Soccer Fan Violence: A Holistic Approach

A Reply to Braun and Vliegenthart

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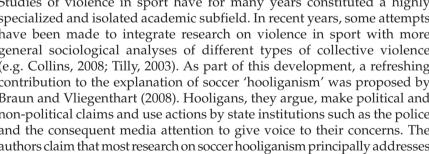
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abstract: Building on Braun and Vliegenthart's recent study of soccer hooliganism, this article develops an explanatory model of soccer fan violence and collective violence more generally. The fabric of soccer fan violence becomes a richer tapestry if the diversity of the phenomenon is recognized and the focus is moved towards a more holistic approach to explaining crowd behaviour and collective conflict. The proposed approach incorporates macro-level influences and mediating and moderating factors as they affect fan violence. The model recognizes the critical importance of the collective mind and dispositions which can be investigated and understood through the lens of social identification and habitus. The model proposed in the article provides a solid foundation for testing its merits.

keywords: collective violence ✦ habitus ✦ hooliganism ✦ mediating and moderating influences ✦ social identification

Introduction

Studies of violence in sport have for many years constituted a highly specialized and isolated academic subfield. In recent years, some attempts have been made to integrate research on violence in sport with more general sociological analyses of different types of collective violence (e.g. Collins, 2008; Tilly, 2003). As part of this development, a refreshing contribution to the explanation of soccer 'hooliganism' was proposed by Braun and Vliegenthart (2008). Hooligans, they argue, make political and non-political claims and use actions by state institutions such as the police and the consequent media attention to give voice to their concerns. The authors claim that most research on soccer hooliganism principally addresses

the general question as to why hooliganism exists at all, rather than investigating the precise conditions in which it is more or less likely to occur, as well as the evolution of fan violence over time (Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008: 797). They stress that static explanations which only try to grasp the general existence of social phenomena overlook contextual processes that facilitate or hinder the incidence of violent acts (Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008: 813).

Braun and Vliegenthart (2008) bring into sharp relief two issues which are germane to an understanding of the causal mechanisms underpinning hooliganism. Following Tilly (2003), they conceptualize hooliganism as a sub form of *contentious* behaviour which operates at the level of the *collective*. The identifying markers of this behaviour are collective claims associated with experienced discontents which take place in interaction with political contexts, are shaped by the media realm and characterized by strong collective identities and social learning (Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008: 800). Using these markers as a template, Braun and Vliegenthart distil from the relevant literature four independent variables which they hypothesize explain temporal and spatial fluctuations in violent incidents at soccer matches. These are repression (indicated by the ratio of the number of arrests to the number of violent incidents reported at matches), media coverage (indicated by the visibility of hooliganism in terms of the length and positioning of articles in mainstream Dutch newspapers), grievances (using monthly changes in unemployment rates as a proxy) and the level of aggressive play at matches (indicated by the number of yellow and red cards distributed at matches). Time series data of the number of registered violent incidents of spectator violence in Dutch professional soccer for the period August 2001 to June 2005 are regressed against the four independent variables. The authors report that three of the independent variables are significant explanatory factors of violent incidents at soccer matches. These are rising unemployment, media coverage and aggressive play on the pitch. Furthermore, they found that the presence of risk matches (emotionally charged matches, e.g. between historical rivals) had a systematic effect on hooliganism (Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008: 811).

We agree that what has been found by Braun and Vliegenthart (2008) illuminates factors which affect temporal and spatial fluctuations in spectator violence at soccer matches. As such, what they have identified are moderating variables implicated in the phenomena of fan violence. However, we strongly believe that their findings do not evidence the deeper causes of crowd violence in sport and collective violence more generally. We believe that the causes of collective violence are more informed through a model which incorporates macro-level influences, mediating and also moderating factors as they affect that phenomenon.

