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## Typology of Nightclubs in São Paulo, Brazil: Alcohol and Illegal Drug Consumption, Sexual Behavior and Violence in the Venues

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Nightclubs are venues in which excessive alcohol use and illegal drug consumption occur in addition to other high-risk behaviors, such as violence and sexual risk behaviors. Environmental factors common in nightclubs and the personal characteristics of patrons might increase the risk of these events. To better understand the relationship between these factors, typologies were formulated that clustered nightclubs according to definite profiles to identify differences to be taken into consideration in preventive interventions. **Objectives:** The present study aim was to construct a typology of nightclubs in São Paulo, Brazil. **Methods:** This typology was constructed using mixed methods research through the triangulation of several data sources as follows: 307 hours of ethnographic observation at 31 nightclubs, 8 focus group sessions with nightclub patrons ( $n = 34$ ) and 30 semi-structured interviews with nightclub employees. Content analysis and qualitative typology were used. **Results:** Four nightclub types were defined based on four analyzed thematic axes (Intoxicating, Violent, Dancing and Highly Sexualized nightclubs). Excessive alcohol use was detected in almost all of the investigated nightclubs, and drug use was observed in approximately one-third of them. Triangulation of the data revealed a relationship among environmental factors (especially alcohol sales strategies and promotion and the availability of areas for sex) and a more considerable presence of high-risk behaviors. **Conclusions:** The study shows that nightclubs are settings in which high-risk behaviors are potentiated by facilitating environmental factors as well as by the lack of laws restricting excessive alcohol use stimulated by the promotion strategies applied at these venues.

### KEYWORDS

Nightclubs; alcohol; illicit drugs; typology; mixed methods; brazil

### Background

Nightclubs provide a setting for leisure activities in which the concept of socially acceptable behavior is more “flexible” (Duff, 2008) and making new friends, escaping routine and relaxing are facilitated (Reingle et al., 2009). Therefore, nightclubs represent an appropriate environment for youth socialization and social capital acquisition (Parker, 2003).

However, nightclubs are venues in which excessive alcohol use and illegal drug consumption occur in addition to other high-risk behaviors (Calafat, Gomez, Juan, & Becona, 2007; Studer et al., 2015). This setting is associated with higher odds of sexually transmitted disease acquisition (Eileen, Pitpitanl, & Kalíchman, 2016), physical, verbal or sexual violence (Bellis et al., 2015), serious intoxication (Calafat, Fernadez, Juan, & Becoña, 2008) and driving under the influence of alcohol (Sanchez, Ribeiro, & Wagner, 2015), which evidence a relationship between context, substance abuse and high-risk behaviors.

Typologies of nightclubs have been used to better understand the association between the personal characteristics of patrons and their engagement in high-risk behaviors as well as the role of environmental factors common in nightclubs; these typologies consist of relevant categories for clustering nightclubs to allow their different profiles to be considered for preventive interventions and public policies (Cavan, 1966; Chatterton & Holland, 2002). According to Clapp et al. (2007), the current understanding of the socioecological mechanisms in operation at nightclubs and in their patrons is quite limited, and few studies have combined personal and environmental data.

Notwithstanding the differences among studies of nightclub typologies (Anderson, Kavanaugh, Rapp, & Daly, 2009; Purcell & Graham, 2005), there is consensus on the strong influence of music genres and environmental factors on the risk behaviors displayed at them. However, these studies were conducted in developed countries (Hughes et al., 2012; Quigg et al., 2014), where the laws for alcohol and drug sales and consumption are different

from the laws applied in Brazil, which is widely known for its fragility concerning the regulation of the sale of alcohol (Laranjeira, Pinsky, Zaleski & Caetano, 2007), which is the most widely consumed drug in nightclubs (Sañudo, Andreoni, & Sanchez, 2015). Additionally, cultural factors strongly influence patrons' behavior. Therefore, data collected in one country cannot be extrapolated to other countries with different economic conditions.

São Paulo has a wide variety of nightclubs open 24 hours that cater to many different types of patrons (Manson, 2014). Because environmental factors common in nightclubs and the individual characteristics of patrons might increase event risk and both aspects are susceptible to sociocultural influences specific to each country, the aim of the present study was to formulate the first typology of São Paulo nightclubs through the triangulation of several data sources (ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups) to establish how the various types of high-risk behaviors practiced at these venues might be clustered.

## Methods

The present study was approved by the ethics committee of Federal University of São Paulo, ruling no. 21477.

