre. The town was unsurprisingly vacant, with few faces roaming the streets in search of alcoholic inhibition. After a couple of drinks in a one-time popular pre-loading venue, we decide on going to the Hut, an indie nightclub that will be open until 4. Again, the place is dead, but we see another participant Doc and his mate Billy. We grab a few drinks as a four and head to the smoking area, which is significantly busier than the dance floor. Much of the night would be spent here, mingling with other nocturnal dwellers while smoking and 'chatting shit'.

Me and Jimmy gradually splinter from Doc and Billy, who have seemingly caught the attention of a girl and found other friends on the dance floor, respectively. The venue is gradually getting busier as we enter the early hours of Saturday morning, with spilt drinks sticking our shoes to the floor and lads dressed in Stone Island and CP Company eyeing each other up from across the bar. I'm pretty pissed now, which I can tell because I'm starting to enjoy myself and I'm thinking less and less about gathering the

data. It's not long before Billy has been thrown out for hitting another lad, a theme that would recur throughout the data collection because for Billy, as Doc noted, it's not a good night unless he's had a fight. Doc attempts to leave with Billy as he is being thrown out, trying to convince the bouncers that 'he's a good lad' and his actions 'were not for nothing'.

The girl who Doc had been with comes over with her friend to me and Jimmy, seemingly at a loose end now that Doc has disappeared out of the back entrance of the venue. After ten minutes or so of getting to know each other, she asks me to buy her friend a drink, saying that she has had a really rough time recently and that it will make her feel good if she gets some attention off someone. I respectfully decline, saying I'm not particularly interested (nor was it signed off in the ethics form to 'pull'). I tell her she is better off asking Jimmy, which she does and he obliges, getting a kiss after a short while for his troubles.

It's not long before we are met by Clinton, an associate of Jimmy's who I had seen around the city's nightlife since I first entered it as a teenager. His presence, as it always had, annoyed me but I remained relatively civil. Soon after, Jimmy's escapade with the girl, Chantelle, is cut short by some unwelcome news about one of his friends sleeping with his ex behind his back. Jimmy storms to the toilet, house key in hand ready to snort a bag full of cocaine. Clinton comes with us as I wait outside the toilet for Jimmy to finish snorting his powder in hope of feeling better at the revelation. Clinton is seemingly unfazed by Jimmy's predicament, instead trying to engage in a deep conversation about friendship with me, as he says to me 'I feel like you hate me'. Not sober enough to put up with unwelcome nonsense, I nonchalantly say 'mate, just fuck off, I'm not interested'. He did not fuck off, but the irritation quickly stopped. Jimmy

exited the cubicle rejuvenated, wanting to enjoy the rest of the night despite the emotional setback, blocking out his negative thoughts with rum, lager and cocaine.

We head down to the dance floor and grab more drinks as the Hut is steadily losing its clientele, Chantelle and her friend included. Its not long before we need another, and I accompany Jimmy to the bar. As I stand behind him as he is about to be served, two girls suddenly launch into an aggressive tirade against him as they accuse him of pushing in, to which he seems bewildered by such a suggestion. As I attempt to diffuse the situation by interjecting as politely as I can, one of the girl's (who I assume to be) boyfriend aggressively gets in Jimmys face. I quickly jump in and push him off, to which he tries to shove my hand out the way. I get in his face, 'what the fuck do you think you're doing you little prick? You do not start on him and you do not fucking touch me'. His aggressiveness has subsided now that he is aware that his confrontation will be met with equal aggression, backing out of my face but saying 'I do not fucking care'. 'Well, you will fucking care if you carry on, Dickhead' I respond, to which he finally backs off and the confrontation ends before it ever truly began.

After those final drinks were brought and consumed, we decide enough is enough and we should head home. On the way to the taxi rank, we decide home is not calling and we head to Glam instead, a late-night gay club which largely caters to the pissed-up and kicked out heterosexual consumers of the other bars and nightclubs by virtue of it being one of the last venues open. We enter, quickly engage in conversation with regulars of the nightlife scene who we have met before, and try to enjoy ourselves. But in an establishment like Glam, that is pretty hard to do. The dancefloor is packed like sardines, the room is dark and full of smoke, and occupied with young men and women with cocaine fuelled machismo waiting for an excuse for confrontation. But fear not, as

we descend down the stairs we see Doc, the girl he was with in the Hut, Lauren, and Chantelle. We order five double vodka Red Bull at the bar before calling it a night. We walk through Hanley in search of a taxi, expecting to pay extortionate prices as it is now approaching 5am, while Jimmy and Chantelle and Doc and Lauren are rekindling their early night flings in the process. We are all of a sudden sidetracked when there is a girl crying and screaming on a side street as we walk past. Lauren decides to be a good Samaritan through offering the girl support, who responds by saying she is going to kill herself. This offer of support is not welcome, and soon the two girls are screaming at each other in the street while Doc says that he 'cannot be fucked with this, let's just go home'. Amidst the commotion, two sets of lads leave another venue nearby. Two of the lads begin to square up as one shouts something relatively unintelligible about his hometown and defending its honour. Neither of the two lads seemingly want to commit to the first punch despite dancing around one another and their friends getting involved, so I walk on with the rest of the group.

We grab a six-seater cab and home time beckons. That does not last long, as Doc says we should continue the night back at his place. We all acquiesce as we head back to his house. As we enter, he wakes his parents, infuriated that he has brought people back to his house. He does not particularly care at the time, but he says we will all after stay outside. Shortly after, the girls discover that Doc has a hot tub and quickly make themselves at home by getting in it. Doc and Jimmy do the same. I want to leave now, I'm out of place and its now light outside as I hear birds chirping. The two couples kiss, until Doc leaves to calm his parents while Jimmy and Chantelle's romance quickly turns sour as they begin to argue. Lauren, in Doc's absence, makes suggestive comments to me regarding a threesome, to which I respectfully decline, thinking how the fuck did I

get myself into this situation and how the fuck do I get out of it. Thankfully, the hot tub fiasco is cut short by Doc's mum and dad growing considerably frustrated with his actions. Him and Lauren depart to his room, me not joining them, while the remaining three of us walk back down the main road towards the city centre. The argument between Jimmy and Chantelle continues on the walk, with their dalliance ending and getting to the point where Lauren squares up to Jimmy. I again attempt to act as a mediator. Outside a cashpoint, Jimmy begrudgingly pays for Lauren's taxi, while the pair of us walk back to mine. It is now 7am. Shortly after our arrival, Jimmy orders a taxi and departs.

I'm now alone. My inebriation is turning to hangover, my enjoyment has long turned into dissatisfaction, and the carnivalesque jubilance has turned to depressive anxiety. My dogs are barking, my mum is waking up, and all my would-be plans for today have been scuppered by the night before. Had I gone native? I do not think so. I probably acted better than I normally would on a night out despite my heated interaction earlier in the night. Although, having stayed up until gone 7am, it makes me ponder the appeal of cocaine and amphetamines more than usual, but I'm fairly certain I shan't be partaking in that anytime soon. Nothing good has come from tonight. All that has been experienced is disappointment, violence, confrontation and being inebriated to a discernible degree. I never want to do this again. But I will, and it'll probably start again tomorrow afternoon.[2]

[2] Fieldnotes written on the day the fieldwork took place.

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Appendices

School of Justice, Security and Sustainability

ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK

Researcher name:	Owen Hodgkinson
Title of Study:	SU_21_155 '24 Hour Party People': An Ethnographic Study of Hedonism in Stoke-on-Trent's NTEs'
Award Pathway:	PGR
Status of approval:	Approved

Your project ***proposal has been approved*** by the Ethics Panel and you may commence the implementation phase of your study. You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

You should arrange to meet with your supervisor for support during the process of completing your study and writing your dissertation.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site.

The Ethics Committee wish you well with your research.

Signed: **Date: 15/07/2022**

Dr. Kirsty Squires
Ethics Co-ordinator (SCE)

Ethics Proposal Revisions

Name of Researcher: Owen Hodgkinson

School: Justice, Security and Sustainability

Student Number: 17012749

Name of Supervisor(s): Dr Luke Telford, Professor James Treadwell and Dr Mark Bushell

Major revisions will be answered below, minor revisions such as rewording are highlighted in red in the original text.

For this point, will you be asking participants if they view themselves (now or in the past if they visited historically) as working-class?

They will be asked questions such as where they live, what their occupation was/is, what their parents occupation was; all of which shall be considered to determine whether they are working-class. If their answers do not sufficiently answer this, I will outright ask them to define their social class.

