

Football Fans' Views of Violence in British Football: Evidence of a Sanitized and Gentrified Culture

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Abstract

This article draws on the responses of 1,500 fans from across the United Kingdom to an online survey posted from August 2013 to November 2013 regarding their experience of football violence. Reflecting the 2013 Home Office report that indicated a continued long-term decline of football fan violence in England and Wales, 89% of fans illustrate a decrease in violent behavior from the 1980s with 56% indicating this is due to better policing, 56% attributing it to improvements in stadia, 50% highlighting the deterrence provided by CCTV, and 49% ascribing it to a civilized supporter base. Overall, fans reflect on a more sanitized and gentrified culture emerging out of measures introduced since the 1990s (including changing police strategies, banning orders, alcohol bans, higher ticket prices, and CCTV).

Keywords

football, fans, violence, hooliganism, police

Introduction

Football violence, disorder, and aggression among its participants are a tradition of the game and existed long before the introduction of the Football Association (FA) in 1863. For example, the advent of “folk” football from the 14th century led to frequent laws that sought to outlaw an activity that was seen as a social distraction

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encouraging violence, but one that also shifted the focus away from military-type activities such as archery (Giulianotti, 1999). Although violence was a factor in the public school and university systems of the early-to-mid 19th century, it was from 1863 that on-field incidents of violence were regulated through the introduction of fines and suspensions.

The growth of football during the latter part of the 19th century coincided with mass industrialization and urbanization as thousands of people moved into cities and towns for employment. As the number of clubs in these areas grew, so too did the display of masculine identities that often centered on drinking, gambling, sexism, and heterosexuality as boys and men began developing a lifelong cultural and social affiliation toward a particular club that was subsequently passed through the generations (Cleland, 2015b).

The building of stadia and need for paying spectators to contribute toward players' wages resulted in the pitch being cordoned off, with a police presence an increasing feature of crowd management and safety. In fact, as the number of teams and leagues continued to grow, the formation of clubs in close proximity to one another led to fans developing a sense of territorial ownership and cultural identity that distinguished them from fans of rival clubs. A consequence of this was the beginning of the process where fans saw themselves as the so-called 12th man because of the vicarious participative influence they felt they had on the atmosphere and outcome of matches. For some fans, the passion and belonging that football elicited were reflected in their participation in violent disorder as they sought to gain respect and social capital among their peers in confrontations based on social and cultural factors including divisions over class, local identity, religion, and political views (Giulianotti, 1999).

Given the historic role of violence in the culture of football, not surprisingly it became a prominent feature of sociological analysis, in particular its focus on fans of clubs in the United Kingdom (see, for example, Armstrong, 1998; Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1988; Frosdick & Marsh, 2005; Giulianotti, 1999). Indeed, it was from the 1960s that football violence was popularly referred to by the media as "football hooliganism" and led to the emergence of three often cited academic explanations that principally centered on its origins and causes¹: (a) The Marxist account of Ian Taylor (1971), who theoretically explained how economic and social change at the end of the 1960s alienated young working class men from clubs that wanted to attract a more affluent supporter base to pay for a rising wage bill. This, he believed, led to significant resistance from fans who engaged in violence with rival fans and the police when they felt that their club's traditional relationship with the working class community had been lost. (b) Peter Marsh (1978) and his colleagues at Oxford University examined the rituals and performance of violence among Oxford United fans and found an internal hierarchical structure that operated within specific "rules of disorder." While the group retained a collective sense of territoriality, individual roles were given carrying varied degrees of participation in violence. (3) The Leicester School's emphasis on the figurational approach of Norbert Elias consisted of a historical analysis of crowd behavior and found that from the 1960s, economic and social inequalities hardened and a rough working class subculture emerged who were less incorporated into

society and whose behavior was underpinned by uncivilized moral standards (Dunning et al., 1988). Football matches subsequently became an opportunity to publicly demonstrate a resistance to authority by engaging in violent behavior with rival fans and the police.²

As a consequence of these approaches, there has been considerable academic debate on the causes of football hooliganism and this article does not want to re-cover old ground. However, we argue that it remains a valid area of enquiry as little contemporary online research has been conducted with fans on a national scale on the extent to which violence remains a feature of British football culture, particularly given increasing measures to tackle it since the late 1980s (such as more severe legislation, alcohol bans, early kick-offs, stadium or partial stadium closures, restrictive ticketing, CCTV, and other covert surveillance and heavy-handed as well as more relaxed levels of policing).

The impact of these measures has led some scholars, such as Best (2010), suggesting it is a

widely accepted opinion that in England, football hooliganism is now a “thing of the past” and that for reasons such as increasing ticket prices, much of the traditional fan base, such as poor working class men, are unable to attend matches. (p. 573)

Likewise, the Home Office (2013) report provided further evidence of a changing culture of football fan behavior in England and Wales by outlining that the number of arrests inside and outside of stadia had decreased from 3,075 in 2010-2011 to 2,456 in 2012-2013. This changing narrative, therefore, was the empirical focus for this article: What are the experiences of fans from across the United Kingdom with regard to evidence of decreasing violence as they are the most likely to be directly affected by it? Does it suggest a more gentrified and enlightened culture of fandom in British football or do these results misrepresent the actual experience for those fans attending matches?