### Study design

This was a mixed methods study (Creswell, 2009). Data were collected in 5 stages as follows: 1) interviews with patrons upon arrival at nightclubs; 2) interviews with patrons upon leaving nightclubs; 3) collection of environmental data inside nightclubs using ethnographic observation; 4) semi-structured interviews with nightclub employees; and 5) focus groups (FGs) conducted with nightclub patrons.

The present article describes the integrated results of stages 3, 4 and 5 obtained through triangulation of the data collected using ethnographic observations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. A total of 31 nightclubs and 2,422 patrons were randomly selected. The epidemiological interviews with nightclub patrons (closed questionnaire and alcohol breath test at the time of entering and leaving the premises) and the ethnographic observations (closed questionnaire for observation and filling of field notebooks at the venues) were performed first. Next, some of the previously interviewed nightclub patrons were recruited to participate in focus group sessions. Additionally, employees at the investigated nightclubs were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

## Participant selection

### Nightclubs

A portal survey was performed using two-stage cluster sampling, with the clusters consisting of the nightclubs and nightclub patrons (Voas et al., 2006).

In the present study, nightclubs are defined as leisure venues that sell alcohol, have one or more dance floors, a 300-person capacity and are able to check each patron's arrival and departure. To make a list of São Paulo nightclubs, an active search was performed in magazines and guides specialized in leisure activities as well as across the first 10 pages of Google that appeared when the following search terms were used: "Nightclubs and São Paulo", "Party Scene and São Paulo", "Discos and São Paulo", "Bars and São Paulo" and "Nightlife and São Paulo". The final list included 150 entertainment venues, from which 40 venues and potential replacements were selected using the lottery method with probability proportional to size sampling. From the 40 initially selected venues, 31 (including 7 replacements) agreed to participate. These venues were the setting for ethnographic observation, which was performed by two trained investigators for a total of 307 hours (i.e., 8 h and 30 min per nightclub on average during their entire opening hours and on their busiest day according to the information provided by the managers). At the same time, epidemiological data were collected from patrons at the entry and exit doorways; these data were published by Carlini et al. (2014) and Santos, Paes, Sañudo, and Sanchez (2015), among others.

### Focus groups with nightclub patrons

Based on the data collected during the ethnographic observation at the investigated nightclubs and recorded in the aforementioned environmental questionnaire, the FGs were defined according to the following profiles: 1) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) nightclubs ( $n = 7$ ); 2) "university" nightclubs (UNI) ( $n = 8$ ) that were primarily attended by university students; 3) "alternative" nightclubs (ALT) ( $n = 6$ ) essentially serving the underground culture (i.e., rockers or goths); and 4) "eclectic" nightclubs (ECL) ( $n = 3$ ) attended by an eclectic public and playing various music styles. The nightclub profiles funk ( $n = 3$ ) and ballroom dancing ( $n = 4$ ) were also considered, but no patrons agreed to participate in the FGs.

Using the data collected by the portal survey, such as the patrons' e-mail addresses and telephone numbers, 145 subjects were randomly selected to participate in a FG stratified per gender and nightclub profile. Subtracting losses (individuals who confirmed participation but did not show up), 34 subjects participated in eight FGs. To increase comfort level during discussions, focus groups

were stratified by gender and nightclub profile (World Health Organization, 1992).

### **Semi-structured interviews with nightclub employees**

Employees met and contacted at the selected nightclubs during the first stage of the study were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviewees named other possible participants for inclusion according to the snowball sampling technique (Biernack & Waldorf, 1981).

Several chains of interviewees were recruited to include the largest possible number of employees with different profiles. Thus, 8 security guards, 6 bartenders, 5 managers, 3 waitresses, 2 firemen, 2 DJs, 1 promoter, 1 hostess, 1 cashier and 1 cleaner were included; their characteristics are described in Table 1. The inclusion criteria were as follows: at least 2 years of experience, having worked at more than one nightclub, and a minimum age of 18 years. The final sample comprised 30 nightclub employees, which sufficed to attain the theoretical saturation point for the main subjects approached (Patton, 2002).