25 participants is not many for PhD research…

While the author notes this, it is expected that due to the prolonged period spent with the participants in the NTE, whilst they also interact with people who are not under study, shall gather enough data for the research to be viable.

Baker and Edwards (2012) highlight how there is no academic consensus on what constitutes the correct sample size in qualitative research. Realist ethnographies such as Winlow's (2001), Wakeman's (2016) and Telford's (2022) are evidence that smaller data samples can be enough to gather good quality research. Furthermore, if there were 50 participants, this would largely be too time consuming to do in depth in the short timespan available, and could likely lead to data saturation (Treadwell, 2020).

The focus of the review tend to be the interviews whilst these are important elements I feel that the ethnographic research poses more ethical issues particularly around consent and when researching potential drunk or drug using participants. Whilst I'm happy to approve this application the researcher may wish to consider this element of the research.

(See section 5B)

The author has taken this on board and has read the relevant data to try and counteract this. While I accept that it presents various ethical issues to document participants who are under the influence of alcohol and possibly other psychoactive substances, there are a range of measures that can be deployed to mitigate this and ensure ethical research . To counter this, the participants will have been asked prior entering the NTE to give me their sober and informed consent to document them in this situation. Further to this, the participants shall be anonymised so nothing they do in these situations can have

any bearing on their life outside of the data collection. I will also add, I enter the NTE with many of the participants on a weekly basis, so I expect to see nothing out of the ordinary occur, while the consent forms and anonymisation are giving them more protection than they would usually receive.
Further, Research with the inebriated is nothing new, with researchers such as Newcombe (1992) documenting drug use in the UK dance scene thirty years ago. While ethics may not have been as vigorous back then as they are today, it is clearly a suitable tool if it is used correctly, and it would be wrong as an ethnographer to not document people in NTE if they are drinking (see Treadwell, 2020), when after all, that is likely what they are likely there for (Smith, 2014). Furthermore, ethnographically documenting these circumstances enables the research to 'peel back the curtain' into people's real lives (Treadwell, 2020). While interviews give a good insight into how people view themselves and their life history, ethnographic insights will evidence the real thing and wont rely on their sober testimony.

In summation, to conduct research with the intoxicated ethically, I will follow the guidelines set out by Beauchamp and Childress (2001) of:

- Autonomy: participants should be free to participate. As previously mentioned, they will sign a consent form when sober and having been informed of the purpose of the study. They will also have up to two months to withdraw from the study from when initial contact is made

- Non-maleficence: participants should be protected from harm. I have to take into account the participants health in this circumstance. If I find that they are what I would consider to be too intoxicated as other researchers have (see Deehan and Saville, 2003), I would not use them in the data in that circumstance and instead seek that they stop drinking or get medical help if needs be.

- Beneficence: the benefits of research should outweigh the risks. In this research, it is imperative that I view and document participants in this environment for reasons mentioned prior, while they will face little risk due to the anonymisation process.

- Justice: people should be treated equally. In the case of my research, the participants shall not be taken advantage of due to their inebriated state. This means that I will treat them as I would if they were sober, and let them guide the research rather than let myself influence them whilst they are intoxicated and potentially more easily persuaded.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Full Ethical Review Form

Full ethical review must be used for research involving above minimal risk and therefore necessitating a more thorough ethical review prior to approval. Further guidance on projects which involve above minimal risk is provided within the University's Ethical Review Policy.

Relevant professional body ethical guidelines should be consulted when completing this form.

Please seek guidance from the School Ethics Coordinator if you are uncertain about any ethical issues arising from this application.

There is an obligation on the researcher and supervisor (if applicable) to bring to the attention of the School Ethics Coordinator any issues with ethical implications not identified by this form.

PART A: TO BE COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

Name of Researcher:	Owen Hodgkinson
School:	Justice, Security and Sustainability

Student/Course Details (If Applicable)		
Student ID Number:		17012749
Name of Supervisor(s)/Module Tutor:		Dr Luke Telford, Professor James Treadwell and Dr Mark Bushell
PhD/MPhil project:	Yes	
Taught Postgraduate Project/Assignment:	Award Title:	
Undergraduate Project/Assignment:	Module Title:	

Project Title:	'24 Hour Party People': An Ethnographic Study of Hedonism in Stoke-on-Trent's NTEs		
Expected Start Date:	May 2022	Expected End Date:	September 2023

Application Checklist

Have the following documents been supplied alongside this application?	Yes	N/A
Participant information sheet(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	Yes	
Participant consent form(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	Yes	
Letter/s of invitation to participants in language appropriate to the recipient		No
Questionnaires (only attach questionnaires that have NOT been validated previously)		No
Health related projects only: Letters giving permission for access to participants or confirming that full LREC ethical approval is not required		No
Other relevant information (e.g., tests or product information)		No

NHS Research	YES	N/A
Will the research involve any of the following: • NHS patients • NHS staff or premises • Confidential patient information • Material consisting of or containing human cells • Patients who are cared for in private and voluntary sector nursing homes • Exposure to ionising radiation • Medical devices that are not CE-marked or CE-marked medical devices that have been modified or are being used for a new purpose • Investigational medicinal products • Practising midwives conducting a clinical trial • Protected information from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority register. If the research will involve any of the above, an IPR (Independent Peer Review) application should be completed INSTEAD of a full ethical review. Please contact the Chair if the IPR panel for advice. The HRA (Health Research Authority) provide a tool to help identify if projects need NHS REC approval: http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/ethics/index.html		N/A

Submission Guidance (for completion by School):

1. Project Outline

Please provide a brief paragraph indicating answers to the following questions where relevant:

i) The aims and objectives of the project.
ii) Its rationale and justification.
iii) The research question or specific hypotheses to be tested.
4) The background to the project.
5) Where the research is to be carried out.
6) Names of other individuals or organisations involved in the project.
vii) Whether other approvals have been gained or are to be sought.

i) The aims and objectives of the project

This study intends to conduct ethnographic observations and interviews with those who are, or who once were, regular participants in Stoke-on-Trent's NTE, more specifically those who frequent venues such as nightclubs and pubs. The main focus of the study will be the lived experience of the users of the city's nightlife. These data will be used to examine the purpose and culture of the NTE in a post-industrial city that has largely been left to rot by the neoliberalism (see Lichfield, 2019). This shall be explored through asking participants why they engage in such practices that some researchers have labelled inherently harmful and serve no purpose, while I will also spend time with the participants to fully experience their life within the culture to add further contextual depth. From these experiences, I can highlight where wider social, cultural and political shifts have influenced the life path and worldview of participants, placing the micro-cultures of Stoke-on-Trent within the macro-culture of post-modern society, highlighting how it has potentially failed or benefitted people of today. Through conducting this research, the data shall add to wider theoretical debates surrounding neoliberalism, cultural shifts, depoliticization, and deviant leisure within the post-industrial West Midlands.

Aim:

To explore the lived experiences of the past and present users of Stoke-on-Trent's NTE, utilizing the data within the wider macro-framework of social, political, and cultural issues to examine why and how issues within this sociological arena exist.

Objectives:

1) To generate the data required for this study by conducting ethnographic fieldwork consisting of extensive participant observations and comprehensive semi-structured interviews. This will allow me to examine the reasons for engaging with certain behaviors within the NTE, and why this is the case for the participants.
2) To place the findings within the macro-framework of neoliberalism, and add to theoretical debates surrounding depoliticization, deviant leisure, and cultural shift within working-class locales.