The approach taken to address these research questions provides a different perspective from ethnographic research on football fan violence as it focuses on the views of 1,500 fans from across the United Kingdom to an online survey posted from August 2013 to November 2013. Overall, the results outline how a traditionally rough and rowdy working class game has become refined and renovated since the 1990s in a way that has made it appeal to a wide spectrum of tastes and sensibilities. Although the measures mentioned above have had an impact, we present large-scale empirical evidence of the emergence of a largely civilized supporter base that reflects a sanitized and gentrified culture of contemporary U.K. football fandom.

Method

Although ethnographic methods remain an important component of contemporary football research (see, for example, Ayres & Treadwell, 2012; Pearson & Sale, 2011; Rookwood & Pearson, 2012), the introduction of football message boards has created new opportunities to capture large-scale qualitative data (Cashmore & Cleland,

2011, 2012, 2014; Cleland, 2013, 2015a; Cleland & Cashmore, 2014; Gibbons & Nuttall, 2012; Millward, 2008). Over previous projects using online platforms, the lead author has developed a relationship with more than 100 editors of football message boards who provide permission to use them for academic purposes. To try and capture data from across the United Kingdom, an anonymous online survey was established (www.topfan.co.uk) to provide a faceless opportunity where fans could provide honest and frank views about their experience of violence. This approach avoids social desirability and the motivation to lie as sensitive discourse can be expressed with no threat of prosecution or an opportunity to gain some form of reward, like a prize as none were offered.

Although there are many advantages of this approach for data collection purposes, we followed the ethical guidelines established within “The Association of Internet Researchers.” For example, Griggs (2011) refers to the potential of harm as well as ethical issues surrounding consent and deception that need to be stated at the outset of any research project in an online environment. In addressing this, every opening post contained a paragraph explaining how the lead author was an academic gathering anonymous responses (via an embedded link to the survey) regarding their thoughts and experiences of violence, whether they have engaged in it or not. By doing so, it avoided identity deception as it allowed each message board user to voluntarily consent to reflecting on their experience, while they were reminded at the end of the survey “by clicking submit, you are giving your consent for your views to be used as part of this project.” Most of the opening posts were placed in the “off topic” section of message boards as they tend to remain a feature for longer and avoid disruption to those message boards that focus only on matters relevant to the first team.

The research was conducted from August 2013 to November 2013 and ended when 1,500 responses had been received. Ninety-two percent of the participants were male, 10% were aged below 21, 6% were aged 22 to 25, 18% were aged 26 to 35, 21% were aged 36 to 45, 29% were aged 46 to 55, and 16% were aged 56+. Therefore, we had a significant number of participants who could provide a comparative account of the environment they experienced in the 1970s and 1980s with what they were experiencing in 2013.

The intention of this research project was solely based on gathering 1,500 responses from fans across the United Kingdom, but as often happens on message boards, a thread of discussion can take place once an opening post has been made. Even though pseudonyms are used on message boards, anonymity cannot be assumed as the identity of some members of an online community are known to other posters (Millward, 2009a). Consequently, a “performance” could take place on a thread with posters looking to impress or influence other posters by exaggerating their true feelings. Similarly, a “performance” could also take place within the survey where the participant could still conceal or falsify their true experience. Therefore, we make no claim that the results are representative of all supporters across the United Kingdom, but given the wide-ranging sample we argue that it conveys a significant composition of football fans’ views about their contemporary and comparative experience of violence.

To try and compensate for an inflated bias of self-selection, the authors engaged in more than 100 message boards across the United Kingdom. We also recognize how the research has an in-built bias due to Internet access being required to complete the survey, but we felt this was an acceptable bias given the widespread availability of the Internet in 2013 via a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Although fan message boards were the main source of data collection, both authors also sought other ways of advertising the online survey to as wide a range of supporters as possible through university press releases as well as through our own social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter.

After the research period had ended, a mixed method of analysis took place with a statistical breakdown of the closed questions and a thematic analysis of the open-ended responses. To minimize subjectivity, both authors worked independently to inductively analyze each open-ended response through open coding and begin establishing an initial set of first-order themes. Over a number of phases, the range of themes were reduced further and placed into appropriate categories based on dominant patterns, commonalities, and differences (Bryman, 2012). Once this process had been completed, both authors collaborated in a process of verification that eventually led to five recurring themes:

1. Comparisons with the 1970s and 1980s,
2. The tribal nature and cultural practice of hooliganism,
3. The influence of alcohol and drugs,
4. Comparisons with violence abroad,
5. The role of the police and courts.

