

Locating impropriety: Street Drinking, moral order and the ideological dilemma of public space

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Abstract

Drawing on research in urban sociology, cultural geography and social psychology, this paper explores some of the moral rules that govern social relations in public places. In particular, we consider how certain practices become classified as everyday incivilities -- infractions of the moral order that sustains public life. In order to develop this notion, we draw illustrations from an ongoing research project that is investigating social attitudes towards 'street drinking', an activity that has led to the creation of 'alcohol free zones' in over 100 British cities during the past decade. As an emergent theme, this research has suggested that the classification of street drinking as either acceptable or unacceptable conduct is contingent upon the social construction of public space that users invoke. This theme is discussed in the context of wider struggles over citizenship and social control in the public domain -- struggles manifest within 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al., 1988) over the limits of free conduct, the tension between open and closed public spaces, and the attempt to distinguish 'admissible' from 'inadmissible' publics.

Social interactions in public places are an integral feature of associational society, the informal web of civic relations that characterises our ‘life between buildings’ (Gehl, 1987). This paper explores the moral rules that govern our relations in such places, defining what counts as acceptable conduct and what passes as normal interaction. Research on this topic generally takes its bearings from the writings of Erving Goffman, particularly from *Behaviour in Public Places* and *Relations in Public*. In these books, Goffman showed how seemingly trivial acts of propriety are essential to maintaining the interactional order of public relations. Conversely, he showed how even brief moments of impropriety may ‘dynamite’ the delicate moral framework that sustains public life. By signifying the transgressor’s alienation not only from an immediate social gathering but also from the wider social and institutional contexts in which that gathering is embedded, such ‘everyday incivilities’ (Phillips & Smith, 2003) undermine the forms of trust that make public life possible.

The maintenance of public propriety involves careful supervision of the body and its associated activities (e.g. forms of deportment, dress and demeanour). It entails making a series of ‘miniscule repressions’ that together enable “...the symbolic management of the public facet of each of us as soon we enter the street.” (Mayol, 1998, p.17). Although they often pass unnoticed, such repressions offer reassurance that the integrity of the public order remains intact and that others can be trusted to act as they should. By the same token, the ‘lexicon of the body’ (Mayol, 1998) plays a signal role in the social construction of impropriety. The wrong posture or gesture or bodily appearance may invoke a surprising degree of insecurity and moral opprobrium. As we shall presently see, for instance, it is frequently the ‘look’ of particular groups of users within public space that is deemed problematic by other users. People who visibly consume alcohol on the city’s streets will form our case in point.

Our argument will complicate this rather obvious line of analysis in two ways, raising issues that cannot be treated substantially in this brief article. First, we will suggest that conduct becomes ‘situationally inappropriate’ (Goffman, 1963) not only because it is deemed to have breached accepted rules of interaction (e.g. rules specifying appropriate levels of involvement, civil inattention and so forth). Analysis of users’ own accounts of incivility also reveals their abiding concern with what cultural geographers have termed the ‘transgression of place’. Second, and qualifying this argument, we will suggest that accounts of place transgression often appeal to contradictory constructions of place. This idea is particularly significant in the context of relations in public space, an arena whose very nature, function and identity has been historically structured around an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) between freedom and control.

Place transgression as an infraction of the moral order of relations in public

The idea that social conduct may infringe place norms or meanings is a central theme within an emerging literature on the cultural geography of transgression. This literature suggests that the “place of an act determines (as much as it is determined by) the reactions to the act and the meanings accorded to it” (Cresswell, 1996, p.61).

Thus, just as the performance of particular actions help to define the identity of a place (kneeling in church creates a reverential space), so too the meanings attributed to places delimit what behaviours are deemed acceptable there (church is where one should kneel). The term ‘acceptable’ carries in this context both moral and political implications. Behaviour constructed as ‘out-of-place’ is typically couched in the imagery of danger and pollution, being depicted as a threat to the moral fabric of society or even a form of social contamination (e.g. see Cresswell, 1996, 1997; Sibley, 1995). The political dimension of this process arises because normative definitions of place may help to create environments where practices of social exclusion come to appear legitimate and necessary. The meanings accorded to, or inscribed within, specific places may be used to expose unacceptable behaviour, to create or escalate ‘moral panics’, and to warrant interventions designed to restore the social order. Transgressive people and activities may thus become expelled to the symbolic and material margins of society, a process that “...brings into being a morally superior condition to one where there is mixing because mixing (of social groups and diverse activities in space) carries the threat of contamination and a challenge to hegemonic values.” (Sibley, 1995, p.39).

We believe that the notion of place transgression is significant to understanding the social psychology of relations in public places in a number of ways. Perhaps most important, it suggests that public conduct may become construed as offensive not only because it denies what we owe to one another in our fleeting encounters on the city’s streets, a theme explored so compellingly by Goffman (1963, 1971). However curious the idea may sound, by violating valued constructions of place, such conduct may also be construed as denying *what is owed to public spaces themselves*. By implication, in order to understand everyday civility and incivility, we need to recognize their ‘locatedness’ within the symbolic and material geographies of public life (c.f. Dixon, 2001).

At first glance, this application of the theory of place transgression may seem stretched. It is one thing to study transgression in settings where territorial boundaries have been sharply drawn. In such ‘strongly classified’ spaces as the middle class suburb (Sibley, 1992) or the post-apartheid city (Dixon, Reicher & Foster, 1997), for example, boundary consciousness is heightened and foreign people or modes of conduct are readily exposed. However, it is quite another thing to extend this kind of investigation beyond parochial settings into the public domain. After all, public spaces are supposedly characterised by their accessibility to all citizens and their capacity to accommodate an array of life styles. These qualities are encapsulated in historical images of the town square and the marketplace, veritable metonyms for what a vibrant, inclusive public sphere should look like (c.f. Light & Smith, 1998). Belying such images, however, several commentators have argued that public spaces are rapidly becoming spaces of homogeneity and social control. They have warned of the proliferation of ‘closed-minded’ (Walzer, 1986) spaces where a narrowing range of conduct and people are tolerated. Some have gone so far as to predict the ‘end of public space’ (Mitchell, 1995), pointing to the erosion of the public domain as an arena for political protest and to the spread of ‘sanitized’ public spaces that encourage the essentially

private practices of leisure and consumption of a limited section society (see, for example, Banerjee, 2001; Cooper, 1998; Franzien, 2001; Light & Smith, 1998; Mandanipour, 1999; Mitchell, 1995 for useful commentaries).