ii) Rationale and justification

Research on the post-industrial north has been plentiful, especially amongst *Ultrarealist* scholars, with the social harms that have taken place since the rise of neoliberalism being well documented in the areas that once held strong, industrial identities in the modern era (see Winlow et al, 2013; 2017; Lloyd, 2013; Ellis, 2017). There has also been a growth in research around the NTEin such locales over the last twenty years, with Winlow and Hall's (2006) ethnographic study of the NTE in the North-East of England highlighting the issues and harms associated with postmodern nightlife, while also highlighting the wider issues that created these

harms in the first place. And yet, Stoke-on-Trent has largely been ignored by such research. This is in spite of its historical role in British industry with it being one of the most important and biggest producers of ceramics and coal, while also having a thriving steelworks sector and other manufacturing works (Rice, 2010). Further to this, the area once had a thriving NTE up until the late 20th century, with many of the worlds biggest musicians coming to North Staffordshire to play its venues at one time (Gratton, 2019), while nightclubs such as Hanley's The Place and Shelley's Laserdome of Longton being credited as being ahead of their time in terms of music and entertainment (Davies, 2021). If you were to look at the city now however, there is little industry of any kind left, with all that has been left in its place is poor-paid jobs and high unemployment (Lichfield, 2019). The nightlife of the city has also seen a dramatic, decline in recent years with many of the cities former nightclubs and pubs now lying as derelict buildings, as if they were a relic of a time long gone (Davies, 2021). Of course, this is not all that makes the city unique and worth investigating, as if it was this would simply be a rehash of Winlow and Hall's (2006) study. Much has changed since that book was published, especially within Stoke. Tony Blair is long gone, and so are all of Labour's seats in the city. The free market destroyed the world's economy in 2008, hitting the six pottery towns as hard as anywhere in the country owing to its large working-class population. Meanwhile, the mega-rich have only gotten richer (Fleming, 2022). The UK came out in droves in 2016 to vote to leave the European Union; Stoke was to become known as the 'Brexit Capital' shortly after when it was revealed it had the highest percentage of the population to vote leave (something that the liberal classes think must mean the residents are uneducated and racist (Lichfield, 2019)). And, finally, the Covid-19 pandemic ripped through the city, with draconian restrictions causing the city to fall even further down the hole of economic despair, with their being little evidence of the cities nightlife ever being able to recover (see Burn, 2020; Shaw, 2021). For these reasons, this is an area that is in dire need of study, as it's unique history and its effect on those who live within its boundaries is a story worth telling. The study shall document the decline of the city and its nightlife through speaking to all generations who were exposed to different NTEs, documenting how the culture of 'going the dancing' has transformed into 'getting on the piss'.

iii) The research question or specific hypothesis to be tested

1) What are the lived experiences of people from Stoke-on-Trent within the city's NTE?
2) What can their experiences of the NTE tell us about broader social, cultural, political and economic issues in Stoke-on-Trent?
3) What are the similarities and differences in older and younger people's experiences of Stoke's NTE?

iv) The background to the project

Stoke-on-Trent has gone through several shifts to reach where it is today. Most notably, Stoke-on-Trent shifted from an agricultural community in the pre-industrial era into a labor powerhouse by the late 1700's. As the industrial revolution continued, so did North Staffordshire's success in the pottery industry, remaining a major player in national and international trade and the city's main employer. In 1841 43.3% of men and women in employment over the age of 20 in Burslem and Wolstanton worked in the pottery industry, while in Stoke it was 38.2%. 10 years later, seventy percent of all Potters in England and Wales were employed in Staffordshire (Briggs, 1993). In fact, the population in general had grown exponentially thanks to the flourishing ceramics industry. Where the population of the pottery villages could have previously been counted in hundreds, by 1738 it had risen to 4000 overall. A century later, the population was 68,000 (Bailey, 2000). This also meant a restructuring of what constituted the area's industrial and social hub. While Burslem

had originally laid claim to the title of the mother town, with it having the largest population, by 1801, Hanley had begun to surpass it as the most populace area of the pottery towns (Bailey, 2000).
Of course, the area's factories continued to expand as the working population grew, with Royal Winton having expanded to four factories in the area come the turn of the 20th century, while Aynsley opened its imposing factory Portland Works in 1861 (North, 1998). Not only did the already local pottery business continue to grow, potters from around the country began moving their headquarters and manufacturing to North Staffordshire, most notably being Royal Doulton, who at one time were the world's largest manufacturer of ceramic goods, moving from London to the pottery capital in 1877, opening a factory in Burslem (North, 1998). Alongside businesses, master potters from the continent also flocked to the six towns, with the pottery industry attracting highly sophisticated designers such as Emile Lessore who started working for Wedgewood in the 1860's, leading to a resurgence in their popularity (Briggs, 1993). Further to this, supporting industries also grew in Stoke, with local flint mills such as Edwards and sons in Bucknall and Shirley's in Etruria supplying the materials to the local pottery businesses, highlighting the local industry that this had created in pottery manufacture as a whole (Taylor, 1995).
pottery was not the only industry to take off during this period of prosperity. As previously mentioned, the ceramics industry was heavily reliant on the local coalfields, which in turn flourished. Pits such as Sneyd, Norton and Florence are as redolent of the area's past as Minton or Spode (Rice, 2010). The coal industry was well established from the 17th century, primarily supplying diverse industries such as tile making and small metal-based trades. But from 1750, large scale mining began due to the growing dominance of the pottery industry after the opening of the county's first porcelain works in Longton (Taylor, 2003). Pot banks were soon being built close to collieries to reduce the burden of having to travel far for coal (Taylor, 1995). Large mines such as Adderley green mine opened in 1799 to meet the demand of the pot banks (Corum and Lawley, 1993). Like the pot banks, the mines were a large employer for the area, with 10.5% of Burslem and Wolstanton and 6% of Stoke's male working age population working in the industry in 1841 (Briggs, 1993). Hanley Deep Pit alone would come to employ over 400 men and boys by 1868, producing 400 tons of coal a day (Edwards, 2012). By 1950, the industry would grow to employ 15,000 (Corum and Lawley, 1993).

Despite such industrial prosperity, the lives of the area's residents were far from luxurious. On the contrary, the Potteries were renowned as an area infested with crime, poverty, and disease. One of the main reasons for such deprivation in the region was due to, ironically, the success of its industries. While the three industries successfully put Stoke-on-Trent on the map, they had dire effects on the lives of its citizens. With 200 years of industry, poverty, and grime, the city's industries had been poisonous and debilitating, underpaying workers and unprofitable for its owners (Rice, 2010).
It was often said that the Luftwaffe never bombed Stoke to an excessive degree as one would think they had already bombed it due to the excessive smoke that filled the North Staffordshire skies (Rosenthal and Lawrence, 1993). The sun was virtually blocked out by smoke, people could walk down the street and be unable to see who was beside them (Rice, 2010). It is of no wonder that Riddler (1987) described The Potteries being 'more akin to Dante's Inferno than a busy industrial conurbation'. It would be this smoke that caused most of the problems for residents. Stoke was always noted as being unhealthier than most other industrial cities and towns thanks to the pottery industry (Corum and Lawley, 1993), with workers having no choice but to live close to their place of work, putting themselves and their family amidst the pollution (Taylor, 1995). They were often living so close to the source of the pollution, that if they had any sort of garden, nothing would grow in it (Taylor, 2003). People had become accustomed to wearing dirty clothes and walking around with masks on their faces or handkerchiefs clutched to their mouths. The dust of the pot banks led to the debilitating 'Potters rot' (North, 2020). In 1910, the biggest cause of death in Stoke-on-Trent

was disease related to the respiratory system, evidently caused by the dirty, industrial smoke that filled the sky and lungs of the area's residents (Taylor, 1995). Added to this, the use of lead in the pot banks also had grim effects. By working with lead, Workers suffered from poisoning, often developing partial paralysis and problems with their nervous system (North, 2020). This was for many a best-case scenario, as there were many lead related deaths due to the use of lead glazes up until 1948, when it was finally made illegal for potters to use the substance (Rice, 2010).
Of the city's second industry, it could arguably be said that the conditions in the mines were much worse. Mining was perilous due to the threat of inundation from older unused workings nearer the surface, and the large amounts of gas found in many mining seems (Riddler 1987; Briggs, 1993).

Away from the drudgeries of work, life was not much better for the inhabitants of what would become Stoke-on-Trent, with the local houses largely being unfit for living. The packed rows of working-class houses bred disease, with cholera, diphtheria and scarlet fever being common complaints. During the 1897 diphtheria epidemic, there were 14 times as many cases of the disease in the Potteries than the national average, while Longton had the highest rate of child mortality in England and Wales (Corum and Lawley, 1993). This was no doubt helped by the houses, crammed so closely together so to make more profit, suffering from poor sanitation, with the outdoor and open toilets being a source for such diseases (North, 2000). By 1910, Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases spread through the slums accounted for 23% of deaths in the federation (Taylor, 1995). The worst slum in the Potteries from the mid-1800s was in Burslem and was known locally as 'The Hellhole'. It was said to contain houses in squalor with half-starved, half-dressed women and children, and idle drunken man. The Hanley slums of 1900 were said to be similar with town being widely acknowledged as having an abundance of houses where up to 15 people lived in a two-bedroom terraced house, poor sanitation, lawlessness and alcoholism (Riddler, 1987). Broken pavements, open drains, disease, immorality, and obscenity were the norm for slums like these (Warrillow, 1963). Areas such as these remained well into the 20th century. John Street in Longton was one such infamous community amidst the pot banks. They had no gas or electricity, and the only running water was a tap shared by up to 10 people in a backyard, with the outside toilets also being shared by two or three families (Corum and Lawley, 1993). By the 1950, 12,000 of such houses that were deemed unfit for habitation were still occupied in the city (North, 2000).