## **Instruments and data collection**

### **Nightclubs**

A structured questionnaire based on two instruments and the procedures suggested in the following studies were used in the ethnographic observation and environmental data collection: 1) Kit for Assessment of Recreational Nightlife [KAReN] (Calafat et al., 2007) and 2) Safe Bars (Graham & Homel, 2008). Among the collected data, the main data used in the present study were as follows: Nightclub: targeted public (heterosexual or LGBT) and music style; Patrons' behavior: aggressiveness, sexual behavior, alcohol and drug consumption patterns, and physical, verbal and sexual violence; Alcohol sales: minimum purchase amount (cover charge) and modalities of alcohol promotion; and Physical environment: lighting, temperature, areas for sex, and capacity (number of people in the premises).

### **Focus groups**

The focus groups included one observer who recorded the participants' nonverbal reactions and wrote a data pre-analysis report and a moderator charged with orienting the discussions based on a semi-structured script following Krueger and Casey (2009) global recommendations. The focus group sessions lasted 1 h and 40 min on average and were audio recorded.

From the thematic axes considered in the script, the axes comprising the following key questions were used in the present study: *“Do you think that there are environmental factors (examples) in nightclubs that stimulate*

*excessive alcohol use? Which ones? Why?”* These same questions were posed relative to illegal drugs, violence and sexual risk behaviors. The key questions had a subdivision (i.e., *“Which are the main types of nightclubs that stimulate excessive alcohol use?”*) for all of the other subjects approached (sexual risk behaviors, violence and use of illegal drugs).

### **In-depth interviews with nightclub employees**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 nightclub employees. The interviews took place at a time (morning, afternoon, night or dawn) and place (home, office, bakeries, or parks) selected by the interviewees, and the procedure followed the guidelines proposed by Patton (2002). The interviews lasted 1 h and 30 min on average.

Three of the thematic axes considered in the script were used in the present study: 1) sociodemographic data; 2) opinion on the nightclub profiles (environmental factors) that promote high-risk behaviors (excessive alcohol use, illegal drug consumption, violence and sexual risk behaviors) and profiles of the patrons most exposed to them; and 3) how nightclubs and patrons address high-risk behaviors. The question style was the same as in FGs.

## **Data analysis**

### **Compilation of the material**

The data analysis was based on the triangulation (Patton, 2002) of three data sources: focus groups, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations.

The narratives of the participants in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were fully transcribed and coded as follows: Focus groups – initials FG followed by nightclub profile and participant's gender [e.g., FG\_LGBT\_F (focus group\_LGBT\_female)] and Individual interviews – the first two letters correspond to the employees' job, followed by their age and length of work experience at nightclubs in years [e.g., SG24\_2 (security guard, 24 years old, 2-year work experience)], as shown in Table 1.

The analysis was performed using the content analysis technique developed by Bardin (2004), which includes the following steps: immersion, coding, definition of categories, and definition of themes. The participants' narratives were clustered into major themes (according to each thematic axis), resulting in thematic reports. The identified themes were analyzed to provide meaning according to the emic view, which seeks to understand a given culture from within its own cultural references. The NVivo-10 software was used to facilitate the handling and storage of the material and the organization and coding of notes (Gibbs, 2009).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the 30 interviewees: job and corresponding code, age, gender, education level, length of work experience at nightclubs and number of nightclubs in which the interviewees worked.

Job and corresponding code	Age	Gender	Education level	Work experience in nightclubs (years)	Number of nightclubs in which he/she worked
Security guard (SG)	24	Male	Complete secondary school	2	10
Security guard	20	Male	Complete secondary school	4	10
Security guard	29	Male	Complete secondary school	3	3
Security guard	29	Male	Complete secondary school	5	4
Security guard	29	Male	Complete secondary school	2	3
Security guard	35	Male	Complete secondary school	12	10
Security guard	35	Male	Complete secondary school	10	10
Security guard	39	Male	Complete secondary school	2	7
Security guard	35	Male	Complete secondary school	5	3
Bartender (BA)	28	Male	Complete secondary school	2	2
Bartender	26	Male	Incomplete secondary school	8	10
Bartender	27	Male	Complete secondary school	7	10
Bartender	40	Male	Complete secondary school	20	7
Bartender	27	Male	Complete secondary school	3	2
Manager (MA)	56	Male	Incomplete secondary school	25	7
Manager	51	Male	Complete higher education: Business Administration and International Trade	22	9
Manager	41	Male	Complete higher education: Chemical Engineering	18	2
Manager	35	Male	Incomplete secondary school	3	3
Manager	26	Male	Complete higher education: Social Sciences	4	2
Waitress (WA)	48	Female	Incomplete secondary school	7	4
Waitress	23	Female	Nutrition undergraduate student	4	4
Waitress	24	Female	Economics undergraduate student	5	7
Fireman* (FI)	51	Male	Complete secondary school	12	4
Fireman	26	Male	**	5	10
DJ (DJ)	38	Male	Complete higher education: Business Administration	20	10
DJ	34	Male	**	9	10
Event promoter (PR)	36	Male	Complete higher education: Engineering	3	10
Hostess (HO)	45	Female	Complete secondary school	21	5
Cashier (CA)	46	Male	Complete secondary school	9	5
Cleaner (CL)	57	Female	Complete secondary school	19	2

\*responsible for first aid;

\*\*data not collected.