In these new public spaces, the concept of place transgression has become all too relevant; increasingly, conduct is being defined as problematic because it is 'out-of-place' in public. Thus, the behaviour of homeless people may be rejected because it imports supposedly private conduct into the public domain (e.g. sleeping or washing) (Mitchell, 1995). Teenagers who 'hang about' in shopping malls and arcades may be rejected because they violate the consumerist norms that regulate public life in such spaces (Panelli et al., 2002). Acts of collective protest may be rejected because they create the risk of riotous disorder, threaten damage to private property, and make the streets 'ungovernable' (Mitchell, 1996). Open expressions of gay relationships may be rejected because they disrupt the hetero-normative values that tacitly govern public conduct (Hubbard, 2001). Perhaps most troubling, the mere presence of 'other' racial and ethnic groups may be rejected because it is sufficient to create anxieties over public safety (Durrheim & Dixon, 2001).

The ideological dilemma of public space

The foregoing examples confirm Lefebvre's (1976, p.31) now well-known point that the spaces of everyday life are not merely neutral backdrops to social relations and processes, but are also "products literally filled with ideologies". Even society's most accessible and civic-minded spaces, the public areas of our towns and cities, are suffused by the ideologies of class, age, gender, sexuality and 'race'. In acknowledging this fact, however, one must be careful not to imply that public spaces have become uniform arenas of repression and exclusion. Merrifield (1994) notes that the 'end of public space' literature, which has largely focused on specific aspects of American urban experience, may exaggerate the degree to which the public life more broadly defined has been eviscerated by forces such as privatisation and functional fragmentation. Making a related point, Brill (1989) has warned of the dangers of nostalgia for the public spaces of the past. He notes that spaces now viewed as embodying the ideal of democratic citizenship, such as the Greek Agora, were always also spaces of violent exclusion. As such, those who look to historical exemplars for some classless 'common ground' of democracy may perpetuate both a utopian view of the past and a dystopian view of the present.

We have found it more useful to think of public space having an essentially two-sided character, a character that has assumed widely varying historical forms and that continues to shape urban life. On the one hand, public space has always been conceived as an arena of order where 'appropriate' publics might participate in a particular ideal of urban existence. The implementation of this exclusive vision of public space has, of course, required the exercise of power, the imposition of a regime of social control that preserves sectional interests and values. On the other hand, public space has also been conceived as a site for oppositional activity, playful

deviance, and educative exposure to the full range of people and values that make up a society. It has been a space for grievances to be aired, sufferings made visible, and alternative values expressed. However much they have been eroded, these features remain part of the public spaces of modern towns and cities, where received definitions of appropriate conduct are constantly assailed by activities that are ‘out-of-place’ and where, a fortiori, what counts as normal conduct is constantly being redefined. In short, the very concept of public space encompasses “... competing ideas about what constitutes that space – social control or free, and perhaps dangerous, interaction – and about who constitutes ‘the public’” (Mitchell, 1995, p.115).

The dialectical tension between freedom and control that defines public space is not merely an issue of concern for town-planners, architects, politicians and other bureaucrats of the city. It is also a matter that must be confronted in everyday living (c.f. Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone., 1992; Rivlin, 1994). Public life presupposes life-in-public and thus a constant engagement with, and evaluation of, others’ presence, actions and entitlements. This process inevitably raises a range of concerns for the ordinary users of public spaces. Among other things, such concerns have to do with the maintenance of personal safety, the reconciliation of personal rights and desires with the rights and desires of others and, as we shall emphasize, the preservation of the kind of social space in which public life remains possible. As social psychologists, we are especially interested in how ordinary people experience, think about and navigate these challenges of everyday life in public places. We are also interested in exploring how the psychological and behavioural processes that are involved become enmeshed with the wider historical and ideological production of public spaces.

Billig et al.’s (1988) concept of ideological dilemma can be used to clarify how this relationship between the psychological and the ideological unfolds within concrete struggles over incivility in public places. On the one hand, this concept highlights how ordinary people’s reasoning about topics of social controversy tends to echo, refract, and rework wider ideological traditions. Thus, personal opinions on issues such as equality, prejudice, justice and free speech are typically couched in terms of the shared categories, commonplaces and symbols that characterize the ‘thinking society’. On the other hand, as its name suggests, the concept of ideological dilemma does not treat ideologies as singular systems of meaning that sustain monolithic ways of understanding the social world. To the contrary, it highlights their essentially contradictory nature, which is in turn “...born out of a culture that produces more than one hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest” (1988, p. 163). By implication, when applying the grand themes of ideology to the problems of everyday life, individuals must constantly wrestle with the ‘contradictions of commonsense’. Generalizations based around racial or gender stereotypes, for instance, must typically be counterbalanced by acknowledgement of human uniqueness and individuality. Endorsements of policies that promote social differentiation and inequality must be weighed in the context of countervailing values of tolerance and distributive justice. It is worth noting that this process is viewed as essentially dynamic and rhetorical in character; that is to say, it is a process enacted as ordinary people

argue and think about the challenges of everyday life. The subject of ideology imagined here is no passive dupe. He or she is an active agent capable of reflecting on as well as reproducing ideological themes and tensions.