Comparisons With the 1970s and 1980s

The notoriety given to hooliganism in the 1970s and 1980s led to formations such as West Ham's "Inner City Firm" and the "Headhunters" at Chelsea, with the Sports Minister at the time, Colin Moynihan, famously describing it as "cancer in an otherwise healthy body" (Armstrong & Hobbs, 1994, p. 231). The continuation of violence at domestic and international football was met with widespread coverage by the local, national, and international media and reached its peak in the mid-1980s. The live broadcasting of the 1985 European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus (where fighting before kick-off resulted in the deaths of 39 Juventus fans after a wall collapsed) was met, for the first time, with serious measures from the governing body of European football, Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA), who sought to eradicate hooliganism. Banning Liverpool from competing in Europe for 7 years and English clubs for 5, this tough stance was matched with the introduction of legislation in the United Kingdom that began with the 1986 Public Order Act and has been followed by the 1989 Football Supporters Act, the 1991 Football Offences Act, the 1999 Football (Offences and Disorder) Act, and the 2000 Football (Disorder) Act. It also included the introduction of alcohol bans, CCTV, and perimeter fencing that acted as a "cage" in segregating home and away fans as well as preventing them from entering the field of play.

Although the introduction of perimeter fencing is likely to have prevented disorder from occurring inside stadia, it also contributed to two significant disasters during the 1980s. The first occurred at Valley Parade in May 1985 during a match between Bradford City and Lincoln City where 56 fans died as a result of a discarded cigarette setting fire to piles of litter that had been built up under one of the wooden stands over many years. The continued threat of hooliganism had seen the removal of fire extinguishers because of the fear of them being used as missiles and the locked gates prevented a safe exit from the engulfing fire. The Popplewell Report (1986) that followed this disaster recommended the inclusion of exits but ultimately mirrored the British government's focus on hooliganism, most notably through the retention of perimeter fencing.

Indeed, its continued use had a direct impact on Britain's worst stadium disaster when 96 Liverpool supporters died at the 1989 FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough. The decision to alleviate crushing outside the stadium in the minutes preceding the kick-off by opening the gates resulted in thousands of fans rushing toward the middle section of the terraces and crushing those congregated near the front. This time the subsequent Taylor Report (1990) immediately recommended the removal of perimeter fencing and led the way in establishing all-seater stadia in the top two divisions of English football by the start of the 1994-1995 season. The introduction of the Premier League in 1992 and beginning of a financially lucrative relationship with the satellite company, BSkyB, did not stop clubs passing the cost of stadium redevelopment on to supporters with the start of higher ticket prices.

Given the inflated rise in ticket prices, clubs sought a more affluent and civilized "customer" to attend matches with a focus on attracting fans from outside of their traditional fan base, a process that has forced many lower working class fans away from attending matches (Cleland, 2015b). Reflecting the widely held assumption that the gentrified culture of football since the early 1990s has impacted upon levels of fan violence, 89% of our participants stated how violence no longer exists at a level they had previously experienced. When asked for their reasons, 50% indicated the influence of CCTV, whereas 49% stated the presence of a more civilized supporter base. Representing the views of many participants who could compare their experience over several decades, a Coventry City fan (male, aged 55) stated, "Compared to the 1970s and 1980s, modern football has a minimal violence problem. There is more chance of trouble on a night out in a city centre."

Supporting views such as this, 56% of fans stated that the changes made to the game since the Hillsborough disaster have improved the sanitization of football. Not surprisingly this figure was higher among the older age groups as they could compare the historic problem of violence with the under-investment in football; a point illustrated by a Chelsea fan (male, aged 41) who claimed, "Violence has reduced in the last 20 years and has become more socially accepted due to its hyper-surveillance, bourgeoisification and gentrification post-Taylor (such as ticket prices and an increasing middle-class fan base)," while a Millwall fan (male, aged 48) reflected,

Wannabe hooligans remain part of the culture of football, but the real hard core element appears to have died out. That is not to say that violence does not happen, we live in a casually violent society, but the commercialisation of English football has limited its impact. There are too many people keen to protect “The Brand.”

Protecting “The Brand” was a symbol of some of the responses, with fans keen to emphasize the market interests in presenting the Premier League as “hooligan-free” due to it seeking to enhance its value to an increasing number of commercial partners and investors. For 24% of the participants, the role of the media is important in the ways in which it “presents” violence. Some fans argue that the ways in which the media amplified violence during the 1980s actually provided a platform where hooligans could “perform” in front of a worldwide audience. As suggested by Garland and Rowe (2000), the changing emphasis of the media, in particular through its focus on the wider rehabilitation of the game and the impact of measures introduced into football since the early 1990s, indicates the “remarkable cultural rehabilitation of football” (p. 145). This was also reflected among the participants, with this Leyton Orient fan (male, aged 41) outlining, “The media play a big part in the culture of football. If they decide they want to publicise football violence again, then the perception of whether it is declining may change.”