The data collected by ethnographic observation were quantified to describe the characteristics of the investigated nightclubs and to facilitate the formulation of the corresponding typology. For this purpose, the data were tabulated in Excel spreadsheets, and simple frequencies were calculated to describe the environmental and behavioral characteristics found in the investigated nightclubs.

### Nightclub typology

Integration of the data collected from the three aforementioned sources allowed the construction of a typology (Kluge, 2000) of nightclubs according to the following thematic axes, which represented potential high-risk behaviors displayed at this particular setting: patterns of drinking and violence, sexual behavior and use of illegal drugs. The nightclubs were clustered according to the intensity of each high-risk behavior as estimated based on the ethnographic observations and the recorded narratives.

## Results

### Nightclub typology

Four different types of nightclubs were defined according to the main characteristics of the investigated nightclubs relative to the four analyzed thematic axes: *Intoxicating*, *Violent*, *Dancing* and *Highly Sexualized*. The details of each type are provided in Table 2.

The distribution of music styles at the investigated nightclubs was as follows: 29% electronic music, 13% pop-rock, 10% dance-pop, 10% rock, 10% country (*sertaneja*), 10% eclectic, 6% hip-hop, 6% funk and 6% *forró*. Relative to the sexual orientation of the patrons, 23% of the nightclubs targeted the LGBT public, 6% targeted heterosexuals and homosexuals and 71% targeted heterosexuals.

### High-risk behaviors detected at nightclubs

#### Drinking

Alcohol was the only drug consumed in all of the investigated nightclubs. Nevertheless, differences were found

**Table 2.** Typology of 31 São Paulo nightclubs after triangulation of ethnographic observation, focus groups and individual interviews.

Type	High-risk behaviors	% (N)	Description
<i>Intoxicating nightclubs</i>	High alcohol consumption; High illegal drug consumption; Non-violent; Sex not allowed	35% (11)	Most nightclubs in this group targeted a heterosexual public seeking rock, gothic rock, electronic music, funk and hip-hop. High level of illegal drug consumption, including marijuana, ecstasy, ketamine, LSD, cocaine and inhalants. Patrons were very altered due to the excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Regarding environmental factors, these nightclubs had strong light effects (e.g., strobe lights), very loud sound levels and overcrowding above the maximum allowed capacity. Although excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs occurred in all of these nightclubs, some significant differences allowed them to be divided into two subgroups: 1) the environment at electronic music, rock and gothic nightclubs was friendlier due to patron loyalty; the main drugs used were marijuana, ecstasy, LSD and ketamine; and 2) the environment was less friendly at hip-hop and funk nightclubs; the main drugs used were marijuana, cocaine and inhalants; synthetic drugs were not used. The presence of an ambulance was observed at a single nightclub, and none of the nightclubs had adequate structures for the staff to provide care to seriously intoxicated patrons.
<i>Violent nightclubs</i>	High alcohol consumption; Negligible illegal drug consumption; Violent; Sex not allowed	26% (8)	All of the nightclubs in this group targeted a heterosexual public. This group exhibited the widest variety of alcohol sales strategies: 1) "Combos": kits composed of one liter of vodka or whisky and energy drink cans; 2) "Open bar": a fixed fee is charged at entry for unlimited alcohol consumption in the premises; 3) "Buy one, take two": two bottles of vodka or whisky are sold for the price of one; 4) "Sale": alcoholic beverages are sold below their market price (1 beer can = BRL 0.99); and 5) "Cover charge": a fixed fee is charged at entry that allows the purchase of the corresponding amount of alcohol; customers are not reimbursed if they consume less than the paid fee. Excessive alcohol use and sexual competition among patrons contributed to the occurrence of physical, sexual and verbal violence characterized by punching and kicking, touching of intimate parts without permission, aggression through the use of offensive language with strong sexual connotations and quarrels. The music styles included electronic music, country, dance-pop and eclectic music; different genres are played in the same event. Regarding environmental factors, these nightclubs had strong light effects, very loud sound levels and overcrowding above the maximum allowed capacity.
<i>Dancing nightclubs</i>	Low alcohol consumption; Negligible illegal drug consumption; Non-violent; Sex not allowed	23% (7)	Most nightclubs in this group targeted a heterosexual public. The largest numbers of patrons consuming non-alcoholic drinks were found in this type of venue. The nightclubs played <i>zouk</i> and <i>forró</i> (i.e., typical ballroom dance music) as well as flashbacks from the 70s and 80s. Patrons were mainly interested in dancing with their partners. The environment was very friendly; drug consumption or violence of any type was not observed at any time. The environmental factors were not remarkable: few or no light effects, moderate sound levels and numbers of patrons below the maximum allowed capacity.
<i>Highly sexualized nightclubs</i>	High alcohol consumption; Negligible illegal drug consumption; Non-violent; Sex allowed	16% (5)	All nightclubs in this group targeted homosexual patrons, with a single exception. Three types of areas for sex were found: 1) Nightclubs targeting male homosexuals had darkrooms with a 50-person capacity; these areas are widely known for their high-intensity sexual activities, the most common practices being group oral and anal sex; only electronic music was played in these venues; 2) Large couches were available outdoors at the one nightclub for female homosexuals, where women engaged in masturbation were observed; the music played included older rock and dance-pop; and 3) Rooms for sex were available at the one nightclub for heterosexuals; couples masturbating were seen even in the common areas; the music played was mainly country, pop-rock, dance-pop and funk. The environment was friendlier at the nightclubs targeting homosexuals. With the exception of two nightclubs for male homosexuals in which illegal drug consumption occurred, few or no instances of substance use were observed. Regarding environmental factors, these nightclubs had strong light effects, loud sound levels and overcrowding above the maximum allowed capacity.