The concept of ideological dilemma can be used to sensitise researchers to some central features of the social construction of public life. To begin with, it highlights how the public domain acts as an arena where ideological traditions are asserted. In distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable uses of public space, for example, ordinary citizens may invoke ideological assumptions about the meaning and value of public life and thus reproduce (or disrupt) particular notions of public order. As important, however, the concept of ideological dilemma also anticipates that everyday accounts of relations in public space will have a two-sided or 'dilemmatic' quality. It predicts that the ideological tension between freedom and control that has defined the historical production of the public domain will find expression in ordinary user's accounts of public life. The view of public space that emerges here is not one in which sites designated as 'public' have singular or fixed meanings. To the contrary, the concept of ideological dilemmas highlights the possibility that such places may be attributed with varying and sometimes competing definitions that are constantly evolving as individuals grapple with the contradictions of public life. The political psychology of place, as we conceive it, takes as a guiding theme this notion that the geography of social life is essentially contested.

In order to develop this and some of the other ideas we have introduced above, we will now discuss a research programme that is exploring a controversial form of public conduct in the United Kingdom, namely the activity of 'street drinking'.

Street drinking and the designation of 'alcohol free' zones in public spaces in the UK

Research Context

The consumption of alcohol in public spaces such as parks, town squares and street corners has long been an object of official and lay concern in British society. Among other problems, it has been linked to underage drinking, binge drinking, street assaults, 'glassings', and other forms of public disorder. Consequently, between 1980 and 2001, over 100 local authorities established 'alcohol free zones' in British towns and cities: public areas in which police have powers to confiscate alcohol and arrest individuals who ignore warnings to stop drinking (Home Office, 2001). Provisions within the Criminal Justice and Police Act of 2001 have recently made the implementation of street drinking bans more straightforward, and it is anticipated that the number of towns and cities adopting designation orders is set to increase. As of July 2003, a further 75 local authorities had used the new primary legislation to declare such designation orders¹.

The research discussed in the rest of the article was conducted in Lancaster, a city situated in the North-West of England. In July 2000, Lancaster's local authority implemented a bylaw that prohibited street drinking in parts of the city centre. Maps of affected areas were drawn up (see Figure 1 below), sign-posted warnings erected, and local police informed of the bylaw's provisions. Our research arose as an attempt to gauge local residents' attitudes towards this new legislation and, more broadly, to explore their accounts of the meanings and consequences of street drinking in Lancaster. In order to do so, we collected a variety of kinds of data, including naturalistic observations and a questionnaire survey. For the purpose of the present article, we will draw illustrations from a series of depth interviews that were gathered from ordinary users of one of Lancaster most historic public spaces, Market Square. Lying at the heart of the city, Market Square houses important services such as the library, Museum and Market, acts as a popular meeting place for diverse groups of residents, and is a focal point of social, cultural and economic life in Lancaster (Figure 2). It is also an area of Lancaster where street drinking has traditionally occurred and, as will become apparent, where it continues to occur, albeit more surreptitiously than in the past.

--Place Figures 1 and 2 about here--

Interview Data and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 59 respondents, who were present in Market Square between 10am and 6pm on weekdays or weekends from April to August 2002. This sample consisted 36 men and 23 women, who ranged in age between 14 and 80 years old (mean age: 38.4 years). All respondents were local residents of Lancaster or immediately surrounding areas and, reflecting the demography of the city, the vast majority were white (n=56). They consisted of a diverse mixture of office workers, shoppers, mothers with children, and high school students. One respondent identified himself as 'rough sleeper' who regularly engaged in street drinking. None of the other respondents classified themselves as street drinkers or suggested that they regularly engaged in this practice.

All interviews were conducted in situ in the Market Square area and varied between 15 minutes and one hour in length. Potential interviewees were approached by a researcher (the third author) and invited to participate in the research. Each interview was organised around a set of key questions (e.g. Why do you think the authorities have introduced a street drinking ban? Who is the ban directed towards? What is your own attitude towards street drinking?); however, respondents were encouraged to elaborate their opinions in an open-ended fashion. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed in full.

The analysis of the interview data drew broadly on the principles of discursive and rhetorical psychology (c.f. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1997), examining the nature and situated functions of everyday constructions

of street drinking as a ‘public’ behaviour. The present article does not attempt present this analysis in full; rather, our aim is to explore some of the themes presented in our introduction. First, we briefly consider how ordinary users of Market Square constructed the meaning of street drinking, focusing their portrayal of the activity as an ‘everyday incivility’ (Philips & Smith, 2003). Second, we demonstrate how the theoretical concepts of place transgression and ideological dilemma enrich our understanding of residents’ accounts of street drinking.

Analysis and Discussion

Street drinking as incivility

Existing research on the social evaluation of street drinking legislation has tended to focus on its impact on criminological indices such as offence rates and fear of crime (see e.g. Marsh & Fox-Kibby, 1992; Ramsay, 1989, 1990, 1991). The present study developed in a somewhat different direction. Analysis of interview transcripts suggested that street drinking measures were framed not only, or even primarily, in terms of their impact on crime in Lancaster city centre. They were also framed as a mechanism for regulating transgressions of the moral rules that govern behaviour in public places, transgressions that Goffman (1963) famously labelled ‘situational improprieties’. For Goffman and subsequent generations of researchers, such behaviours are significant not least because they *disrupt and therefore reveal* the tacit norms that underwrite wider processes of social involvement and integration. Consider, for example, extracts 1 to 3.

Line No.