As suggested by Rookwood and Pearson (2012), violence at matches directly impacts on all fans, such as cause injury or even death to those fans inadvertently caught up in it, affect their future attendance if the club is banned from competitions or is forced to close the stadium for upcoming matches, face aggressive public order tactics by the police if the threat of violence exists (such as restrictions on movements as well as heavy-handed crowd management tactics), and face alcohol bans, ticket restrictions, and early kick-offs. However, in their 15-year ethnographic research among a number of U.K. fan groups, Rookwood and Pearson found that a proportion of match-going fans expressed positive views toward hooligans associated with the same team (such as through a sense of protection and enhancing their reputation). Rather than condemn them on moral grounds, fans were more critical of the social impact this had on their match-day experience, such as the restrictions placed upon them by clubs and the police to maintain social control.

The Tribal Nature and Cultural Practice of Hooliganism

A significant component of research on global football violence is the distinctiveness of fan subcultures. In explaining how these are formed and the importance of identity within them, Spaaij (2008) outlines how “football hooliganism has gradually evolved into a persistent, transnational subculture that continues to attract significant numbers of young men seeking excitement and adventure” (p. 370). For fans in our study who claim to engage in violence, they each stated a variable degree of participation and different reasons for this practice (ranging along a continuum from merely passive involvement to regular physical participation). According to some fans, participation in violence detracts from “boredom” in their everyday life, as suggested by this Newcastle United fan (male, aged 29):

With not much excitement in your life, you latch on to a tribe who then become the focus of your life and you live and breathe it. I believe it's more to do with the poverty/boredom/mob rules, a need to release your frustration at what little seems to be going right in your life.

Examples such as this reflect the “quest for excitement” suggested by Elias and Dunning (1986) to explain the central feature of violence, especially for those who deem their own lives to be boring, mundane, and unchallenging. As suggested by Ayres and Treadwell (2012), violence is “about breaking free from the restraints of the working week and losing control, in an effort to reassert their identity and regain some autonomy over their lives” (p. 93). Although it is recognized that the social and cultural composition of the match-going fan has changed, some responses did reflect Dunning et al.’s (1988) claim that a rough working class subculture continues to use football to enhance their self-identity. In providing one example, this Celtic fan (male, aged 37) stated,

Kids from deprived backgrounds with little or no chance of employment tend to lack self-esteem. Being part of a group of football casuals gives them an identity and a form of self-worth. This in turn provides them with confidence and an escape mechanism that, at times, translates itself into violence.

For other fans, the focus on rough working class fans as hooligans is misleading. Supporting the findings of Ayres and Treadwell (2012), Giulianotti (1999), and Spaaij (2008), who suggested that rather than consisting of rough lower-working-class men, hooligans are more likely to be *incorporated* into mainstream society than excluded from it, a Middlesbrough fan (male, aged 51) claimed, “Social status is irrelevant to hooliganism. If you are into it you are welcome,” while a Tranmere Rovers fan (male, aged 49) illustrated,

People who engage in violence have something missing from their lives (perhaps genuinely through no fault of their own) and unfortunately use football violence in a twisted sense of at least belonging to something and having a sense of pride/worth.

Although all hooligan groups share the central practice of seeking some sort of violent confrontation, when one occurs, it not only presents an opportunity for a group to construct their own sense of identity and belonging but also allows for individuals to accrue prestige and status (Armstrong, 1998). For Kerr (2005), it also allows individuals to confront their fear because if there was no fear for personal danger then the excitement, pleasure, and emotional arousal would not be as dramatic. A Mansfield Town fan (male, aged 49) provided an example of the intense pleasure gained through violent behavior, irrespective of some older fans stopping this practice:

During the early 1980s I was to my shame very much involved with the organising of firm versus firm match ups. It was seen at the time to be “the thing to do” and coming from a mining background the working week was always a hard one and the release of all the pent up anger from the week peaked at the weekend where you could vent your spleen whilst having a bloody good laugh about it . . . This was their day their 2 hours where the rules were theirs and theirs alone. A sense of belonging is what most people crave and at

football you are amongst several thousand people who share the same feelings as yourself they have the same mentality for those few hours at the match. Even now, if I saw one of my mates in trouble I would get back involved no problem.

This collective “sense of belonging,” according to King (2001) suggests how “individuals must protect the group’s honor, even at the risk of personal injury, if they are to enjoy the benefits that come from membership of the group” (p. 574). According to Spaaij (2008), the body as a form of masculine agency is an important component in this as it provides an opportunity to demonstrate physical prowess for those hooligans who want to engage in violence. For young male fans engaging in violence, masculine social capital can be achieved if their practice is recognized by like-minded peers, such as this response by a Portsmouth fan (male, aged 24):

Violence is an essential part of the match-day experience. We go toe-to-toe with firms all over the country whenever we play. We’ve got each other’s back, we drink together and we crack skulls together. We like to drink, watch the game and fight. It’s human nature.