Like Braun and Vliegenthart, we acknowledge that understanding the dynamics of hooliganism moves beyond singular phenomenological approaches to the issue. A quantitative approach to understanding hooliganism builds on the insights of other scholars who have studied the dynamics of mobilization and collective violence in other contexts, including violent protests, riots and collective action more generally (Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008: 797–8). Although the work by Braun and Vliegenthart acted as the catalyst for this article, our objective is to propose an alternative model that goes beyond merely offering a response to a single piece of research. We are aware that our contribution differs from that of Braun and Vliegenthart in terms of its epistemology and methodology. However, we believe that our approach brings together distal and proximate causes of soccer fan violence. As such, we see our model as complementary to Braun and Vliegenthart in that it moves the debate on soccer fan violence forwards.

Our approach incorporates broader economic, political, social and cultural conditions; the mediating effects of fan cultures and identities as well as factors including those identified by Braun and Vliegenthart which we believe moderate the expression of soccer fan violence. Our contribution is relevant to a wider sociological audience in that it offers a perspective on collective violence which views structural conditions and human agency as jointly and reciprocally shaping social action (Sewell, 1992), drawing on, inter alia, the concepts of habitus and social identification. Our aim is to establish common linkages between sport violence research and the sociology of collective violence and to contribute to ongoing efforts to identify and understand the meanings and mechanisms behind different forms of collective violence (e.g. Collins, 2008; Senechal de la Roche, 2001; Tilly, 2003; Turpin and Kurz, 1997).

To understand this approach, the first task is to clearly conceptualize what is meant by soccer fan violence. The second is to identify and discuss what we regard as mediating and moderating influences affecting the expression of fan violence. This enables a better understanding of the particular social and situational contexts within which incidents of soccer fan violence take place, as well as of the factors that may escalate or de-escalate violent behaviour at soccer matches. It will also contribute to awareness of the commonalities and differences between crowd violence in sport and other forms of collective violence. Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

We acknowledge that our attempt to develop an alternative sociological approach to soccer violence may be perceived as glossing over the very intense tribalism and intra-academic rivalries that characterize research on soccer hooliganism, particularly in Britain (e.g. Dunning, 1994; Giulianotti,
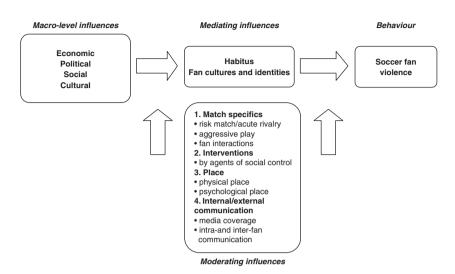
Figure 1 *A Conceptual Model of Soccer Fan Violence*

1999). Bairner (2006: 595) has summed up the deep disciplinary and theoretical divisions as follows:

> Indeed, without wishing to trivialize some of these academic rivalries, one can see similarities between their behaviour and that of the people whom they study. . . . They are highly motivated to fight for a particular cause – in this instance not a football club or a specific neighbourhood, but rather a theoretical perspective. All of these factors have conspired to produce a struggle for supremacy – a battle to be 'top lads' in the academic study of a social phenomenon in which the status of being a 'top lad' is highly sought after.

However, Bairner (2006: 583) also points out that 'there may well be more common ground in this debate than some of the main adversaries would care to admit'. Although the different theoretical positions cannot be assembled as a harmonious model, most sociological analyses of soccer fan violence are not necessarily mutually exclusive and as Bairner has demonstrated, there are some interesting areas of common ground.