Extract 1

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| I | It still sort of goes on a bit, but compared to like a few years ago you said (inaudible) ban. | 1 |
| A | Oh yeah it would just be, I mean it just would be absolutely covered with you know people just sat there and all the locals you know their names. You can see them there every day doing it and as I say, some of them like there was a couple of tramps that weren't any harm to anyone. They would sit there drinking, just getting on with their own thing. You see I haven't got a problem with it in that case, but it's the ones that were being rowdy and stumbling about the place and you know it's not very nice is it if there's that kind of threatening behaviour even though they've meant to do no harm, the fact that they were aggressive the way they were speaking and that, you know, yeah. | 2
3
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8 |
| I | Do you think, I mean some people have said it infringes their liberties to drink | 9 |
| A | Well I think, I think that if people want to drink there's plenty of places, we've got that many pubs here they can jolly well do it inside there. You know, if they want to have a can of lager in the country they can do it as long as they throw their can away, don't just dump it, you know. But I think no, I think, I mean it's like smoking really as well, you know. Sort of sometimes I'm walking with the pushchair and you can't get past people and the smoke is going right down (inaudible), I think, come on. I mean I used to smoke myself so | 10
11
12
13
14
15 |
| I | So did I | 16 |
| A | You know what I mean, so but I think there's plenty of places people should go to the places and do it | 17 |

(30 year old woman).

Line No.

Extract 2

I	What about the alcohol ban do you think that's a good thing?	1
T	I think it will always be. When you walk into a town say like if you're a visitor or you're a tourist and you walk into a town and you see loads of people sat around drinking and stuff it doesn't look very nice.	2 3 4
I	Do you think it'll be, people are drinking now do you think it works. Some people said they should really clamp down on it.	5 6
T	I think as long as they're not causing any trouble and they're doing it discreetly and stuff then I don't see what the problem is.	7 8
I	You don't think it inevitably leads to trouble?	9
T	I (inaudible) really.	10
I	I mean does it bother you if someone (<i>child shouting</i>)	11
T	It doesn't bother me but it would	12
I	It doesn't affect you?	13
T	No it doesn't affect me no, if there was loads of people sat around drinking I wouldn't like it but one or two it's not so bad cos it's not as noticeable	14 15

(23 year old woman)

Line No.

Extract 3

M:	Oh yeah it gives a bad image of the town really. You know, people visiting are walking past people who have got cans in their hands and they cause a nuisance because they are drinking outdoors. They start messing about cos they are drunk. They don't know what they are doing. If they are in a pub, at least they are indoors	1 2 3 4
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(16 year old boy).

Although these accounts differ in several respects, it is possible to distinguish two common features in their construction of the meaning of street drinking. First of all, they focus on the *civic implications* of street drinking, with the activity being framed as an infringement, or potential infringement, of others' entitlements. Thus, drinking is associated with 'rowdy' and 'aggressive' behaviour that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, threatens other users of Market Square (Extract 1, lines 6-8). It is deemed a 'nuisance' that leads participants to 'messing about' (Extract 3, line 3) and is likened to similarly inconsiderate behaviour, such as smoking around children (Extract 1, lines 13-17). In each case, residents are concerned not only with street drinking's association with crime, but also with its wider effects on civic life in Lancaster.

A second and closely related feature of these accounts is their representation of street drinking as a *visually incongruous* activity. As Extract 2 states quite explicitly, drinking in public just 'doesn't look very nice', and is particularly unacceptable when it occurs on a scale that is "noticeable" as opposed to "discreet" (lines 3-8). Accounts of this problem tended to assume a common narrative form in which respondents told how visits to the city would be disrupted by the presence of street drinkers. Such accounts typically featured a wealth of seemingly mundane details about the location, number and bodily deportment of offenders. In our considered extracts, for example, we find references to 'loads of people sat around drinking' (Extract 2, line 2), or 'just sat

there' (Extract 1, line 3), groups of drinkers who 'absolutely cover' the Museum Steps (Extract 1, line 2), who have 'cans in their hands' (Extract 3, line 2) or 'stumble about' (Extract 1, line 6).

These details should not be regarded as incidental or background features of the accounts. They convey the *sensuous impact* of street drinkers on ordinary pedestrians, an impact achieved through their *noticeable occupation* of a given public space and their engagement in unacceptable kinds of non-verbal behaviour. To reiterate Mayol's (1998) point, we can see here how the 'lexicon of the body' is fundamental to the moral construction of improper behaviour in public places, where the smallest gesture becomes a potential sign of impropriety. Even such nondescript acts as 'sitting around' or holding a can of beer may signify alienation from the normal rules of public interaction and the forms of social order they maintain. Such acts undermine individuals' sense of social trust and lead street drinkers' to be classified as 'unpredictable strangers', social outsiders "...who do not share one's own approach to life, one's principles and sensibilities" (Lupton, 1999, p.1).

Locating incivility: Constructing street drinking as 'out-of-place'

The latter examples demonstrate the truism that social actions are not intrinsically civil or uncivil. They become so within particular contexts of interaction. Sometimes, for example, moral rules vary according to the social identities and relationships claimed by the individuals involved. As Goffman (1971, p.412) famously observed, "The delusions of a private are the rights of a general" and "the obscene invitations of a man to a strange girl can be the spicy endearments of a husband to his wife". At other times, moral rules may reflect the expectations conventionally associated with a given type of situation or negotiated during the course of an unfolding conversation. Without denying the importance of these and many other ways of defining of the context of civic relations, we wish to focus on a dimension that is fundamental to our respondents' accounts of street drinking, including those presented in extracts 1 to 3; that is, *where* it occurs or, more precisely, *where it is constructed* as occurring. In simple terms, in each account the consumption of alcohol is deemed problematic on the grounds that it is 'out-of-place'. Indeed, it is only by invoking spatial meanings that respondents are able to classify street drinking as an infraction of the moral order.

Street drinking as transgressing the private/public distinction: The most obvious example of this practice builds on a simple distinction between private and public space, which then acts as a discursive resource for classifying the appropriateness of behaviour. Extracts 1 and 3, for example, explicitly invoke an inside versus outside dichotomy. Drinking is couched as an activity that properly occurs indoors, where it is out-of-sight and subject to private, institutional regulation. By importing such behaviour into the public areas of Lancaster, street drinkers are thus constructed as transgressing the moral geography of everyday behaviour.