Not only did the slums breed disease, but they also bred depravity, with the towns residential areas being hotspots for drunkenness and violence.
the Potteries had an evil reputation of being one of the most drunken districts in the Kingdom, with Hanley alone having 245 beer houses and 52 licenced pubs in 1869 (Warrillow, 1960). Drunkenness was such a social problem during this period, some of the cities factory owners employed town criers to wake their alcoholic and idle men for work (Wedgewood, 1970). Unfortunately, this was rarely successful, as shown by one Longton pottery factory where 60% of workers were habitual drinkers, many of which failed to turn up for work on a Monday morning after a weekend of drinking (Warrillow, 1960). The employers struggled to control their men not only at home, but also at work, with drinking on the job being common, especially in the pits, with drinks sometimes being forced upon young women where the most villainous of workers would force themselves upon them (Riddler, 1987). The employers did not exactly help the alcoholism in the area however, as most workers were often paid at their local pubs, whose landlords were happy to let them spend all their wages on their ale (Corum and Lawley, 1993). Most money was spent on drink and gambling, taking its toll on their already low wages; of course, this led to many a brawl between residents (Warrillow, 1960), in some cases resulting in murder over gambling disagreements (Wedgewood, 1970). Pubs such as The Sea Lion Inn and its nearby residential road Lower John Street were renowned for their drunkards and violence, with the area was known as the worst place in the city to live at the turn of the century (Taylor, 1995).

Much of this behaviour went unpunished, with the policing and the law either paying little attention or being unable to do anything about it. On one occasion in the 1890s, a drunken brawl took place outside the Black Horse pub in Hanley. For hours fighting continued with life and property in danger while no one was there to enforce the law (Warrillow, 1960). However, the slums and pubs were home to the working-classes entertainment as well as just alcohol and violence. Many of the pubs offered several brutal attractions, such as dog fighting, cock fighting, bull baiting and at one time even bear baiting; all popular pastimes amongst the Stoke-on-Trent clientele (Warrillow, 1960). The more respectable of the working-class however stuck to taking part in unlicensed boxing matches and illegal gambling, yet even this was regarded as immoral by the elites of the time (Taylor, 2003).

Periods of annual leave for the workers was also known as a time when the North Staffordshire residents would let debauchery run wild for their week off of work, where there were often fights and pickpocketing amongst the drunkenness (Wedgewood, 1970). Such periods were known as wakes. There was much criticism by religious leaders and employers over the immorality that would occur during town's wake weeks; however, there was little fun for the working-class inhabitants of the region to have other than drinking themselves into oblivion as the poor were priced out of many activities in the late 1800's, effectively banning them from public parks where people had to pay to use the facilities (Taylor, 2003). Instead, the hedonism of the wakes could be explained by the business owners and local authorities refusing to invest in local facilities for the working people. While other industrial cities took pride in their community, seeing themselves as competing against other cities across Britain, the Potteries largely competed internally against each other, with not one of the towns offering much to the people (Taylor, 2003). It was more likely that the business owners were upset at the fact that they were not making the money for the weeks they were closed and used the hedonism that took place as an excuse to condemn them (Taylor, 2003).

While low level crime such as drunkenness, prostitution, begging and fighting were seen as the common offences in the Potteries, more serious criminal activity occurred in the area. Crimes such as baby farming was prevalent in the Potteries during the late 1800s, and laudanum was heavily used in the Potteries and given to the babies. Most sinister, some baby farmers often did it for the purpose of collecting insurance money when the babies died from malnutrition (Warrillow, 1960). Violent gangs were also a fixture of the Potteries. In the 19th century Hanley was plagued by a gang of youths known as the Rough Fleet gang, the leader of which was Jack Wilson. Taking advantage of the poorly lit streets, they would beat up and rob the people of Hanley. The local Watchmen and constable's were helpless, as they also faced the being attacked (Warrillow, 1960). Wilson, despite being the son of a wealthy pottery manufacturer, was believed to have been spurred on for his love of gambling and drink. He rarely committed crimes just for profit, it was often just something for him to do as he found such actions humorous. If he was not attacking people for fun, he was making local drunks in the pubs fight for his money (Wedgewood, 1970). Another, and much more sinister, gang was that of William Walklate's of Sneyd Green, who in 1820 raped a woman with his crew. While he and two of his accomplices faced execution, he had brought a large crowd of people from the Potteries who had travelled all night to reach the front of the scaffold of where they were to be hung in Stafford, as was customary for the time (Wedgewod, 1970).

However, crimes purely for financial gain were ever popular in Stoke-on-Trent, with the local working-classes often turning to crime to make money to supplement their poor wages. Some did this without the use of violence, such as Theodore Moore, who filled the Potteries with counterfeit silver coins, while most preferred more violent methods such as Highway robbery. Certain areas were renowned for this in the Potteries, with one lane in Etruria being known as Rogues Lane due to its prevalence (Warrillow, 1960). Basford in the 1880s was also an area with a reputation for Highway robbery, battery and assault, while come 1900 Northwood was home to another notorious area, known colloquially as The Rocks (Wedgewood, 1970). Brian Street in Hanley had a similar

reputation, with those in the street having little respect for the policeman who seldom dared venture there, yet they cowered at the sight of the local Catholic priest whose authority was unquestioned (Wedgewood, 1970).

In the years following the second world war, things got somewhat better for the residents of Stoke-on-Trent due to the Labour government of Clement Atlee and the subsequent social reforms he brought in such as increased social housing and socialized healthcare. Later, issues unique to the Potteries such as pollution were solved through the implementation of the Clean Air Act in 1953, doing much to improve the environment in the city, as well as its high death rate.
This period until the mid-1970's was a time of relative prosperity for the working-classes in industrial Britain, with socialist economic principles being blended successfully with traditional cultural beliefs such as the importance of family, community and work (Hall, 2012). During this period, crime dropped significantly, wages grew, and the city still could lay claim to being an industrial behemoth, with 62,000 still being employed in the cities pottery industry in 1968. Although this had declined since the war, it was still enough for the city to keep hold of its unique character and employ a significant number. By 1991, this number would fall to below 22,500.

As the Keynesianism of the post-war period was finally put out of its misery by Thatcher in 1979, misery was to ensue for the residents of North Staffordshire. The pottery, steel and coal-mining industries were among the earliest victims of the Conservatives deindustrialization in the 1980s. Much of the town's purpose and identity was quickly eroded. While there were some attempts of resistance, such as the 1985 miners' strike that was very much active in Stoke-on-Trent, it would not be long before they were to be crushed by a government intent on stripping a city of its identity and replacing it with little else. Due to it being replaced with little else, Stoke has stagnated and become increasingly worse by a number of metrics. Average pay is 16% below the national average, house prices are half the national average, and its biggest employer is now an online betting company (Lichfield, 2019), replacing the purpose that the city's traditional manual jobs gave with making money off the back of peoples misfortune and financial precarities.
The past decade of austerity has seen the city's public services become depleted, while the crime rate has continued to rise and is significantly higher than the county average of 60 crimes per 1000 people at 91. The town centres meanwhile range from the depressed to the derelict, with the once booming nightlife of the city being all but dead, with their being a 40% decrease in pubs and bars from 2001 to 2020 (Burnett, 2020). No doubt, the 2020-2022 Covid-19 pandemic has only added more fuel to this funeral pyre that is Stoke-on-Trent's NTE (Jones et al, 2022). The somewhat positive drinking cultures that could previously be found in areas such as working men's and social clubs, where a sense of community spirit was often found (see Winlow and Hall, 2006), have long gone from the city. All that remains is dangerously drinking to excess, leading to violence, death, and addiction (Tariq, 2022; Byatt, 2022).

v) Where the research is to be carried out
The research will be carried out in and around the city of Stoke-on-Trent, in the arenas that make up the area's NTE. The interviews will primarily occur in private residence, while the ethnographic observations will largely occur in the NTE.