Conceptualizing Soccer Fan Violence

Braun and Vliegenthart (2008: 800) usefully define 'hooliganism' as a form of contentious behaviour. However, they base their definition largely on arguments relating to what we would argue is one specific sub-form of fan violence: soccer hooliganism. For example, they argue that 'In most cases, more or less organized groups try to initiate fights with rival groups', that

'hooligans want to humiliate the competing gangs that support other club teams', and that hooligans deliberately seek to obtain media attention for their actions. Their definition appears to equate fan violence to organized hooliganism and thus clouds the issues around the explanation of fan violence more generally. The problems consequent upon this definitional confusion are compounded by the fact that data used as an indicator of soccer fan violence were obtained from annual reports published by the Dutch National Football Intelligence Unit (CIV). These annual reports contain a list of registered 'incidents', which are subjectively and broadly defined as:

> . . . an event requiring additional police deployment whereby the behaviour of a group of supporters aims at the following: (a) seeking a confrontation or; (b) causing damage or; (c) committing public violence or; (d) making discriminatory remarks or; (e) violent behaviour by supporters directed at the police and club security personnel. (CIV, 2003: 11)

This broad definition frustrates analysis of the scale, intensity and sophistication of fan violence. The incidents registered include both physical and verbal offences, and fail to distinguish between qualitatively distinctive types of violence, such as fighting, vandalism, missile throwing and pitch invasion. Moreover, there is no way of linking individuals with incidents and building a profile in terms of their motivations, (socioeconomic) backgrounds and whether or not they are allied to any organized hooligan group.

Research shows that spectator violence at sporting events takes many forms, and that different types of violence may require (partially) different explanations (Smith, 1983; Wann et al., 2001; Young, 2000). Stott and Reicher (1998: 354–5), for example, have suggested that as crowd 'conflict becomes more widespread and involves larger numbers of people, the importance of violent predispositions as an explanation of violent conduct becomes increasingly marginal'. Soccer fan violence can be conceptualized as operating on two different continua. This first refers to the level of intensity of the violence, which ranges from low-level conflicts, such as interpersonal verbal assaults, to high-level violence, for example mass fighting which involves large sections of the soccer crowd. The second refers to the degree of organization and planning involved. It is well established that spontaneous and more socially organized forms of fan violence ought to be distinguished for analytical purposes (Duke and Crolley, 1996; Roversi, 1991; Spaaij, 2006). This distinction between spontaneous fan violence and more organized or premeditated forms of violence opens up interesting questions regarding the historical development of soccer fan violence. Can similarities and differences be identified among forms of spectator violence over time? Has the frequency and intensity of fan violence varied over time and are any spatial variations evident? If so, what factors help to explain these variations?

5

Two research findings are of particular import in this regard. First, the distinction between spontaneous violence and more socially organized or premeditated forms of soccer fan violence is observable in the relative shift from a pattern in which attacks on match officials and opposing players predominated over attacks on rival fans, to a pattern in which inter-fan fighting and confrontations between fans and the police became the predominant form of spectator violence (Dunning, 1994: 136). This relative shift has taken place in several European countries, but at different time points (Spaaij, 2006: 11). Although a similar (though largely unrelated) process has been observed in countries such as Argentina (Duke and Crolley, 1996) and Brazil (Pimenta, 2000), it is unlikely that it is applicable on a global scale. For example, fan violence in North American soccer is considerably less common, and certainly less organized, than in Europe, although there is a long tradition of crowd violence in other North American sports, such as ice hockey, baseball and football (Smith, 1983; Young, 2002). This, in turn, raises important questions regarding cross-cultural comparisons of sports crowd violence (Dunning, 1999).

Second, in several countries there has been a relative shift in the degree of organization and planning involved in inter-fan fighting at soccer matches. Compared to the inter-fan rivalries that developed from the 1960s onwards, first in England and later in other European countries, the spectator violence that took place at soccer matches in the late 19th and early 20th century was relatively unorganized, spontaneous and ad hoc (Spaaij, 2006). Soccer hooliganism in its contemporary sense refers to the social genesis of a distinctive fan subculture among youth and their engagement in regular and collective violence, primarily targeted at rival peers (Giulianotti, 1999: 49; see also Ek, 1996). Thus we define hooliganism as competitive violence among socially organized groups of soccer fans which is principally directed against opposing fans. As such, soccer hooliganism should be viewed as one particular sub-form of fan violence.