As suggested by Armstrong (1998), the intrinsic nature of football fandom (the rituals, values, and codes of honor) has played a significant role in shaping young men’s identities since the late 19th century. However, opportunities for the construction of identity have widened since the 1990s through the publication of hooligan memoirs (see Brimson, 2007; Chester, 2004; Pennant, 2005) and films such as *The Firm, I.D.* and *The Football Factory* as well as other documentaries. Modern technology has also allowed for the creation of hooligan-operated websites that help to expand and facilitate informal and transnational networks by glorifying violence through either videos, pictures, or a narrative description of violent engagement.

From a visual perspective, the adrenaline rush and emotional arousal experienced by hooligans has been enhanced through the opportunity to pause and replay particular incidents before, during, and after a violent confrontation. For Poulton (2014), the representation, reproduction, and simulation of violence has allowed consumers who “are not necessarily deviant themselves, but their consumption allows them to experience vicariously the transgression, deviance or ‘criminality’ of others” (p. 161). It also avoids the associated risks of participating in violent disorder; instead this aura of hyper-masculinity presents “a highly romanticized sense of belonging, solidarity, and friendship” (Spaaij, 2008, p. 385). This glorification of violence and attention given to “celebrity” retired hooligans concerns some fans, with this Hartlepool United fan (male, aged 52) explaining, “Football-related violence has developed its own romanticised ‘culture’ with websites, films and books. This then encourages more teenage ‘would-be’ hooligans who ‘hero-worship’ their peers,” while a Celtic fan (male, aged 39) concurred,

UK casuals/hooligans have a legend like quality to aspire to for young people. Many of the guys who went in the 1980s and 90s are now in their 50s with kids and grandkids. They are past it, but idiots like Cass Pennant have made a career out of recounting his nonsense. For everyone like him, there are many others that have moved with the times and see it as being of its time.

Given this exposure, the image and appearance of modern hooligans is also changing, with a shift away from the previous culture of the skinhead, Doctor Marten boot-style hooligan and replaced with a more “casual” designer style, such as clothing brands such as Burberry, Stone Island, Rockport, and Lacoste that shows no identifiable sign of allegiance to a particular club (even though one clearly exists). As suggested by an Oldham Athletic fan (male, aged 17), image remains an important element of the “casual” culture: “In Britain, football violence can be a fashionable statement with many clothing companies doing lines in ‘away days’ menswear. Thus, hooliganism can be seen as a stylish activity.” According to Giulianotti (1999), the increasing displacement of violence away from the ground also enhances “the hooligan groups’ distinct senses of identity and their formal differentiation from the general body of supporters” (p. 50).

Despite the increasing practice of organized violence away from stadia, another problem is the outbreak of sporadic and spontaneous violence that is often based on the result of a match. As suggested by Stott and Pearson (2007), a football match is a complex event where the crowd is “affected by a multitude of different interrelating causes” (p. 43), such as the atmosphere and rivalry between both clubs, the eventual result, the performance of the referee, and any controversial moments during the game. This was illustrated by a Queens Park Rangers fan (male, aged 50) who stated, “Football carries the crowd along on a wave of emotion. This can turn negative particularly when one group of supporters perceive that their team is being unfairly treated by officials.” Likewise, a Gillingham fan (male, aged 35) concurred, “Football calls upon a man’s tribal instincts and leads to angry outbursts on the terraces if a team’s fortunes do not meet their supporter’s expectations (especially due to external unstable factors such as bad luck, poor refereeing decisions, etc.)”

The Influence of Alcohol and Drugs

The 2013 Home Office report outlined that the number of arrests for alcohol-related disorder had dropped from 800 in 2011–2012 to 549 in 2012–2013. Although this highlights a reduction, the consumption of alcohol has long been a tradition of football culture, particularly for northern European supporters (Giulianotti, 1995; King, 2003; Millward, 2009b; Rookwood, 2009). Therefore, despite measures since the 1980s to limit the availability of alcohol at matches, it remains an important part of the match-day experience for fans (particularly those traveling to away matches), with the “craic” just as important as the result. Although there are many fans who consume alcohol and do not engage in violence (as well as hooligans who do not drink), for others it does play a part in their violent practice, as highlighted by this Leeds United fan (male, aged 27):

Alcohol gives me a sense that I am unbeatable in a confrontation. Home or away, alcohol makes me tick and with my boys no-one is going to stop us from cracking some heads together.

Given a response such as this there were fans, such as this Chesterfield fan (male, aged 42), who felt that restrictive measures on the consumption of alcohol could go even further:

It's a cultural thing. People get sucked into the go to the pub, drink 5 pints before a match and then naturally want a confrontation. Idiots. Ban the sale of alcohol within a 5 mile radius of a match. Problem sorted.