vi) Names of other individuals or organisations involved in the project
Owen Hodgkinson, a post graduate researcher at Staffordshire University is the principal researcher on this research project. Owen is born and bred in the city of Stoke and knows the NTE of the area well through personal experience and his own personal contacts. Throughout his education Owen has demonstrated relevant research interests for this study, such as ethnography

and issues relating to *Ultrarealism*. Owen also has the tools required to conduct research with his desired group, as he can utilise his working-class biography to facilitate access and shape the research process, as has previously been utilised by other *Ultrarealist* scholars (see Ellis, 2016; Winlow, 2001)
This is evident in his master's dissertation, for which he spent time with football hooligans who had experience sectarianism and linked this to wider social, cultural, and political issues to theorise how they had become who they are. Owen will be supervised by Dr Luke Telford, Professor James Treadwell and Dr Mark Bushell. Dr Luke Telford is the primary research supervisor for this study. Dr Luke Telford is well versed in ethnographic interviewing and linking micro-data to macro-frameworks to explain how issues have come to be, highlighted by his work on nationalism in the post-industrial north. Professor James Treadwell meanwhile has extensive knowledge and experience of qualitative and ethnographical studies, including those that involve the NTE in relation to those involved with football violence. Dr Mark Bushell has significant research experience involving the NTE, highlighted through his own PhD where he studied migrant workers in the NTE.

vii) Whether other approvals have been gained or are to be sought:
N/A

2. Research Procedure

Please provide a summary of the procedures that will be followed when carrying out the research project under the following headings.

a) The design of the project (including, where appropriate, issues of statistical power):

My project will be qualitative, built upon carrying out ethnographic interviews and observations which will be conducted to gain an insight into Stoke-on-Trent's NTE. Ethnographic interviews have been highlighted by Treadwell (2020) as largely interchangeable with unstructured and semi-structured interviewing that relies on life histories and biographies, however a core difference is the immersion into the culture of those who are being interviewed and the importance of establishing a relationship. Due to me already having a relationship with some of those who are expected to be interviewed to varying degrees (some are known through mutual friends, while others are friends or family members), much of the relationship establishing is already completed due to a sense of trust and rapport already being in place. Open ended qualitative interviewing is better suited to conducting the research over structured interviews, as qualitative interviewing helps the interview flow as a conversation as much as possible (Finch, 1984). This will allow for a narrative discussion to take place, where the interviewee is probed to tell stories relating to the questions, enabling the participant to provide an oral history of their experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). From their narratives, qualitative and insightful conclusions to the research questions can be drawn. However, there will be notes made before interviews take place on topics I as the researcher would like to discuss in order to answer the research questions as good as possible. This will act as a direction sheet for the researcher to make sure that all topics are covered.

Prior to the interview, I shall inform the participants of what the study encompasses via a participant information sheet. Following this I will assure the participant that they have the right to anonymity, not answer any questions they prefer not to, and are able to withdraw at any time

during the research process. I shall ask the participant to sign a consent form to allow me to use to record and use their interview for the study. The participants will be selected through approaching people I know or my acquaintances know who have experience within Stoke's NTE. Interviews with participants who I personally know shall be arranged via text or where I would normally see them, whilst those who I do not know shall be contacted through gatekeepers and a convenient interview time shall be facilitated by the gatekeeper. At the beginning of the interview, I will outline the purpose of this study and will remind participants of their right to withdraw from this study at up to two months after their data has been collected. In terms of openness, it is important when utilising ethnographic methods to be fairly open with the participants, in order to build rapport over shared experiences (Treadwell, 2020)..

Away from interviewing, ethnographic observations shall be utilised. Like most ethnographic studies, the study shall comprise of prolonged researcher involvement within a loose group of people (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). In this case, such group shall be those who are consumers in the local NTE. The primary aim of such the researcher involvement is to gather 'rich, nuanced and comprehensive' data that will enable the researcher to produce a thorough account of the observed (Davies and Francis, 2018). Therefore, the data collection process for ethnographies is often long and complex. To start the observations, I shall use my own contacts to gain entry into the Stoke NTE and begin to conduct unstructured and broad observations of events, actions, social environments, and research participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). As the data begins to demonstrate themes and theory is drawn upon to explain the observations, further mini tour observations will take place in order to narrow the topic of interest and observe trends closer (Spradley, 1980).
In order to record the data collected from the observations made, extensive fieldnotes will be taken. For the purpose of this study, field dairies will be used to document observations during the fieldwork stage. The researcher will start with headnotes, developing them into scratch notes and progressing onto full notes, each time becoming more detailed and conducted in a timely manner to ensure the maximum amount of data is recollected (Treadwell, 2020). Furthermore, thick description will be utilised when producing the fieldnotes. This will allow for an in-depth explanation of experiences and observations will enable the researcher to examine the findings and place them within the wider theoretical debate and social structures (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Observations and the use of fieldnotes to document them are often seen to be subjective due to the influence of the characteristics and background of the researcher (Kawulich, 2005). This puts into question the validity of the research findings. In order to mitigate this issue, the study will take a similar approach to Treadwell and Goody (2008), who accept that qualitative research such as ethnography cannot be totally objective, as the researcher will no doubt be influenced by their own personal biases and opinions. Hence, it is an informed opinion rather than a neutral finding. However, by being 'reflective' in your ethnography, Treadwell (2020), notes, it allows the research to remain transparent through detailing the researchers role in the study and giving context to how perspectives have been formed. This will help to ensure that the role and characteristics of the researcher are acknowledged and address the impact they may have on the research design, data collection and the overall findings (Wincup, 2017).
The penultimate phase of an ethnographic study, which takes place prior the final write up of the ethnography, is the analysis of data. The nature of ethnography requires the researcher to repeat research steps numerous times. This enables the researcher to develop a further understanding of the observed, collect additional data that provides further richness, perform a more cultivated analysis of the findings and enhances reflexivity (Treadwell, 2020). Therefore, the data analysis for this study will begin from the moment the fieldwork commences and will continue until the write up phase begins. One of the ways in which ethnographers organise the data collected in order to make sense of it is through the use of coding. Coding refers to the process of allocating a code to

sections of data in order to identify structures and common characteristics, interpret the data and extract meaning from it (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001).

2) The procedures to be followed:

- Once ethical approval has been obtained and the participants have consented to being studied, I will begin to conduct the fieldwork.
- An ethnographic approach involving participant observation and interviews.
- Once participants confirm they are willing to take part, a location and date will be arranged.

- I shall text my supervisor when each interview begins and ends, while I will also alert them to any adverse events should they occur.

- At the beginning of the interview, participants will be informed about their rights, that they can withdraw during the research process, that they can avoid discussing topics that make them uncomfortable and how the consent form and audio recording of the interview will be stored.

- They will sign the consent form before the interview takes place.

- Before the interview takes place, participants will have the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research, while they will also have this opportunity at the end of the interviews.

- Throughout the interview, a 'direction' sheet (see appendix B) shall be kept with me to remind me of topics that should be discussed with the participant.

- The information they share during the interview will be kept confidential, with identifying details being anonymized during the transcription process and all data being kept on a password secure laptop.

- Each participant will be given a list of contact details for regarding the research in the debrief should they need to get in touch, whilst they will also be informed of support services such as the Stoke Wellbeing Team or PTSDUK in case anything discussed during the interview has caused them to become upset.

- When doing ethnographic fieldwork, I shall enter the field with those who have given me their informed consent to do so.

- Similar to the interview process, I will notify one of my supervisors when I am entering the field and when I leave, informing them who I am with and where I am in case any adverse events were to occur.

- The confidentiality of all participants will be honoured by ensuring that participation and confidential details remain anonymous outside the research team (Wiles, et al., 2008). This will be done by using coded participant numbers, storing any data collected on a password protected laptop and any hard copies will be stored safely in a locked cabinet only

accessible to the researcher. Participants will be informed of their right to confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

3) The participation of people or animals in the project:

The data needed for this study will be generated through ethnographic fieldwork, which will include extensive observations of people in the NTE. In order to gain access to such people, I will rely on my own circle of family and friends who I already associate with, and also use them as gatekeepers to interact with others in the NTE. Relying on one's social network to begin data collection has been deployed by other researchers, such as Ellis (2016), Lloyd (2018) and Telford (2022). My extended family is large, and my social circle is varied, with many of my friends belonging to different social circles, so my findings shall not be skewed by only interviewing the same kind of people.
Informed consent will be obtained from participants via a consent form prior to the commencement of their interview or my fieldwork involving them.

4) How the design of the project and the procedures followed are likely to assess the research question or test the hypothesis in question or establish some significant result:

This study will apply a multi-method ethnographic approach which will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the Stoke-on-Trent NTE. This approach will further allow me to place these experiences within a broader theoretical perspective informed by macro-social, political and cultural paradigms, As well as insights from ultra-realism/deviant leisure. Fieldwork will be conducted by the researcher to generate the rich, nuanced data required for this study (Davies and Francis, 2018, p.139). The fieldwork will consist of thorough researcher observations and semi-structured participant interviews. Data generated through researcher observations will give an insight into the issues concerned by the study (Brewer, 2000). This insight will be reinforced through the use of semi- structured interviews, which allows the researcher to collect further data and strengthen my comprehension of what I have observed (Roberts, 2009).