Over time, due to both the repression of violence in and around soccer grounds and the escalation of some inter-group rivalries, hooliganism has gradually transformed into an increasingly organized and premeditated phenomenon that is only loosely connected to the soccer match itself. As Collins (2008: 315–16) puts it:

> The . . . violence of English and European football hooligans is a special case, the most sophisticated form of sports violence. . . . the violence does not depend upon the events of the game in any way; it can happen the day before the game, or any time around the period when fans are assembled; the game itself serves only to get them mobilized and bring them together. Football hooligans consciously seek the emotional thrills of a fight, with all the legitimating overtones and symbolic resonance that a sports contest provides; but they emancipate themselves from the fate of the team.

6

A theoretical implication of this perspective is that aggressive play on the pitch, which is identified by Braun and Vliegenthart (2008: 814) as having 'a considerable impact' on the level of fan violence, may well be less relevant, if not irrelevant, as an explanatory factor for more organized, premeditated forms of fan violence that take place principally at some distance from soccer grounds. On the other hand, spontaneous fan violence that occurs during a soccer match often appears to be a more direct result of events on the pitch. Collins (2008: 308–9) correctly argues that fans are subject to the same rhythms of dramatic tension as players, and that it is chiefly to experience these tensions and to express their emotions collectively that fans are attracted to attending a game in person (see also Elias and Dunning, 1986). It is therefore unsurprising that fans often behave aggressively at roughly the same moments that players get into fights (Smith, 1978).

Within this context, sports crowd disorder has been classified as either 'issue-oriented' or 'issueless' (Smith, 1983) and more recently, as 'issue-relevant' or 'issue-irrelevant' (Wann et al., 2001). Issue-relevant factors assume that the origins of fan violence lie outside the stadium; it is a variety of societal strains that are believed to be the cause of this violence. The causes of issue-irrelevant fan violence, in contrast, are to be found inside the stadium or venue. From this perspective, it is the immediate social environment in which the event occurs that holds the key to understanding the roots of fan violence (Eitzen, 1979). Issue-irrelevant factors refer to the psychological phenomena present in large sport crowds, such as anonymity, lack of fear of retaliation and diffusion of responsibility (Wann et al., 2001: 126–8). Building on Collins's theory we should add to these factors, the emotional energy and feelings of collective effervescence and group solidarity that develop in sports crowds.

In sum, soccer fan violence is not a unidimensional phenomenon. This has important theoretical implications. It is to these implications that we now turn.

Explaining Soccer Violence: Mediating and Moderating Influences

Braun and Vliegenthart (2008: 813) make the important point that static explanations that only try to grasp the general existence of soccer fan violence overlook contextual processes that actually facilitate or hamper the rise of acts of violence. They identify macro-level indicators in an attempt to explain temporal and spatial fluctuations in violent behaviour caused by soccer fans. However, in doing so, they have narrowed the analytical frame of reference. One is so removed from the individuals

involved, their circumstances and the situational dynamics which affect their behaviour that it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from what has been proposed. In our view the link between the individual perpetrator (or group of perpetrators) and the independent variables specified is at best oblique. The affiliations of individuals, their socioeconomic status, their reason for being at a game and their motivations for violent conduct remain unknown. As Figure 1 shows, soccer fan violence is best explained in terms of a framework which incorporates mediating and moderating influences. Mediating influences explain how cause translates into effect, while moderating influences are those factors which affect the intensity or direction of effects.