in the drinking patterns as a function of the nightclub typology established according to patrons' profiles, sexual orientations and music styles. Drinking was most prevalent in the *Intoxicating Nightclubs* (Table 2). Excessive alcohol use seemed to be one of the main reason for patrons to attend this type of nightclub, as shown in the following transcript:

*"No one goes to nightclubs to drink water or milk (laughs), people go there to drink, drink and drink. It doesn't matter whether you're young or old, have more or less money".*

FG\_8\_UNI\_M

### Sales strategies and promotion

As shown in Table 2, several sales strategies to promote excessive alcohol use were detected, especially at the *Violent Nightclubs*. Open bar availability stood out as the strategy that most promoted excessive alcohol use. Additionally, data triangulation showed that the drinks served at the open bars were seemingly fake or had low quality, although this practice was not exclusive to open bars.

*"The outcome of open bars is 95% of the people will get completely blasted. It's the worst possible promotion [strategy] because the drinks are of the lowest quality and you keep drinking until getting blasted." FG\_ECL\_F*

*"Sure, when everybody's drunk they start serving 'pig in a poke' and no one notices (...) Or do you believe that someone will check whether drinks are fake or not? (...) 'Open' [bars] serve to drink until you drop." FG\_ECL\_F*

This scenario is only possible and is perpetuated by a lack of control of the quality of beverages by competent agencies and the laws regulating the various types of alcohol sales.

*"There's no control, therefore, no more than 5% of nightclubs work with authentic brands (...) Putting Natasha vodka into Smirnoff bottles is 'routine' and we do this all the time (...) In open bars, we serve drinks which we don't even know whether they have a brand." BA26\_8*

A cover charge was another strategy used to promote greater alcohol consumption and was applied at 45% of the investigated nightclubs. This practice seems to stimulate patrons to consume an amount of alcohol corresponding to the fee paid upon entering the premises.

*"It was banned at some time, right? But they always charge it, because it guarantees some profit for the venue, and people don't complain, because they do want to drink, and if they can drink [an amount of alcohol corresponding to] the fee they've paid, it's OK with them." WA23\_4*

### Responsible alcohol sales

No instance of staff members warning people to stop drinking or refusing to sell alcohol to clearly drunk

patrons was observed during the ethnographic observations. Data triangulation corroborated these findings and detected a lack of acceptance of the proposal of enacting measures to restrict alcohol sales to drunk individuals. These data show that the lack of alcohol sale regulations is relevant for drinking behavior.