It is worth noting in passing that even this straightforward version of the private-public distinction is not as self-evident as it first appears. For one thing, as the respondent in Extract 1 observes, it may be quite acceptable to 'have a can of lager' in public when one is 'in the country' (Line 11). The possibility thus arises that there exist a range of public spaces across which the acceptability of drinking may vary. For another thing, the distinction between public and private space turns out on closer inspection to be ambiguous and open to dispute. How, for example, are beer gardens to be defined? Or what about the outside tables through which the activities of customers of restaurants, bars and cafés may extend onto the city streets? As will become apparent, this kind of definitional ambivalence indicates that the public-private distinction is not pre-given or fixed, but is something that is actively constituted and fluid (c.f. Cooper, 1998).

Line No.

Extract 4

- S: I do think it's [drinking] a social nuisance because I believe that any citizen should be free and safe to go through the town 24 hours a day, day or night, for whatever reasons that they have to be travelling through the town, without heed or hindrance basically. And drunks, the thing is with drunks, one of the worst things is there's so much glass in the street, you get glass absolutely everywhere from off-licences, from people carrying them from pubs and it's supposed to be monitored but I don't believe that it is. 1
2
3
4
5
6
- I I see on a Saturday morning you can see the people are just deliberately smashing bottles. 7
- S Yes, that's true. Some of them are so drunk that they can't even hold them anyway and they're not responsible, they're not responsible for themselves at that point. 8
9
- I But they've got the alcohol ban, I mean there's a sign there, you don't think it's very effective? 10
- S It doesn't appear to be, not at the weekends. I mean the main problem with this Square, and I'll say it, and it's nothing to do with er, not necessarily with alcohol, it's just people's attitudes towards littering (inaudible). They think it's normal to litter as opposed to a few people just dropping some litter, and they just refuse to pick the litter up I've even said I was going to phone the police and it still doesn't bother them. Nobody's, and the Council don't seem to bother, it doesn't seem to be, there's no enforcement, you know there doesn't seem to be any law enforcement as regards litter and glass and things like that now, that I can see anyway. I don't know whether, they may have a policy on it but I don't know whether they sort of work though [...]. 11
12
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- I: I mean you said at the beginning about drinking do you think an alcohol ban where you live, on the street drinking where you live, do you think that would be a good thing? 20
21
- S Yeh, street drinking anywhere outside. I don't even like drinking outside of, personally, outside of pubs unless it's in a beer garden or something like that which is an enclosed space within the confines of that the pub. It's not actually stretching out into the street, on the pavement. We're not in France. We don't drink here like they drink in France. They drink here like you know slobby stuff so that's what I feel about that. 22
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- I Have you been coming to the town centre for a long, I mean they've [street drinking laws] only been here for a few years, do you notice the difference or? 27
28
- S I have noticed this town deteriorating and decline over the years yeh, I have. They used to have a (inaudible) nice fountain here, this fountain, I think it was a donation from British Nuclear Fuels and it's horrible, it's sort of angular, I think there was a circular type of fountain, I can't remember but I just remember the one that they had before was better than this one and you know it's like, and I believe that the Council sort of accept things like that because they'll accept anything, they accept everything, it seems like they do everything as cheaply as they possibly can and we end up with a shoddy town with a horrible shopping centre a real 10th rate market. 29
30
31
32
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35
- (40 year old man)

Line No.

Extract 5

- M: It has changed because there was quite a few winos that were sitting round here normally but 1
I think since they've banned drinking from all the area they've moved them out, I don't know where 2
but it seems a lot better because you can see a lot more public. When the winos were sitting round 3
there you wouldn't see this lot sitting round here. You'd see the winos plus a few people that's it, 4
but not like this [...] In fact they wouldn't come near the Square itself but now since the winos have 5
been moved or moved on you get more public in the Square, sitting down 6
(30 year old man).

Line No.

Extract 6

- J I don't see why they should have to be in a public place, if they want to drink they why can't 1
they sit in a pub or somewhere, there must be other places that you can go to. Anyone can sit 2
in Market Square as far as I am concerned as long as they're not blocking the steps. 3
D What happened they did start allowing people, you know the pubs to put tables out and chairs 4
out but the trouble is in English pubs you go to the bar and you buy your drink and you take 5
it to where you're going to sit so people weren't actually sitting at the tables and the chairs 6
provided, they were going to sit by the fountain, and sitting on our steps. They were bringing 7
drinking glasses which then got, particularly as they got more muddled, they were dropping the 8
glasses, there was broken glass everywhere. I mean in the 9
J It affected other people (inaudible) people who weren't drinking at all. 10

(Two local women, aged 30 and 35 years)

Street drinking as transgressing the accessibility and free use of public space: Extract 4 to 6 above illustrate a second and related way that street drinking may be constructed as out-of-place. In Extract 4, the respondent complains that citizens' freedom of movement is being restricted by the presence of street drinkers (lines 1-3). Lancaster citizens, he argues, should be able to travel the city without 'heed or hinderance'. In making this kind of argument, he orients to one of the defining qualities of social constructions of public space, namely its status as an arena where individuals should be able to claim full rights of access, use, action and appropriation (Carr et al., 1992). Along similar lines, other interviewees complained that visible congregations of street drinkers in the city centre deterred vulnerable groups (e.g. women, the elderly) from using public services, an argument that served to warrant the necessity of a street drinking ban. Thus, in Extract 5, the interviewee justifies his support for the bylaw on the grounds that it has created a context in which 'the public' have returned to Market Square, reclaiming use of its facilities and exercising rights that were hitherto restricted by the presence of drinkers. Similarly, in Extract 6, an attempt to allow a bar in the Square to provide outdoor drinking facilities is criticised on the grounds that it ultimately infringed the rights of 'people who weren't drinking at all' (line 10) to use particular facilities such as the Museum Steps (see point A, Figure 2) and the Fountain's seating (point B, Figure 2)¹. In all of these extracts, then, support for the restriction of public drinking is grounded in a particular conception of the entitlements enshrined within public spaces such as Market Square.