The use of open ended interviews throughout the fieldwork will give me an opportunity to delve deeper into the participants background and how their identity has is related to the NTE, enabling me to theorise how this may have influenced their behaviour in the NTE. It is expected that the method of interview will be useful in explicating a persons background, as the method enables the interview to flow as a conversation, hopefully making the participants more relaxed than if it were a structured questionnaire, as the informal manner of the interviews take on the character of intimate conversations between close friends (Finch, 1984). From their narratives, I will be able to draw qualitative and insightful conclusions to my research questions. I will also be able to ensure that the research questions can be answered as the method enables the researcher to probe the participant on issues relating to the questions, such as questions about their socio-economic upbringing, experiences of racism and nationalism, and their political views, while I can attempt to divert the conversation away from areas that are not relevant to the research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009)

5) Availability of facilities/resources/equipment to enable the project to be carried out:

The project requires consent forms for the participants to sign which will be done in person on paper, and a Dictaphone to audio record the interviews (I will use my phone).

6) Procedures that will be followed if any adverse event occurs:

As seen throughout, this study has been designed to limit the negative impact it may cause on both the researcher and the research participants. However, the following procedures have been developed in the instance that an adverse event occurs:

1. If participants become distressed or uncomfortable during the interview process the researcher will remind them of their rights not to answer any question, they do not feel comfortable answering, to pause the interview, or withdraw their participation at any point during the interview.
2. If participants express concern regarding their anonymity, they will be reminded that their right to confidentiality will be upheld and protected.
3. Participants will be informed that they have up to two months after the competition of their interview to withdraw their data from the study if they wish to no longer participate. The contact details of the researcher and research supervisor will be provided in the participant information sheet and debrief sheet.
4. Participants will be provided with details on how to contact the researcher or a member of the research team if they have any further questions, issues or wish to place a complaint about the study. This will be contained within the participation information sheet and the debrief sheet.
5. Participants will be provided with the details of support services they can contact if they need any further support. This will be contained within the participant debrief sheet.
6. The following procedures have been put in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the researcher is maintained throughout the study:

a) Plans and procedures have been put into place to minimize the risk posed to the researcher during interviews, this includes building a rapport with participants prior to the commencement of the interview and practicing safer interview techniques. For more details, please see the final section of this form.

b) Supervisory meetings will continue to be scheduled once and month and are available upon request to ensure the well-being of the researcher. This will provide the researcher with a safe space to discuss their experiences and concerns they may have. The researcher will also be able to access support from Staffordshire University's Wellbeing Centre if required.

c) the supervisory team shall be informed when I am entering and leaving the field, and where I will be and who with in case any adverse events may occur. They shall also be contacted immediately in the unlikely event that something does occur.

3. Participant Recruitment & Characteristics

Please provide clear information regarding the recruitment of participants and their appropriateness to the project:

*(**NB:** Student researchers must also ascertain from their Supervisor whether or not they require a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in order to enable this project to proceed. If this is the case the application must make clear whether or not it has been undertaken. Any data collection or other activities requiring this clearance must not begin until it has been obtained.)*

a) The number of participants involved in the study (including the adequacy of the sample size for both qualitative and quantitative research):

For the study there will be at least 25 participants who will be interviewed, as this provides an adequate enough sample for qualitative research to be conducted and analyzed. There is variation in what is considered a valid number of participants for qualitative research, with Geerson and

Herowitz (2002) arguing that 60 people are needed for the data to be valid enough to support convincing conclusions, while Morgan, et al (2002), Guest, et al (2006) and Francis, et al (2010) highlight that many concepts and themes are identified after five or six interviews. Due to the study hoping to enter the field with most, or, if possible, all of the participants, 25 interviews shall be the goal as this should be enough coupled with the fieldwork data to highlight themes and concepts to analyse and theorise, while any more than this shall be a bonus. With the ethnographical paradigm being utilised for the interviews, previous studies in this vein such as Treadwell and Garland's (2011) show that a small number of participants – in their case three – can still be utilised to bring back strong data that can be expanded on in later studies; henceforth the use of 25 interviews should be more than sufficient when using ethnography to delve beneath the surface of participants feelings and motivations. The sample size of 25 has been designed to be large enough to generate the rich qualitative data needed, yet small enough to ensure that the researcher can dedicate enough time and effort into collecting such quality data (Worley, Barrow and Wood, 2016). I will also spend at least a year entering the NTE field, as this will ensure that an adequate number of observations are made in this setting. This will ensure that enough in-depth data is collected to provide a comprehensive account of Stoke's NTE (Davies and Francis, 2018).

b) How participants will be identified, approached or recruited:

To ensure that the data collected is able to answer the research questions effectively, the following procedure will take place to approach and recruit participants:

1. Interviewees will be identified firstly by recruiting from my own social circle, and then by the way of snowball sampling, whereby participants are asked to identify other potential participants (Babbie, 2008).
2. I will provide all potential interviewees with all the information contained within the participant information sheet verbally when I invite them to take part in the study. Paper copies will be provided to participants at the interview to ensure they have further access to the study information and Staffordshire University contact details if needed.
3. The researcher will allow potential participants time to decide whether they wish to participate. To ensure that participants do not feel pressured into participating, no further attempts will be made to communicate with them in relation to providing an interview. If participants wish to provide an interview, they can communicate this decision directly to the researcher. This will allow them to make an informed, voluntary decision to participate in the study.
4. All participants will be encouraged and provided the opportunity to ask any further questions they may have prior to signing the consent form.
5. Once a participant has chosen to participate in the study consent will be obtained verbally and an interview will be arranged for a time that is suitable for the participant, where they will give signed consent via a participant consent form.
6. As outlined previously, the voluntary nature of the study and the right to withdraw will be reiterated to participants throughout the duration of the study to ensure informed consent is taken without duress.
7. To collect the remaining data, in a way that mitigates the intrusion into the lives of the participants, the researcher will engage in ethnographic observations. This includes participating in 'ordinary conversations and activities' with those who are consumers in the Stoke NTE.
8. To ensure that the identity of research participants remain unidentifiable to the public, the results will be presented as an aggregate, whereby the identity of research participants will be protected by removing all personal and identifiable data.
9. If the research procedure does not generate enough interest and further participants are

required, the process will be repeated.

3) Whether there are any inclusion or exclusion criteria, together with their justification:

Participants invited to partake within this study will include anyone aged over 18 who has currently or in the past had vast experience as a consumer in the Potteries NTE.
The inclusion criteria have been developed to ensure that the data collected has the ability to adequately answer the research questions. Interviewing people who have experienced Stoke's NTE I different generations shall give an important insight into how and why the city's nightlife has mutated, providing a unique insight into the experiences of NTE consumers who have witnessed such a change.

4) The age range of participants; the gender balance of participants; and the participants' state of health:

The participants taking part in this study will cover a diverse age range, with participants being able to participate as long as they are over the age of 18. For at least 15 of the participants, the study will aim to gater those who are between the ages of 18 and 35, while at least ten participants shall be aged 36 and over so that the study can give an adequate insight into the changes that have taken place within the NTE in decades prior. The study aims to gather data as balanced as possible in terms of gender as this will highlight issues that are unique to different genders within Stoke's NTE. In terms of the older demographic who are no longer active within the NTE, the health, competency and wellbeing of participants will be considered when choosing participants for the data set. While I do not envisage any of the respondents possessing any myriad health issues, it is possible that some of the older respondents will possess some health issues that accompany aging. The researcher will use their own observations and guidance from my supervisors to make judgements of the suitability of participants.

5) Whether there is any inducement to participate in the study:

No material incentives will be used to induce participation in this study. All participation will be voluntary.

6) How participants will be informed about the right to withdraw from participation the study (and whether time limits will be established during which a participant can request for their data to be withdrawn from the study):

Participants will be initially informed of their right to withdraw via the participant information sheet, with them being told of their option to retract their participation for up to two months following initial contact being made. Participants will be asked to confirm that they understand that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary that they can withdraw up to two months later without having to give an explanation. Participants will also be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study any time during and before the commencement of the semi-structured interview. Furthermore, information about their right to withdraw and how they can withdraw their contribution from the study will be outlined on the debrief sheet, which will be provided to participants after the semi-structured interview. The debrief sheet states that if participants wish to withdraw from the study, they can do so within 2 months of them becoming a participant.