*P1\_ "Nightclubs will never do such a thing. They don't even serve water, no way they'll tell people to stop drinking because they're already drunk, and also, we go there exactly to do that [get drunk]."*

*P2\_ "No one will agree to that. We'll get mad, the owner won't agree to have less profit, and even if it becomes a law, who's going to control it? (...) Fat chance, that's not partying." FG\_ECL\_M*

### Physical environment

Environmental factors seem to play a relevant role in the stimulation of drinking, including manipulation of the nightclub environment by employees, as shown in the following transcript:

*"You set up the place for people to be stimulated to drink more. Sound, lights, temperature, promotion, filling the place up, etc. This is what a nightclub is all about." PR36\_3*

*"Nightclub owners aren't stupid. They know that if the club is full they'll make a profit because people drink more. At times they even turn the air conditioner off." WA48\_7*

### Moderate alcohol use

Alcohol consumption was moderate or low in 16% of the investigated nightclubs, and few cases of alcohol intoxication were observed. These were venues targeting an older public, the focus of which was on dancing, whether ballroom dancing or choreographed dancing to flashback music. These venues were characterized as *Dancing Nightclubs*, as shown in Table 2. There seemed to be a type of "self-regulation" in operation at this type of nightclub because getting drunk was viewed negatively by the patrons.

*MA26\_2: "People go to ballroom dancing places to dance a choreography, and that [getting drunk] is difficult (...) They don't drink, because if they do they can't dance, and that's how they have fun, not by drinking (...) They're older and seldom you get to see someone drunk here, it's not good."*

### Illegal drugs

High levels of illegal drug consumption were found in 35% of the investigated nightclubs, all of which were *Intoxicating Nightclubs* (Table 2). The drugs most frequently used were marijuana, ecstasy, ketamine, LSD and inhalants, and drug use in combination with drinking was a common occurrence. This pattern of consumption was

stronger in the electronic music nightclubs in which environmental factors were a part of the drug use rituals.

*“I go to electronic music nightclubs and everybody knows that ecstasy, pot and LSD are used a lot there because they’re a part of the history of electronic music, just like pot is a part of the history of reggae (...) The lights and the music are important, they interact with the drug and we get much more high.”* FG\_ALT\_M

The interviewees showed concern with the use of these substances because they were aware that nightclubs were not duly prepared to address cases of intoxication.

*“I’ve worked at several nightclubs and it’s indeed a fact, people do too many drugs (...) The nightclub staff can’t do much more than call an ambulance in some cases because they don’t know what to do and might make things worse.”* DJ\_38\_20

The use of illegal drugs is perceived as a safety problem by the nightclubs’ employees because it can cause legal problems for both venues and patrons.

*“Gee, everybody’s doing it, and if the police come and the nightclub [staff] doesn’t do that famous ‘trick’ [bribing] everybody ends up in jail and you can be sure the following day the names of the nightclub and its owner will make the newspaper headlines.”* FG\_ECL\_F

*“Nightclubs shouldn’t let these drugs in because everybody might end up in jail (...) If someone gets too sick and we can’t do anything to help, it’s a problem to call an ambulance because someone might tell what they saw in there.”* MA41\_18

## Violence

Physical, sexual or verbal violence was observed at 26% of the nightclubs, which were classified as “Violent Nightclubs” (Table 2). Excessive alcohol use, overcrowding above the maximum capacity and strong sexual competition among the men for the women make these venues more prone to sexual violence, eventually ending in physical violence.

*PI\_ “The songs say that women will ‘agree to everything’, then guys go around groping all the women indiscriminately, but here comes one and gropes another guy’s woman, and the fight begins (...) There’s a lot of quarreling because there’s hardly any room to move and people bump into each other. If everybody wasn’t so upset, perhaps they wouldn’t quarrel so much about that.”* FG\_UNI\_M

*“They believe that if a woman goes to a nightclub it’s because she’s always ‘wanting to do it’ [sex] and they make advances in a very nasty way (...) There’s at least four fights every night and I don’t even need to say that they’re all drunk.”* SG35\_10

One environmental factor characteristic for this setting is the aggressive lyrics of the songs played, which

stimulate sexual violence and excessive alcohol use, eventually validating the actual display of these behaviors in the premises.