Our thesis is that the key driver of collective violence, of which soccer crowd violence is an example, is the social identification that individuals form with a collective (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Social identification is constituted in a dialectical interplay between internal and external identification (Jenkins, 2000). Identification with a collective is the social psychological mechanism which renders individuals amenable to its transformative capabilities; psychologically, the shift from personal identity to social identity is what makes group behaviour possible (Turner, 1982). Following Tilly (2003), we argue that the collective has potency only when there is a basis for contention, an object in the widest sense. This process of external identification involves the categorization of others in contrast to self- and group identification. Categorization entails the invocation of similarity within categories as the basis for differentiation between them (Jenkins, 2000: 22). The rivalries between soccer fan groups, which may also be a repository for long-standing divisions along class, religious, political or ethnic lines, are exemplars of objects of contention. When individuals identify strongly with a collective they learn a repertoire (Tilly, 2003) of behaviours which are directed at the object of their contention. The repertoire operates such that the vilification of that object does not cause an individual cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) when compared with acceptable standards of behaviour. This issue is discussed below in relation to fan habitus and collective fan identities.

Mediating Influences

The scale and intensity of soccer fan violence varies considerably across situations and localities. Fan habitus and the attendant processes of collective identity formation among fans strongly influence patterns of behaviour and can be viewed as mediating influences between macro-level sources and actual behaviour. Bourdieu's (1984) work on habitus is instructive here because it maintains a focus on the structural-processual positionings of social groups, which tend to be underestimated in psychological studies of soccer fan violence.[1] Habitus is a system of durable and

transposable collective dispositions which ensure the active presence of past experiences, an embodied history is internalized as a 'second nature' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). Painter (2000: 242) describes habitus as:

> . . . the mediating link between objective social structures and individual action and refers to the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour, which, while not wholly determining action . . . do ensure that individuals are more disposed to act in some ways than others.

The habitus informs fan behaviour in two ways. On the one hand, it tends to generate all the 'reasonable' behaviours which are possible within the limits of objective regularities, 'and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristic of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate'. On the other hand, the habitus 'tends to exclude all "extravagances" ("not for the likes of us"), that is, all the behaviours that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions' (Bourdieu, 1990: 55–6). The habitus has a collective aspect. Although each individual is different in that they have had personal experiences that have fashioned their attitudes and values, the habitus is collective in the sense that common situations in which people find themselves dispose them to certain shared actions (Webb et al., 2002: 115).

Habitus and fan identities can be viewed as explanatory factors in that some soccer clubs experience significantly more, and more intense, fan violence than others (Spaaij, 2006). In their study of Watford Football Club (FC) supporters, Williams et al. (1988: 41) found that 'hooligan behaviour does not rest easily within the general framework of club activities or alongside the reputation established locally and outside Watford by the "friendly" club'. They concluded that the generally affluent and cosmopolitan audience attracted by the club is the main reason for the absence of hooliganism at Watford: 'The kind of audience attracted by Watford is crucial in understanding the club's non-hooligan traditions. These traditions are important in limiting the hooliganism of local fans, and in producing a relatively sanguine and non-aggressive approach on the part of visitors to Watford' (Williams et al., 1988: 41).

Because 'hooligan behaviour' is not sanctioned at clubs like Watford, young male fans who are attracted to hooliganism (that is, relatively organized forms of fan violence) are likely to either follow one of the more notorious football clubs or eschew their hooligan proclivities. Giulianotti (1995: 196) has referred to these effects in his analysis of Scottish soccer fan culture:

> Those Scottish soccer casuals travelling with the national side tend to eschew the hooligan habitus for the duration of the tournament. . . . Alternatively, there are hooligan formations such as the [Hibernian] casuals which are alienated by

9

the Scottish support's persona. A handful have marked out their fundamental antipathy towards the reputation of Scottish fans by following English supporters to fixtures abroad, in the hope of either witnessing or getting caught up in football-related violence.

It should be noted here that habitus is durable but not immutable or eternal (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). Bourdieu regarded habitus as an open concept since actors' dispositions are constantly subjected to a range of different experiences. The dispositions that comprise habitus may be affected by new experiences in terms of being either reinforced or modified. In other words, while each habitus is set by historical and socially situated conditions, it is permeable and can allow new forms and actions to arise (on this issue, see Sewell, 1992: 16). Thus, although Bourdieu anticipated that most experiences will serve to reinforce actors' habitus (as people are more likely to encounter situations and interpret them according to their pre-existing dispositions rather than to modify their feelings), he did accept that changes may occur (Bourdieu, 2002: 29).