7) Whether the project involves any special groups requiring some additional justification or permission (e.g., children and young people under 18 years of age, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, patients, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities (e.g., drug taking), or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship):

the project does not involve any special groups.

8) Will informed consent be obtained from research participants? Yes

Please give details of who will obtain content and how this will be undertaken.

The participants will first express interest in participating in the study by speaking to myself or the gatekeepers. Before the interview begins, the participants will read through and sign a consent form which gives me permission to audio record and analyse their story for my project. They will be given the opportunity at this time to ask any questions about the study, identify any areas they are not comfortable talking about or wish not to be recorded, and will be made aware of their freedom to withdraw. Their consent forms and any other identifying data shall be digitalised and stored on a password secure laptop, with any physical copies of the consent forms being destroyed to protect their identity. They will also be informed that their transcripts and quotations may be used for future research, which they will consent to in the consent form

4. Information and Data

Please provide answers to the following questions regarding the handling and storage of information and data:

a) How will research data be stored (manually or electronically)?

All electronic data will be stored safely in a password protected laptop. This will include interview recordings/transcripts, fieldnotes and participant consent forms. Fieldnotes and consent forms will be scanned and saved on the laptop within 14 days of data collection and all paper copies will be shredded. Until paper copies are scanned and saved electronically, they will be stored in a locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher.

2) How is protection given to the participants (e.g., by being made anonymous through coding and with a participant identifier code being kept separately and securely)?

The confidentiality of all participants will be honoured by ensuring that all participation and confidential details remain anonymous outside the research team (Wiles, et al., 2008). This will be achieved by using coded participant identification numbers and storing the codes safely and separately in a document protected by a password. To further protect the identity of participants, pseudonym's chosen by the researcher will be used for publication. Additionally, any identifiable data will not be included in the interview transcript. Disclosure of information that indicates that people are at risk of harm may lead to the researcher disclosing this information to the appropriate authorities. Participants will be informed of this practice in the participant information sheet and will provide consent for this to take place via the participant consent form.

3) What assurance will be given to the participant about the confidentiality of this data and the security of its storage?

Assurances will be given to participants about their confidentiality and security of the data they provide. The information sheet will provide potential participants with an explanation of the data handling and confidentiality procedures undertaken in this study. This includes information regarding the storage and disposal of confidential information and the steps taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. Participants will be reminded this during the brief before the interview and during the debrief after the interview has concluded. Participants will be encouraged to and given the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns they have during a brief before the interview and during the debrief when the interview has concluded. Additionally, participants will be provided the contact details of the researcher and the researchers supervisor for if they have any questions or concerns after their participation in the study has ceased.

4) Is assurance given to the participant that they cannot be identified from any publication or dissemination of the results of the project?

It will be reiterated to participants at numerous points throughout the study that their anonymity will be protected and that they cannot be identified in any publication or dissemination of the study and its findings. The participant information sheet will assure participants that their anonymity will be protected through the anonymisation of data via the use of coded participant identification numbers and researcher assigned pseudonym's. Additionally, research participants will be informed of their right request a copy of their transcripts to review the level of confidentiality and anonymity given to them. This information will be reiterated during a brief before the interview begins and during the debrief after the interview has concluded.

5) Who will have access to this data, and for what purposes?

Only the principal investigator will have access to the stored data collected as part of the study. As the PhD supervisors of the principal researcher, Dr Luke Telford, Professor James Treadwell and Dr Mark Bushell might view the stored data in order to discuss findings and analysis. However, the wider research team will not have full access to the transcripts or fieldnotes and data will only be shared when necessary. The findings from this study will be used to form part of the researchers PhD thesis and may also be used for future academic publications and teaching materials.

6) How will the data be stored, for how long, and how will it be discarded?

By the end of the study, all data will be electronically stored. In accordance with the Staffordshire University policy on handling data, all data will be stored in the password protected laptop for ten years. After 10 years the data will be permanently deleted.

5. Risk, Harm and Other Ethical Considerations

Please provide an estimate of the perceived benefits or outcomes of the project weighed against the possible harms caused to the participants.

Please identify any potential risks or hazards that might be caused to participants or the researcher, in addition to any discomfort, distress or inconvenience to them, together with any ethical problems or considerations that the researcher considers to be important or difficult in the proposed project.

The NTE and the social harms associated with it can be considered a sensitive topic for all parties involved. One of the ethical risks related to this project is the potential for participants' recollecting their experiences becoming upset or angry by participating in the study. Treadwell (2020) and Ellis (2016) highlight how participants who have previously committed or been victims of crime may become violent or frustrated during studies if they feel as if they are being targeted. This is evident in Ellis' (2016) study where he saw football one hooligan threaten one of his friends as he felt his friend was being insulting.

Further to this, some may be willing to inflict harm on those that they view as suspicious or with ulterior motives, such as those who are attempting to research them covertly (Pearson, 2012). While people in the NTE can carry the risk of violence, it is also possible that they may face ill mental health from taking part in the study, with discussions of violence, harm, and criminality possibly bringing up feelings of guilt and distress (Ellis, 2016).

There are more general risks that must be countered in this study also, such as the confidentiality of participants being maintained in order to protect their identity and minimize the chances of any harm coming from the information they relay, whether that be through repercussive violence or the criminal justice system looking into their potential crimes (Ellis, 2016).

Please explain how any potential risks or hazards will be dealt with, along with any justificatory statements. This information should highlight any remaining ethical considerations and to respond to them in a way which may assist the Research Ethics Committee in arriving at some judgement upon the proposal.

Firstly, as a regular frequenter of the Stoke-on-Trent NTE, I have the biographical experience needed to stand me in good stead to do this research.

It is imperative to ensure that research participants do not exit the study with any emotional burdens caused by their participation (Linkogle and Lee-Treweek, 2000). A number of steps will be taken to ensure that this is achieved. It is important that the research does not cause any psychological distress to those involved, such as feelings of distress, guilt, anger, or fear related to their disclosure of sensitive information. To minimise this potential, participants will agree to discuss the topic beforehand and will be able to inform me of any subtopics that they would rather not discuss before the interviews take place. Furthermore, with the interviews being semi-structured, the participant may direct the conversation in whatever way they wish. If for any reason a participant does become upset because of participating in this study, I will give them the opportunity to discontinue the interview, as well as contact details for mental health support services if relevant.

If the participant becomes upset during the interview, I will offer them the opportunity to pause the interview and take a break or the option to terminate the interview. However, I will aim to sense whether or not topics are distressing to the participants by assessing their body language (Allmark et al 2009). If their demeanor changes after a certain question is asked, I will make sure not to

probe them on the topic further.
While it is important that I look after my own safety, this should not come at the behest of good social research, henceforth participants shall still be questioned on things which could potentially make them angry, such as disagreeing with them on answer and probing them on this (Treadwell, 2020). Further safe interviewing techniques will be employed to minimise the risk to the researcher. This includes building a rapport with the participants prior to the interview taking place and positioning the researcher closer to the door of interview room to facilitate a quick exit if needed.
This will also be the case when entering the field for observations, with my supervisory team being notified when I enter and leave the field, my whereabouts and who I am with, and will be contacted immediately if I am in any danger. If there is a potential for harm by going into the field, I will discuss this with my supervisory team first and make them aware, providing us with an opportunity to discuss and resolve any potential issues prior to entering such a field. If I am informed by participants that I could be put in harms way by interviewing and observing certain people, I shall make sure that I do not approach them to take part in the study. If I feel uncomfortable during the fieldwork taking place, I will leave the field early and inform my supervisors my reasons for doing so. Meetings between myself and my supervisors will continue to be scheduled once a month and are unlimitedly available upon request to ensure the well-being of the researcher. This will provide the researcher with the opportunity to discuss their experiences and any issues they are facing. The researcher will also be able to access support from Staffordshire University's Wellbeing Centre if required.

While I accept that it presents various ethical issues to document participants who are under the influence of alcohol and possibly other psychoactive substances, there are a range of measures that can be deployed to mitigate this and ensure ethical research . To counter this, the participants will have been asked prior entering the NTE to give me their sober and informed consent to document them in this situation. Further to this, the participants shall be anonymised so nothing they do in these situations can have any bearing on their life outside of the data collection. I will also add, I enter the NTE with many of the participants on a weekly basis, so I expect to see nothing out of the ordinary occur, while the consent forms and anonymisation are giving them more protection than they would usually receive.
Further, Research with the inebriated is nothing new, with researchers such as Newcombe (1992) documenting drug use in the UK dance scene thirty years ago. While ethics may not have been as vigorous back then as they are today, it is clearly a suitable tool if it is used correctly, and it would be wrong as an ethnographer to not document people in NTE if they are drinking (see Treadwell, 2020), when after all, that is likely what they are likely there for (Smith, 2014). Furthermore, ethnographically documenting these circumstances enables the research to 'peel back the curtain' into people's real lives (Treadwell, 2020). While interviews give a good insight into how people view themselves and their life history, ethnographic insights will evidence the real thing and wont rely on their sober testimony.