*“Every night they play a song saying to drink and go ‘get a woman’, but women don’t always want to be ‘taken’ with no warning whatsoever. When partying no one ever asks for permission, and there’s always quarrels about women. Also, everybody’s drunk and it suffices for someone to step on someone else’s foot for fighting to begin.”* FG\_UNI\_M

## Sexual behavior

Areas for sex were available in 16% of the nightclubs, which were characterized as *Highly Sexualized* (Table 2). These areas were primarily found in some LGBT nightclubs. Approximately half of these venues had so-called “darkrooms”, where group sex (mainly among homosexual men) was practiced in the dark, at times with several partners at once or partner swapping.

*PI\_ “It’s madness, one in front [of you] another behind [you] all the time ... You’re ‘no one’ there and when you get out, you don’t have a clue whom you had ‘intercourse’ with (laughs).”* FG\_LGBT\_M

Because condoms do not seem to be commonly used in this setting, even when they are available on the premises free of charge, this practice represents a sexual risk behavior.

*“There are [free] condoms at some nightclubs, but they become balloons (laughs) (...) With so much oral and anal sex going on, it’s difficult to keep the condom intact and no one’s going to keep changing it!”* FG\_LGBT\_M

*“The guys from the city government distribute [condoms] and there are free [condoms] at the nightclub where I work, but almost nobody gets them. The idea of ‘darkroom’ and safe sex doesn’t make much sense.”* CA46\_9

The sexual behavior displayed at the LGBT nightclub exclusively for women was more discrete compared to the nightclubs for men. There seems to be a considerable difference in how homosexual women view and react to the nightclub environment.

*“We don’t really like to be exposed. This is why there are few nightclubs for the female LGBT public and there isn’t that sex stuff that happens at nightclubs for boys (...) Masturbation is more discrete and at times it even happens on the ‘couches’, but this doesn’t happen in all the nightclubs because it isn’t a part of the gay female universe as it is for the men.”* FG\_LGBT\_F

*“There’re few nightclubs for gay women, and only one of them has these ‘couches’ (...) It can’t be compared to the nightclubs for men. The girls are always in couples, and the most that happens is fingering [masturbation], but even this not too much. I’ve only seen oral sex twice.”* MA35\_3

Areas for sex are not common at nightclubs for heterosexuals. Only one of the nightclubs investigated in the present study had such an area. Most of the sexual activity at heterosexual nightclubs is hidden and patrolled by the security guards, and special areas for this purpose are not available.

*“There are no places for sex at heterosexual nightclubs. We’re always warned to be wary and not to let [patrons do it], but I’ve worked at nightclubs for university students before. They ‘close’ one just for themselves, and things then truly change, and there’s sex for everybody who wants it (...) Condoms (laughs) seldom, right?” SG26\_5*

*“There’re some university parties where there’s sex, because there are rooms for the ones who want to have sex, and even so it’s not ‘group sex’ (...) No matter the nightclub type, I can’t vouch for condoms, too much drinking and little time (laughs).” FG\_UNI\_F*

## Discussion

A typology of the investigated nightclubs was constructed based on ethnographic observation and the narratives of the patrons and employees according to the following four analyzed categories of behaviors: patterns of drinking, violence, sexual behavior and illegal drug use. As a result, the nightclubs were categorized as *Intoxicating*, *Violent*, *Dancing* and *Highly Sexualized*.

Alcohol consumption in this setting may be associated with patrons engaging in high-risk behaviors (Sloan, Eldred, & Davis, 2014; Townshend, Kambouropoulos, Griffin, Hunt, & Milani, 2014). Nevertheless, the results of the present study indicate that drinking as such was not the single trigger of these behaviors because environmental and individual factors seemed to be strongly associated not only with the different high-risk behaviors but also with their intensity. This finding provides further support for the clustering of patrons by nightclub type, suggesting that or the venue influences the consumption of alcohol or the subject seeks a venue that most facilitates the consumption profile that he wants to accomplish that night.

Excessive alcohol use was the only type of risk behavior found at three of the four types of nightclubs (*Intoxicating*, *Violent* and *Highly Sexualized*). Alcohol promotion and sales strategies may influence the excessive drinking behavior. Our data agree with the data from studies indicating that open bars are the alcohol sales strategy most associated with excessive drinking (Carlini et al., 2014; Thombs et al., 2009). However, it is also possible that patrons’ excessive drinking leads to the adoption of a particular promotion and sales strategies in the venues. We can also hypothesize that vendors merely cater to the patron population and their own drinking practices and preferences when deciding how to apply their alcohol promotions.