In their 15-year ethnographic analysis of English football supporters, however, Pearson and Sale (2011) argue that alcohol restrictions are ineffective as they increase the likelihood of violent disorder because fans still seek establishments that sell alcohol away from the stadium, a point referred to by this Oldham Athletic fan (male, aged 29)³:

Young men are often under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs, and their behaviour is not very different to the behaviour of similar men under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs at other times (e.g., Friday and Saturday nights in city and town centres) . . . Not being allowed to watch a football game whilst enjoying a measure of alcohol has led to many fans travelling and consuming large amounts of alcohol both before and after the game. This binge drinking results in excessive drunkenness and that often leads to violence.

In their ethnographic analysis of the use of cocaine in football firms, Ayres and Treadwell (2012) state how drinking, drug use, and violence at football is an escape mechanism from everyday life as it provides an arena to reaffirm traditional individual and collective notions of masculine identity and status. Reflecting the "quest for excitement" adhered to earlier, they outline, "for these young men, football violence and involvement in a firm provided the setting for the hedonistic pursuit of intoxication and violence against more regular, routine and legitimate activities and pressures" (p. 92).

Indeed, some fans referred to the use of drugs as an important part of their match-day practice, such as this Millwall fan (male, aged 24): "What else are you going to do on a Saturday? I would rather sniff a load of powder, go down the boozer with my mates and kick fuck out of someone at footy." Given its presence on a match day, some fans such as this Liverpool fan (male, aged 44) suggest ways in which the police could do more to help eradicate its consumption:

Violence is augmented by cocaine. This drug, above alcohol and others, needs to be eradicated from the supporter base and would be helped through the use of sniffer dogs on match days not only near stadia, but also in transport hubs and by public houses near the ground.

As well as a physical presence within stadia, one significant change in modern football culture has been the role of satellite television. Given the cost of watching football through increased ticket prices, not surprisingly, there has been a displacement of fans with the public house and other drinking establishments becoming an alternative venue to watch live football via big screens. The location of these in town or city centers or close to the stadium has resulted in outbreaks of spontaneous violence. Of particular note was after the local derby between Newcastle United and Sunderland in April 2013 that resulted in the arrests of more than 100 people

(two thirds of those had not actually been to the game itself). Such was the level of violence involved, some of those arrested served a custodial sentence as a result of their behavior. The impact of incidents such as this have wider consequences as it increases the likelihood that future kick-off times will be changed with the intention of reducing the opportunity for the consumption of alcohol as the police seek ways in which they can maintain public order.

Comparisons with Violence Abroad

A particular feature in the responses was the comparisons by fans to the continuation of violence outside the United Kingdom. These include the recognition of a rise of right-wing fascism across parts of Europe to fatalities across Central and South America. Fans also referred to measures across Europe that include the use of netting behind both goals to prevent missiles from entering the field of the play. For some supporters analyzing fandom overseas, such as this Brighton and Hove Albion fan (male, aged 54), class issues remain a central practice of fandom:

Football still seems to be a rough working class game in most foreign countries, particularly the *ultras* in Europe. With less educated supporters, with a lot less to lose, employed in boring and repetitive jobs, the thrill of a fight, and feeling of power, is very appealing to a lot of young men, and its good fun to show some form of resistance to authority as well as defend what they think is theirs.

In fact, the image of a rough working class game abroad was a consistent feature, with this Yeovil Town fan (male, aged 54) adding,

For fans in England, football has become almost a middle-class experience given the exorbitant cost of tickets. This has not happened abroad where football is, I believe still extremely tribal that still mainly attracts a socially alienated working class fan base.

It has been expressed elsewhere as to the growth and role of the *ultras* (a sub-cultural group of mainly young fans that are highly organized and committed to a particular club) social and political movement across Europe (Guschwan, 2007; Testa & Armstrong, 2010) as well as the *barras bravas* in Argentina (Crolley & Duke, 2007; Giulianotti, 1999) and their role in social identity expression as well as political importance in terms of key votes for those club directors who have political links. Reflecting on the diverse police strategies in dealing with violence as well as the political significance of the *barras bravas*, an Argentinian-born Arsenal fan (male, aged 53) reflected,

Coming from Argentina, I am firmly aware of the poor policing and endemic corruption found in some countries. This encourages hooligans or violent supporters to continue with their practices as proper punishments are never given by the police who are often in the pockets of senior club officials who realise the importance of the votes that supporters can give them in their political campaigns.

Unlike their U.K. counterparts, however, both movements continue to have significant media and political attention as a result of their involvement in racism, xenophobia, intimidation, and violence with rival fans and the police. This is despite the introduction of measures to seek ways of decreasing violence, such as better regulation, surveillance, and policing at matches. In Italy, there has been a renewed focus in tackling the significance of the *ultras*, but rather than see a decrease in violence, there has actually been an upsurge (Hamil, Morrow, Idle, Rossi, & Faccendini, 2010). The death of policeman, Filippo Raciti, during a riot in 2007 resulted in the cancellation of all football-related events for a week, while a number of clubs were forced to restrict attendances after their ground failed to meet new safety and security regulations, including the use of CCTV. Although attendances are increasing in the major European leagues, the problems within Italian football is one reason why attendances at Serie A matches declined by 26% from 1997-1998 to 2007-2008 (Hamil et al., 2010).