These kinds of argument help to clarify what we mean in referring to the ‘locatedness’ of everyday incivilities. They demonstrate how social spaces such as Market Square exist not only as material realities ‘in which’ transgressions happen to occur: they are also discursive constructions whose associated meanings and values may be strategically evoked in order to diagnose breaches of public order. The symbolic demarcation of different forms of private and public space, each associated with specific behavioural norms, represents a fundamental aspect of this process. As several of our respondents reminded us, in the comfort of one’s own home, one may consume alcohol freely, even to the point of excess and abandon. However, in a place like Market Square such conduct is wholly inappropriate. By infringing others’ entitlements, it undermines the role of public space as a site not only *of* but also *for* the expression of civil liberties; that is to say, it undermines very publicness of public space.

Street drinking as transgressing a valued place identity: Developing Mary Douglas’s (1966/1990) work on symbolic pollution, human geographers have argued that people or activities that transgress place norms are characteristically defined as a source of filth, prompting a desire to the ‘cleanse’ social space (Sibley, 1995; Cresswell, 1996). Our data suggests that this process operates even in places such as Market Square, which are ostensibly designed to accommodate the diversity of people and activities that make up a community.

Concerns over the *visibility* of street drinkers in Lancaster city centre, for example, were often embedded within this kind of rhetoric of place defilement. As we have already noted, the ‘noticeable’ presence of groups of drinkers was deemed problematic partly because it displayed their alienation from the normal rules of propriety. Equally, however, the visibility of drinkers was constructed as sullyng the character of Lancaster, contributing to a broader process of place degradation and alienation. As one respondent summarised, “I think it [public drinking] brings the tone of a place down. I’m not being snobby but it does. These gangs of lads walking around with cans of beer you know, and you trying to do your shopping and just have a nice afternoon out”.

By mobilizing this kind of discourse of place transgression, our respondents sought to problematise street drinking and to justify the necessity of a ban. Some emphasised the negative impact of drinking has on outsiders’ impressions of the city. Accordingly, in Extract 3 above, we find a warning that the sight of ‘people who have got cans in their hands’ may leave visitors with a ‘bad image of the town’, an evaluation that warrants the respondents’ affirmation that the alcohol ban ‘will always be’ a good thing (lines 1-3).

Other respondents constructed the rise of street drinking in terms of a broader narrative of the decline Lancaster’s identity as a place. Extract 4 offers a sustained example of this process. The opening section of this extract frames street drinking as part of a broader problem of pollution and littering in the city centre (lines 3-18). The new drinking regulations are evaluated not only in terms of their ability to reduce crime, but also as a

(not entirely successful) means of cleaning up the city centre by purging it of the wrong sort of people and activities. Indeed, in this account, the detritus of drinking (glass, bottles) stands as a kind of metonym for the activity's negative impact on the character of the city. Similarly, in the closing paragraph of the same extract, the respondent shifts revealingly from a discussion of the impact of the drinking byelaw to a general indictment of Lancaster's deterioration into a 'shoddy town with a horrible shopping centre, a real 10th rate market' (lines 23-35). Again, the day-to-day consequences of activities such as street drinking are framed in terms of a broader issue of the degradation of place.

Interestingly, Extract 4 also contains an exception to this rule, which arises as the respondent accounts for his resistance to drinking that stretches 'out into the street or onto the pavement' (line 24). In reminding the interviewer that, "We are not in France. We don't drink here like they drink in France' (line 25), he orients to the practices of European 'pavement society' and thus tacitly acknowledges the existence of more acceptable varieties of street drinking. The implication is that because drinking in Lancaster does not mirror the sophistication of pavement society -- being devoted instead to consumption of the 'slobby stuff' (line 15) -- it becomes problematic. In other words, this example confirms the general point we are trying to make in this section, namely that the impact of drinking on the aesthetics and identity of place is integral to understanding its construction as a transgressive activity. The public consumption of alcohol is not an inherently problematic activity. It becomes so when the manner of its consumption (or the identity of its consumers) is constructed as defiling the character of places such as Market Square. As another of our respondents wryly observed, "If they had tables outside and sort of parasols like they do in France, then maybe it'd be a whole different ball game."

Street drinking and the ideological dilemma of public space

We have outlined some ways in which ordinary users of public space in Lancaster constructed street drinking as 'out-of-place' and consequently as a morally offensive activity. We have suggested accordingly that residents' support for the establishment of an alcohol free zone in the city centre was partly rooted in their desire to restore a particular version of socio-spatial order. It is important to recognize that this kind of moral discourse is by no means unique to events in Lancaster. As we noted in the introduction to this paper, a number of commentators have argued that the public sphere in modern cities and towns is in a period of rapid transformation. Legal, economic and cultural forces are interacting to produce increasingly 'closed' public spaces -- spaces constituted through practices of repression and exclusion as much as they are through practices of social inclusion. From this perspective, social concerns over street drinking and the spread of street drinking bans in the UK might be read as symptomatic of the "revulsion of the middle classes from spaces they find increasingly threatening and offensive" or, more worrying, of the "growing inability of individuals to imagine themselves as a public" (Light & Smith, 1998, p.4).

Developing this line of analysis, we might view the foregoing accounts of street drinking as instantiating an ‘ideological tradition’ (Billig, 1991, 1997) for governing public life. Accounts such as Extract 5, for instance, could be read as maintaining a commonsense distinction between admissible and inadmissible publics, between people who legitimately belong in a place like Market Square (‘the public’) and people who do not (‘winos’). This kind of category construction may erode more inclusive notions citizenship, (re)producing an ideological context where the appearance of a heterogeneous public space belies the reality of a symbolic order in which rights of access are hierarchically graded. In a similar fashion, the imagery of pollution, disorder and incivility that runs through many of our accounts might be read as part of a ideological process that Sibley (1995) evocatively terms the ‘purification of space’, a process enacted via the identification and removal of unsightly people. Indeed, part of the rationale for establishing street drinking laws in UK cities has been precisely to enable this process -- to get alcoholics, the homeless, alcopop teenagers and other social outsiders off the streets and out of the public eye.