The strength of the concepts of habitus and identification is that they illuminate the ways in which fan behaviour intersects with issues of age, class, gender and ethnicity, thereby linking soccer fan violence to its wider social and cultural contexts. In other words, it reveals the relationship between fan communities and their social sources. Giulianotti and Robertson (2006), for example, demonstrated not only that Scottish soccer culture (and European soccer more generally) is traditionally masculine and working class, but also how this culture is sustained, amended and transformed through cultural reproduction processes and intra- and inter-cultural identity processes. They argue that:

> . . . among some sections of a club's support, we may find a 'deep particularism' or 'search for fundamentals', as manifested, for example, through intense rivalry with particular opponents or through linking the club's historical meaning relative to broader political, ethnic and religious identities. (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006: 175)

This finding resonates with Robson's (2000) detailed account of fan behaviour at Millwall FC. Robson focuses particularly on the kinds of values which are produced out of a durable core of practices, sensibilities and orientations in working-class communities. He also highlights the historical continuities in patterns of masculine South London working-class identities and practices which are revealed in male spectator codes and rituals at Millwall. Robson contends that the performative masculinity of Millwall fans is a particular and historically grounded form of social awareness built around concerns for masculinist authenticity and the ridicule of outsiders for their lack of toughness and/or metropolitan

Londonness. Robson argues that at soccer matches these expressive forms are also mobilized in opposition to the (practices of) new family and consumption-oriented audiences.

Also focusing on the habitus of soccer fans, Spaaij (2006) shows how fan violence in Spanish soccer is inextricably intertwined with political nationalisms. Tension and conflict between fans of opposing Spanish soccer clubs is shaped not only by particular, historically evolved sporting rivalries, but also by the expression of deep-seated political identities. In the case of the Barcelona-based clubs, FC Barcelona and Espanyol, much of the fighting that has taken place between opposing fans needs to be understood in the context of a 'deep particularism' relating to broader political and cultural identities in Catalonia.

This argument reflects Dunning's (1999: 158) suggestion that soccer hooliganism may be 'fuelled and contoured' by, among other factors, the major fault lines of particular societies: in England, that means social class and regional inequalities; in Scotland and Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism; in Spain, linguistic and political nationalisms; in Italy, city particularism and perhaps the division between North and South; and in Germany, the relations between East and West and political groups of the left and right. A shared characteristic of all societal fault lines is that they involve variants of 'established-outsider figurations' (Elias and Scotson, 1965) in which intense in-group bonds and correspondingly intense antagonisms towards the out-group are liable to develop.

The concept of societal fault lines contributes an important new standpoint from which to view soccer fan violence. It has been revisited by Spaaij (2006, 2007) to incorporate more localized social cleavages and other factors that structure inter-fan rivalries (see also Armstrong and Giulianotti, 2001); in other words, the potential for crowd violence is not shaped exclusively by national fault lines. Spaaij proposes an approach that is more sensitive to regional and local variations which are produced by temporally and spatially variable structural sources, such as: (changes in) the relative prosperity of particular cities and regions; their demography and occupational structures; and their particular soccer traditions and rivalries (see also Dunning, 1999: 154). This approach highlights the important argument made by Robson (2000: 7) that soccer clubs in Britain as vital cultural institutions in working-class life, 'offer contexts for the generation of highly specific, ritualizing communities of interpretation and expression'.

The key point here is that a large proportion of soccer fan violence, especially the more organized forms typical of soccer hooliganism, does not result simply from situational or 'issue-irrelevant' factors but, like other forms of collective violence (e.g. Tilly, 2003), is ultimately embedded in particular economic, political, social and cultural contexts. These conditions

11

are crucial to grasping the contextual processes that facilitate or inhibit fan violence as well as to understanding cross-local and cross-national variations in the scale and intensity of soccer fan violence.