In Germany, where top-flight football is renowned for its economic stability and average crowds of more than 42,000, the number of criminal proceedings released by the police for the 2011-2012 season stood at 8,143 compared with 5,818 for the 2010-2011 season (Grohmann, 2012). This is occurring despite the introduction of better surveillance and an increased police presence, with Merkel (2007) indicating a rise in nationalistic far-right fascist ideologies among German hooligans, particularly at international matches.

The Role of the Police and Courts

One significant feature of fan culture from the 1990s concerns the emphasis on crowd management and safety. Since 1992, details of football disorder in England and Wales is published annually and is a central feature of government and media analysis (this began with National Criminal Intelligence Service, but at the beginning of the 21st century it became the responsibility of the Home Office). What these reports have indicated since is a significant decrease in violent disorder, even though events, such as the Newcastle United and Sunderland match raised earlier, led to the number of arrests for violent disorder increasing from 273 in 2011-2012 to 554 in 2012-2013. For example, the 2013 Home Office report outlined that of a total attendance figure of 39 million (if international, European, and domestic cup competitions are taken into account), there is one arrest in every 14,000 spectators.⁴ The report also highlighted how the number of banning orders had also decreased from 2,750 in November 2012 to 2,451 in September 2013 (including 471 new banning orders being imposed during the reporting period).⁵

Although this evidence points toward the rehabilitation of football, it masks the problems of enforcing banning orders for the police (particularly smaller police forces or at lower league clubs where policing costs are too prohibitive). It has also led to concerns about the selective recording of offenses that these official statistics are based on, with questions raised as to the overall consistency in how, if at all, offenses are recorded with some offenses ignored, other fans given verbal warnings, and some just ejected from the stadium (Frosdick & Marsh, 2005; Garland & Rowe, 2000; Pearson, 2012). For these

authors, only a proportion of the actual offenses taking place result in an official statistic, especially when considering the claim in the Home Office report that 58% of Premier League and Football League matches during the 2012-2013 season had no police presence (police will be present in the control room, but officers are generally out of sight of fans). Instead, responsibility for maintaining crowd management and behavior is given to club stewards and private security personnel employed by the club who, according to Garland and Rowe (2000), are more likely to remove, rather than arrest, offenders. Supporting concerns about the consistent recording of offenses, a Bristol Rovers fan (male, aged 46) stated, "If there are no/fewer police in grounds then fewer arrests/ejections will be made so the Home Office believes the problem has decreased."

In her analysis of policing in Scotland, O'Neill (2004) outlines how the introduction of stewards had changed the role of the police to one enforcing the law, a process she states had become "inherently confrontational and reactive" (p. 99). However, in their analysis of the role of the police with fans at Cardiff City, Stott, Hoggett, and Pearson (2012) refer to a positive change of police strategy that has moved from one of an overt display of "deterrence" to "dialogue." Not surprisingly, this has reduced the number of police deployed at home matches and subsequently the costs of this public order management for clubs. It has also led to better liaison between forces to discuss strategies and tactics at home and away matches. Recognizing this change in policing, a Wycombe Wanderers fan (male, aged 27) illustrated, "Police in Britain are more understandable and instead of inflaming a situation they try to calm it. Policies such as clubs taking their own regional police on away games is an example of this."

This was one of 56% of fans who stated that the decreasing culture of violence was a result of better policing strategies. Among the responses by the 44% of fans who felt the police were not responsible, a number of reasons were given, such as the political motivations of the police in seeking to boost their authority and the recognition that there is, at times, no visible police presence at some (mainly lower league) matches. As one Chesterfield fan (male, aged 30) stated, "How can the police take credit for something that they have limited involvement with? It's the clubs and the fans that are leading the way. The police still treat supporters as though they are violent hooligans." Indeed, these thoughts were shared among other fans, such as this Bradford City fan (male, aged 28):

The police see football fans as criminals. The football fans feel trapped and treated like animals even in this so-called gentrified culture. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Until you sort out the police, the supporters will riot. Our basic human rights are removed in many games, particularly local derbies.

With regard to the 11% of fans who said violence is not declining, a consistent pattern was the sense that violence will always be part of the culture of football. Reflecting a number of responses, a West Ham United fan (male, aged 27) outlined,

Violence at football will never leave. Better policing in England and banning orders has prevented disorder but the issue is still there. As older hooligans "retire" a new breed is born. It's a British sub culture. And Britain are the kings of youth sub culture.

Indeed, examples still remain, such as the violence between Millwall fans in an FA Cup semi-final at Wembley in April 2013 that leads to some fans calling for more direct and draconian legislation that is aimed at individual clubs, such as this Walsall fan (male, aged 28):

It will never be eradicated but lifetime bans and tougher penalties on clubs must be put in place. Punish the clubs and they'll work a lot harder at rooting bad fans out, as if the club suffers, other fans will become part of sorting the problems out.