Although this line of analysis is germane to events in Lancaster, there is a danger that it simplifies both residents’ understandings of street drinking and the ideological processes through which public spaces and relations are produced. Specifically, it implies the existence of unequivocal support for the creation of a strongly regimented public domain in which ‘deviant’ behaviours are rapidly extinguished, expelled or excluded. However, examination of our interview accounts reveals that the social evaluation of behaviours such as street drinking is often more complicated. Reconsider, for instance, the accounts presented in Extracts 1 and 2 above. On closer inspection, the arguments developed here present neither a dogmatic condemnation of street drinking, nor a unilateral display of support for its prohibition. Instead, we find a series of more subtle reflections on the distinction between more and less mannerly drinking, expressed in terms of drinkers’ ability to manage its consequences for other users of public space. As the respondent in Extract 1 explains, ‘tramps’ who sit on the museum steps and pose no ‘harm to anyone’ are a very different proposition to drinkers who are ‘being rowdy and stumble about the place’ (lines 4-8). Similarly, although the respondent in Extract 2 clearly has reservations about the visibility of drinking in Lancaster, she qualifies these reservations by noting that: “...as long as they are not causing any trouble and they’re doing it discreetly, then I don’t see what the trouble is” (lines 7-8). In sum, rather than calling for a blanket exclusion of street drinkers, Extracts 1 and 2 assess the nature and limits of public propriety itself. In so doing, they orient to the need to maintain a balance between freedom and restraint, between the rights of drinkers to drink and the need to protect other users of public space from the unacceptable consequences of drinking.

This feature of the accounts might be interpreted as refracting a wider ideological dilemma, a dilemma expressed in speakers’ attempts to reconcile the classic liberal tension between freedom and control. In the introduction, we argued that this dilemma permeates both abstract representations of public space and users’ efforts make sense of

their concrete experiences there. Indeed, in one way or another, this dilemma pervaded all of the interview accounts we gathered in Market Square. In saying this, we are not saying that our respondents were invariably conflicted or ambivalent, or that they were unable to express a strong opinion for or against street drinking. Rather, we are suggesting that in the process of formulating and warranting their opinions they generally oriented, either explicitly or implicitly², to the ideological tensions inherent in the concept of *public* space.

	<i>Line No.</i>
Extract 7	
P: Erm it's just a good place here because erm it's like nice open area where you can	1
see people coming and stuff but it's where a lot of people meet. It's gone a little bit down	2
hill in the last 3 years. There's not as many people come now.[..] There was a point where	3
they put a ban on people sitting on the steps during the day but they don't seem to care about	4
that now. It was like getting a bit silly because in it's day it used to be really good coming	5
to the steps. Yeah, that's it, there's a mixture of people. I've heard like my Mum said when	6
she comes through and she actually gets a bit scared by all the pierced and tattooed tramps	7
who sit about. She said that they're quite scary actually. But I don't know them very well	8
but kind of know them. They're not a threat but I mean right I can see how the cross section	9
of people could cause friction. But I think it's nice to see a cross section of people	10
	(17 year old boy)

	<i>Line No.</i>
Extract 8	
A: Um, I think it's unsightly if people chuck the cans everywhere, if people are sat there	1
being aggressive so I think it's more the behaviour and the sort of which goes with it isn't it.	2
If people were sat round having a quiet drink like I'm sure they do in a lot of European countries	3
and there wasn't that kind of label attached to them and their behaviour people would see it	4
differently, wouldn't they. Do you know what I mean?	5
I: Yeah	6
A: I think it's the behaviour of the people or the minority of some people that drink that	7
when you do see people sat round and they're behaving like that, talking like that, that it	8
does look repulsive, you know. Because you can see the whole context of it. Does that	9
make sense?	10
I: Yeah. I mean anyone who's going to drink, that's the nature of drink, that's what it	11
does to you so if you're doing it in public you're going to get like drunk.	12
A: Yeah I think that's what it boils down to and there's plenty of pubs round with beer	13
gardens so they should just do it there, you know. I think that's it, you know, when you've	14
got a mixture of different people in society, you've got the little ones as well, little kids and	15
that, I mean, you know	16
	(23 year old woman)

Consider, as an example of this process, the accounts developed in Extracts 7 and 8. In Extract 7, a teenage boy evaluates changes in the public life of Market Square. What is interesting about this account is precisely its clear articulation of the two-sided quality of public space. The initial section describes the decline of Market Square as 'open' space where a diversity of people would meet (lines 1 to 6). The bylaw's effect in displacing the 'mixture' of people who would occupy the museum steps is criticized and the respondent explains how this has diminished his sense of place. In the second section of the account, by contrast, he notes the negative impression

made by street drinkers on some other members of the public, including his own mother (lines 6 –10). The potential for social diversity to create threat and friction as well as a vibrant public space is acknowledged. Ultimately, the account does not propose a simplistic resolution of this ideological tension; rather, we find an open-ended attempt to ‘work through’ its implications for everyday life in Lancaster. Following Billig et al. (1988), we might say that here is ideology as a lived and living practice, a practice enacted through the rhetorical weighing of the political meanings and counter-meanings that define public space.

In Extract 8, the respondent more clearly favours a street drinking ban and thus offers a more critical evaluation of the activity’s consequences for public life in Market Square. Indeed, this extract reiterates many of the themes introduced in this analysis, being couched explicitly in the discourse of incivility, moral pollution and place transgression. Even so, what is offered here is not a one-sided rejection of street drinking and drinkers. Closer examination of the speakers’ arguments again reveals an implicit weighing of other perspectives and values. As in many other accounts, for example, she is careful to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible drinking, differentiating between the ‘minority of some people that drink’ (line 7), whose behaviour is unmannerly and unacceptable, from the majority whose behaviour is presumably less problematic. She is also able to imagine a public sphere where it is permissible for people to sit “round having a quiet drink, like I’m sure they do in a lot of European countries” (line 3) and where the stigma attached to public drinking would not apply. In short, even in an argument designed to warrant a stricter regulation of the public domain in Lancaster, we find traces of an alternative view. Lancaster’s drinking bylaw is ultimately framed as being regrettably necessary in a social space that must be shared by a ‘mixture of different people’ (line 15), including children.