In summation, to conduct research with the intoxicated ethically, I will follow the guidelines set out by Beauchamp and Childress (2001) of:

- Autonomy: participants should be free to participate. As previously mentioned, they will sign a consent form when sober and having been informed of the purpose of the study.

They will also have up to two months to withdraw from the study from when initial contact is made

- Non-maleficence: participants should be protected from harm. I have to take into account the participants health in this circumstance. If I find that they are what I would consider to be too intoxicated as other researchers have (see Deehan and Saville, 2003), I would not use them in the data in that circumstance and instead seek that they stop drinking or get medical help if needs be.

- Beneficence: the benefits of research should outweigh the risks. In this research, it is imperative that I view and document participants in this environment for reasons mentioned prior, while they will face little risk due to the anonymisation process.

- Justice: people should be treated equally. In the case of my research, the participants shall not be taken advantage of due to their inebriated state. This means that I will treat them as I would if they were sober, and let them guide the research rather than let myself influence them whilst they are intoxicated and potentially more easily persuaded.

Has a risk assessment been completed for this project

No as there are no serious risks, and any potential risks will be mitigated by the procedures outlined above and regular communication and guidance from my supervisors.

6. Supporting Information

Please attach the consent form, information sheet, and questionnaire/interview questions to this application. Further guidance on the design and content of consent forms and information sheets can be found on the University's Research Ethics website.

Example Interview questions

- Where in Stoke-on-Trent are you from?
- Where do you work?
- What is your family background?
- How often do you frequent the Stoke-on-Trent NTE?
- Have you noticed any changes in the NTE compared to when you first started frequenting it to now?
- Describe a typical nightout in Stoke
- Where is there to go in Stoke's NTE?
- Do you tend to stick to one town, or do you vary?
- How important is image in the NTE? For example, is it important to dress a certain way?
- What are you main motivations for frequenting the NTE?
- Do you think most people frequent the NTE for the same reasons as you? If not, why is this?
- Do you go outside of Stoke to experience other cities' NTE?
- Are many of your relationships based around drinking more than anything else?
- How many of the people you frequent the NTE with would you see outside of that social arena?
- Do you find there is much trouble in the NTE?
- Are you satisfied with how things are in Stoke's NTE?

Participant information sheet

Title of study

'24 Hour Party People': An Ethnographic Study of Hedonism in Stoke-on-Trent's Night-Time-Economies

Invitation Paragraph

Hi, my name is Owen Hodgkinson, I am a researcher at Staffordshire University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to know why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. So please read the following information carefully. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into Stoke-on-Trent's NTE, and those who frequent it.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study because either myself or another participant has identified you as someone who currently or previously has frequented the NTE in Stoke-on-Trent.

What will happen if I take part?

My own observations of Stoke-on-Trent's nightlife and open-ended interviews will be used to gather the data needed for this study. If you decide to take part in this study, we can then arrange an interview at a time and place that is convenient for you, and, if you are comfortable with it, I will attend the city's NTE with you.

Your interview can be expected to last around 90-minutes. The interview will be recorded on a recording device. This will only be done with your consent and the researcher will inform you of when the recording begins. Your interview will be stored in a password protected OneDrive file provided by Staffordshire University, and all identifying details shall be anonymised in the case of publication. If there is any information you do not wish to be recorded, I am happy to write parts of the interview if you are still happy for the information to be included in the study.

The interview shall be an unstructured, informal conversation where I aim to talk about different parts of your life in relation to the NTE.

Once you have read the information sheet, please contact us if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part, we will ask you to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Data handling and confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with the data protection law and will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR). The data collected will only be shared amongst the research team and will not be shared with a third party or outside of the EU.

All electronic data will be stored safely in a password protected OneDrive file provided by Staffordshire University. Hard copies will be stored in a locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher. To protect the identity and confidentiality of research participants, coded participant identification numbers will be used to anonymise data, pseudonym's will be used for publication and identifiable data will not be included in the interview transcript. You have the right request a copy of your transcripts to review the level of confidentiality and anonymity. In accordance with the Staffordshire University policy on handling data, all data will be kept for 10 years. During this time, a data transfer agreement will be in place which will ensure that data continues to be held in compliance with UK data protection standards (GDPR).

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be Staffordshire University. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under the data protection law is a 'task in the public interest' You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the Staffordshire University Data Protection Officer. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. You are able to withdraw your data from the study up until 2 months after the initial interview has been conducted, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible as the data will already have been processed, anonymised and analyses will have begun.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, we will not retain any information that you have provided us as a part of this study.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The findings from this study will be used to form part of my PhD thesis. The findings may also be used for future academic publications and teaching materials.

Who should I contact for further information or if something goes wrong?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Email : H012749H@student.staffs.ac.uk

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact the study supervisor or the Chair of the Staffordshire University Ethics Committee for further advice and information:

Dr Luke Telford (Supervisor)
Email : Luke.Telford@staffs.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Consent Form

‘24 Hour Party People’: An Ethnographic Study of Hedonism in Stoke-on-Trent’s Night-Time-Economies

Owen Hodgkinson, Staffordshire University PhD Student.

Email: h012749h@student.staffs.ac.uk

I confirm that I am aware of the basis and intent of the study	
I confirm that I have had the opportunity to answer any questions regarding the study.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am able to withdraw from the project at until three months after the initial interview.	
I understand that the data from the interview shall be recorded via mobile phone.	
I am aware I have the option to withhold any information and have the option to request not to be recorded via audio for certain topics of discussion.	
I am aware that all personal, identifying details shall be excluded from the research and pseudonym shall be used in place of my name.	
I understand that quotes or excerpts shall be used in the project.	
I understand that information used in this study may be used for publication in the future.	
I agree to take part in the study	

Name of Participant

Signature

General Mental Health Concerns

24-hour mental health helpline - 01782 234233

Every Mind Matters - https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/

Social Isolation and Loneliness

The Dove Service - 01782 683155

Mental Health Crisis Support

North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare - 0300 123 0907 (OPTION 1)

Substance Abuse

The Community Drug and Alcohol Service - 01782283113/**https://www.scdas.org.uk/**

Victimisation

Victim Support - An independent charity helping people affected by crime or traumatic events to get support.
0808 168 9111https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/

Researcher Declaration

I undertake to carry out the project described above in accordance with ethical principles. I have completed the application in good faith. I accept that providing false information constitutes scientific fraud and will be subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures.

Signature of Researcher:	Owen Hodgkinson	Date:	28/04/2022

NB: Any departure from the protocol for this research project may mean that the ethical approval decision made by the School Ethics Coordinator is no longer valid and a new ethics proposal will

have to be submitted. It is the responsibility of a student researcher to discuss proposed changes to the agreed protocol with their project supervisor as soon as possible so that a revised /new ethics application can be submitted. Research based on any revised / new protocol **MUST** not proceed unless and until the protocol has ethical approval.

Next Step:

STUDENTS: Please submit this form (and supporting documentation) for consideration by your Supervisor/ Module Tutor.

STAFF: Please submit this form for consideration by your Head of Department of a Senior Researcher in the School. This form should then be forwarded to the Research Administrators in RIIS (ethics@staffs.ac.uk) who will arrange for it to be considered by two independent members of the School's College of Ethical Reviewers

PART B: TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR (If student) OR Head of Department/ Senior Researcher (if staff)

I have examined this proposal and confirm that the rationale and methodology is appropriate and that it can proceed to the stage of ethical consideration.	✓
I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g., consent form, information sheet, questionnaire and interview schedule).	✓

Signature of Supervisor		Date:	28/04/2022

Next Step:

Please submit this form to the Research Administrators in RIIS (ethics@staffs.ac.uk).

PART C: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL ETHICS COORDINATOR

This research proposal has been considered by two members of the School's College of Ethical Reviewers and **RECEIVED** ethical approval.	
This research proposal has been considered by two members of the School's College of Ethical Reviewers and was REFUSED ethical approval on grounds detailed below:	

Recommendation (delete as appropriate): Approve/ Amendments required/ Reject	

Signed (School Ethical Coordinator)		Date	