The impact of legislation and penalties for disorder have been supported by the fall in the number of arrests and these are unlikely to be reduced in the short term given the close attention the authorities pay to the official figures released by the Home Office. At an individual level, banning orders are being imposed to deter those capable of causing disorder, but some fans claim that they are too severe as some fans are banned for minor crimes such as drunkenness or swearing. As a Portsmouth fan (male, aged 47) argued,

Football fans in the UK also face banning orders the most sinister of which is the civil banning order where police forces can and have apply to the courts for an individual to be banned and surrender their passport during international games regardless as to if they have NEVER been convicted of a criminal offence football related or not. Any other group in the country this would be seen as a breach of human rights but football fans are fair game.

These views were not universal, however, with some fans such as this Birmingham City fan (male, aged 20) praising the response by the police to decades of violence and calling for more severe penalties: "The penalties for violence are not tough enough and are almost a joke to some of the fans who even wear such menial punishments proudly as symbols of strength and masculinity." Findings such as this support those of Stead and Rookwood (2007), who in their analysis of banning orders, found that they were largely responsible for the declining levels of hooliganism through their ability to break up firms.

Conclusion

As *the* global sport, football remains an intensely passionate game and continues to provide a strong sense of territorial identity for hundreds of millions of supporters. Reflecting on the extent of violence in British football through the views of 1,500 fans from across the United Kingdom, this article has indicated how the changes made since the mid-1980s (such as an emphasis on crowd management and security through CCTV and banning orders as well as all-seater stadia with higher ticket prices that has resulted in a changing demographic of those watching matches in stadia) have led to a majority of fans experiencing a sanitized and gentrified culture of contemporary U.K. football fandom. The views expressed by the majority of fans, therefore, support the

conclusions of official statistics released by the Home Office as well as previous surveys (see Williams, 2002) that reflect on a more civilized supporter base through the decline of violence in or close to the stadium. One particular element of this, for Garland and Rowe (2000) and Stott and Pearson (2007), is the important role of non-violent fans in the self-regulation of violent disorder at football matches.

A central feature of most of the research on football hooliganism is the shared cultural practice of supporters and how collective identity is a significant feature in the practice of violence, irrespective of location. For some fans, the “quest for excitement” (Elias & Dunning, 1986) remains an important feature of their practice through the pleasurable excitement of a violent confrontation and the social capital (particularly around the demonstration of hyper-masculinity) that can be accrued if successful in enhancing the group and individual reputation. Of particular concern on aspiring young male adolescents is the glorification of violence that can be found among hooligan websites, fan message boards, personal memoirs written by hooligans as well as documentaries and films—each of which is increasingly becoming a popular feature of contemporary consumption.

Although male adolescents continue to engage in violence, the official statistics and findings presented in this article indicate how this practice no longer exists at the levels it once did. Masculinity has always played a key part throughout the history of football, but the majority of supporters do not demonstrate their masculinity through aggression or violence. This is of particular significance when recognizing the continued importance of alcohol in British football culture. Although this has been blamed on the spontaneous outbreaks of violence from fans who are not always attending matches, the majority of fans who consume alcohol do not seek a violent confrontation.

Organized and spontaneous outbreaks of violence continue to present problems for the police, but a number of fans recognize the improvement in police intelligence, surveillance, and security and how this has pushed violence to locations away from the stadium. A reason for this, according to Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002), is how legislation and more severe punishments has changed the traditional contestation of a particular public space (such as defending some form of territory such as the ground or the “home” public house), with confrontations increasingly pre-arranged away from the stadium to avoid detection by the police. However, reduced violence is not solely down to the role of the police and other authorities although banning orders and better police liaison with supporters has also helped improve the match-day experience.

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Notes

1. The term *hooliganism* is thought to be a corruption of Houlihan; this being the name of an Irishman, who migrated to south-east London in the late 19th century and enforced a reign of terror on the local pubs, many of which subsequently employed him as a bouncer. The word *hooligan* was used widely in England, though not specifically about football fans until the 1960s when it became associated with the unruly behavior habitually witnessed at football matches. Reflecting on the lack of a clear definition of “hooligan,” Rookwood and Pearson (2012) define it as an individual who attended matches with the intention of becoming involved in violence with rival supporters (whether or not s/he achieved that aim) or a fan who became involved in physical violence (but not other disorder or criminal activity) even if this was not his/her initial aim. (p. 151)
2. See Giulianotti (1999) for an expanded account of these three theoretical frameworks.
3. Alcohol bans inside stadia have also been a prominent feature of Brazilian football since 2003 to try and prevent violent disorder taking place between rival fans.
4. A regular statistic used in the annual Home Office reports is that the number of arrests equates to less than 0.01% of the total number of fans attending matches.
5. Banning orders are time limited and, because of this, are expiring all the time.

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