Perhaps the most instructive example of this negotiation of the ideological contradictions of public space was provided by the only respondent in our sample to identify himself as a ‘street drinker’. At the time we interviewed him, ‘Tim’ had lived ‘rough’ on the streets of Lancaster for about two years, an arrangement that he preferred to living in a homeless shelter because, as he put it, “...the do-gooders who run these places don’t understand that if you’re living on the streets you need a drink to get to sleep.” Tim confessed to regularly drinking in the public areas of Lancaster and clearly felt that this was a legitimate, and in his case necessary, activity. Yet, perhaps surprising, he supported the ban on street drinking as it applied to Market Square. As he explained, “...if we have a drink we’ll go to the park. I don’t think people should drink in the Market Square ‘cause it should be for everyone.” In other words, although Tim was himself a habitual street drinker, he acknowledged the fact that his freedom to drink must be counterbalanced with the rights of others to make full use of the kind of public environment represented by Market Square³. In practice, he reconciled this tension between freedom and constraint not by renouncing street drinking, but by drinking, in what, for him, was a less public, public space (the park).

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis has treated 'street drinking' as exemplifying a broader class of everyday incivilities that threaten the moral integrity of relations in public spaces. We have also argued that the everyday diagnosis and evaluation of such incivilities is grounded in shared assumptions about the nature and function of public spaces, assumptions that reflect, for example, the desire to maintain a valued place identity, to preserve socio-spatial entitlements, or simply to demarcate public from private behaviour. These ideas have been discussed in the context of wider struggles over citizenship and social control -- struggles manifest within 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al., 1988) over the limits of free conduct, the tension between open and closed public spaces, and the attempt to distinguish 'admissible' from 'inadmissible' publics.

Inevitably, in such a brief discussion, we have simplified the issues involved. We have also omitted themes that were central to respondents' accounts. For example, street drinking is an activity practiced almost exclusively by men and seems to generate particular concerns for the women who use places such as Market Square. Thus its analysis raises important, and in this paper unanswered, questions about the gendered nature of the public sphere and its potential role as a site of 'situational disadvantage' for women (Gardner, 1994). Similarly, our discussion has been based exclusively around a discursive analysis of interview material. We have accordingly neglected to directly consider the ecological and corporeal dimensions of individuals' relations in public spaces. Our analysis of constructions of, and reactions to, the 'visibility' of street drinkers, for instance, would have undoubtedly been enriched by observational data on users' actual behavioural practices in Market Square.

In conclusion, we simply wish to connect our analysis to the guiding theme of this symposium, which concerns the spatiality of social and psychological processes. As the introduction to this symposium argued, social and political psychologists have tended to treat social spaces as mere backdrops to more important processes and public spaces are no exception (see also Brill, 1989, p.28). Thus, while a great deal of their research has focused on behaviours that happen to be 'in public', it has rarely considered how such behaviours are enmeshed with the meaning, identity and reproduction of public places. By implication, social and political psychologists have also disregarded how the material and symbolic transformation of public places may actively re-constitute the kinds of relations we are willing or able to form with one another. In light of evidence that the public sphere is rapidly changing and the possibility that a particular form of public space may be coming to an end, this lacuna has impoverished their contribution to understanding public life.

By the same token, part of our rationale for writing this article is a conviction that political and social psychological research has the potential to complement other styles of work on public space. Urban design researchers and geographers, for example, sometimes have a penchant for imagining spaces in the abstract, that is, depopulated of their human inhabitants and independent of the mundane practices and meanings that constitute everyday life there. Social psychologists, by contrast, tend to take such people, practices and meanings as their *raison d'être* for research. As we have attempted to show, analysis of the improprieties and dilemmas that animate public life illustrates the potential contribution of this style of work. In exploring how ordinary people construct, manage and reflect upon the challenges posed by their relations-in-public, we may elucidate social psychological dynamics that are central to the very formation of the public domain. In our view, Billig et al.'s (1988) concept of 'ideological dilemmas' is particularly valuable in this context, capturing how the competing values of freedom and control are played out within both commonsense and official deliberations about the design of public spaces. At the present historical juncture, this is a research topic rendered more urgent by its moral implications, for as Merrifield (1994, p.59) observes, "Exploring what the constitutive qualities of an acceptable public space are is tantamount to exploring what a truly democratic society might be."

Notes

1. The choice of these particular physical settings as examples in Extract 6 is not incidental. Historically, public drinking in Market Square has occurred in and around the fountain area and the Museum steps. The steps continue to be a popular site of street drinking, albeit performed more furtively than in the past.
2. Billig et al. (1988, p.20-23) provide a useful discussion of the distinction between *explicit* and *implicit* aspects of ideological dilemmas. The latter concept acknowledges that dilemmas of commonsense do not necessarily involve a fully reflexive and self-evident weighing of opposing values. To the contrary, they are often evidenced in more subtle ways and require analysis that goes beyond the manifest content of an account. In many of our interview accounts, for example, wholehearted support for control over street drinking was qualified by implicit acknowledgement of drinkers' rights of freedom of expression in the public domain, an idea we illustrate on p.17-18 of this article.
3. Indeed, elaborating on this value of public freedom, Tim told us that he felt his own rights were sometimes comprised by the actions of other users of the Square, notably by religious groups: "On a Saturday they're always down here... One of em woke me up one day. I was sleeping just round there

and he comes up and shakes me tellin me 'Jesus died for my sins' and 'Do I want to be saved'. I told him to fuck off. Then he says 'you can't tell me to fuck off'. I said I can you just woke me up."

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