Cover charges were another alcohol sales strategy found at the investigated nightclubs, even though this strategy was banned by federal law no. 8,078/90 for being unfair because customers were not reimbursed when they did not drink the full amount of alcohol for which they paid a priori. Open bars are also permitted in Brazil; there was an attempt in the past to pass a law banning them (bill proposal no. 3,414/08), but it was tabled and the law was never passed.

Concerning legal issues, the interviewees overtly rejected the idea of legislation imposing controls on alcohol sales to heavily drunk people, as is the case in several developed countries (Babor et al., 2010).

In contrast to the *Intoxicating*, *Violent* and *Highly Sexualized* nightclubs, the main focus of the *Dancing* nightclubs, which play ballroom dance and flashback music, was on dancing, either in couples or group choreography. Thus, neither excessive alcohol use nor the other types of analyzed high-risk behaviors were part of this setting, as was also observed by Anderson et al. (2009).

Illegal drug use was primarily observed at the *Intoxicating Nightclubs*. The most common venues were the ones that played electronic music, as also shown by the typologies formulated by Anderson et al. (2009) and Purcell et al. (2005). According to Purcell et al. (2005), the main expectation of electronic music club patrons is to interact with the “scene” through the excessive use of illegal drugs and alcohol. Interestingly, the results of the present study indicate that users do not seem to be unaware of the dangers posed by some drugs. The factors the interviewees rated as risks were the lack of structure and training of staff in nightclubs to address intoxicated patrons and the legal penalties for alcohol and drug consumption. Curiously, the interviewees did not judge drug combinations, which are ubiquitous at nightclubs and are potentially responsible for more serious physical effects on the body (Martin, 2008), to be a problem.

Regarding violence, the aggressive environment characteristic of the *Violent Nightclubs*, which are permeated by song lyrics promoting sexual abuse, seemed to lead male patrons to adopt aggressive sexual behaviors of self-affirmation towards women. This behavior profile was also identified in other studies, which described attempts at touching someone who did not want to be touched as a typical sign of sexual aggression (Graham, Bernards, Osgood, & Wells, 2006). In agreement with the results of a study conducted in Canada (Graham et al., 2006), violence among patrons was strongly associated with drinking and nightclubs characterized by high levels of sexual competition and overcrowding.

Regarding sexual risk behaviors, the outstanding factor in the present study was the availability of dark-rooms (at LGBT nightclubs) for unsafe sex practices,

which were generally performed without condom protection, in addition to intercourse with a large number of different partners on the same night. The lack of condom use, even when condoms were distributed free of charge at the nightclubs, should be given special attention and addressed more thoroughly in future studies. One study conducted in Brazil (Kerr et al., 2013) showed that the recrudescence of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic was mostly concentrated among men who have sex with men aged 20–25 years, which coincidentally was the main age range analyzed in the present study (Santos et al., 2015).

The present study has some limitations. First, the environmental factors common in nightclubs, such as strong light effects, overcrowding and darkness, and even acts of intimidation experienced by the investigators, interfered with the ethnographic observation. Additionally, because the present study investigated illegal behaviors, underreporting might have occurred in the interviews and focus groups. Moreover, the method to compile the original list of nightclubs included only nightclubs that appeared at magazines and guides specialized in leisure activities or at the first 10 pages of Google. This procedure could have excluded venues that may not be well-known or well-resourced enough to appear on these sources. However, the study also has strengths, such as the use of different data sources and triangulation, with consequent greater validity of the typology obtained. Additionally, this is the first study to cluster nightclubs in the largest Brazilian city according to the identified different behaviors.

Moreover, it is important to note that in the present typology we have considered only environmental factors interviewees were aware of. However, according to Hill, Pilling, and Foxcroft (2017) there is different patterns of subjectivity between drinkers and their drinking environments, as well as between individuals, which is associated with alcohol-related affordances. These patterns will reflect a different set of opportunities to consume alcohol in drinking venues and indicate that the environment is not a neutral set of possibilities of action that the agent simply chooses. Instead, the drinking environment may “invite a particular action or even ask a person to do something” (Withagen, de Poel, Araújo, & Pepping, 2012).

The present study shows that nightclubs are venues in which risk behaviors are adopted; for this reason, they are relevant targets for public health actions. Thus, public health managers and professionals should consider the specificities of nightclubs and patrons to formulate specific preventive measures and efficient public policies to reduce risk among patrons. The study also notes the need to regulate alcohol sales and restrict the promotion of alcoholic beverages. Moreover, Brazilian laws need to

be enforced more rigorously because law transgression seems to be a common practice in Brazilian society.

## Conflict of interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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