Moderating Influences

Although we have identified four potential moderating influences on the expression of soccer fan violence (see Figure 1) we focus here on two that feature prominently in recent studies: fan interactions and interventions by agents of social control.

The analysis of soccer violence increasingly emphasizes the interactive dynamics of fan behaviour (Armstrong, 1998; King, 1995; Stott and Pearson, 2007; Stott and Reicher, 1998). The most recent attempt to theorize sports crowd violence in terms of its micro-sociological dynamics addresses the situational circumstances which may give rise to violence. Randall Collins (2008) stresses that persons who engage in violent behaviour do so only a small part of the time, and that we therefore need to focus on the situational conditions in which violent acts may occur. Instead of focusing on environmental or background preconditions that are believed to give rise to violent acts, Collins (2008: 3–4; emphasis added) argues for 'direct observation of violent interaction to capture the process of violence *as it actually is performed*'. He contends that it may be more useful 'to reverse the gestalt completely and concentrate on the foreground to the exclusion of all else' (Collins, 2008: 21).

According to Collins, violence is an array of processes that all emerge from a common situational feature: it is a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear that rises up whenever people come into antagonistic confrontation. He argues that violent situations are shaped by an emotional field of tension and fear; any successful violence must overcome this tension and fear. In the case of soccer hooliganism, Collins (2008: 322) stresses that violence 'is at the peak of collective attention, but it is largely a symbol of the wider process of antinomian collective effervescence and the distinctive solidarity of a group that has mastered the technique of deliberately creating moral holidays'. For Collins (2008: 316), hooligan violence 'is a case where deprivation does not explain violence, but the positive attractions of violence do; and this in turn depends on situational conditions that can be manipulated by those who have accumulated the requisite techniques'.

There is ample evidence to support the claim that pleasurable excitement and emotional arousal are at the heart of the hooligan experience (Bairner, 2006; Giulianotti, 1999; Spaaij, 2008). It has also been found that individuals apt to involve themselves in crowd violence exhibit strong sensation-seeking tendencies (Dunning et al., 1988; Kerr, 2005). Apter (1992) has noted that the

opportunities for people to take risks have been shrinking in recent decades. This has led to a search for excitement in activities that carry a degree of personal risk, yet within a 'protective frame' within which they judge themselves to be safe. From this perspective, seemingly 'mindless' acts of fan violence 'are anything but mindless and in some instances may be initiated solely by a need for excitement' (Wann et al., 2001: 111).

Hooligans' search for excitement and thrills exists side-by-side with values of security and routinization. Hooliganism involves what Elias and Dunning (1986) have called a quest for excitement in unexciting societies. Displays of daring and the search for excitement, as opposed to the routine, are acceptable and desirable in society at large, but only when confined to circumstances such as sport, recreation and holidays. In contemporary (western) societies, opportunities for risk taking have declined. Sporting events provide individuals with a need for excitement that is often lacking in other spheres of life. For most sports spectators the excitement and emotional arousal of a sports match suffice. Hooligans, however, cherish the peak experience associated with symbolic and physical violence within the soccer context. Fighting counteracts boredom and the experience brings high emotional arousal as well as a collective effervescence (Spaaij, 2008: 375–6).

An aspect of the situational dynamics of soccer fan violence which merits particular attention is the social interaction between spectators and agents of social control. Ward (2002: 457) makes the important point that the 'characteristics of fans may be less important to fan violence than the behavior of those groups responsible for controlling crowds'. Police intervention is often a significant factor in the escalation or de-escalation of fan violence (Adang, 1998; Galvani and Palma, 2005; Stott and Reicher, 1998). There are significant synergies with other social scientific analyses of collective violence in this regard. Several scholars highlight the significance of the social interaction between crowd members and the police to explain crowd behaviour and violence in settings ranging from social movement protests to mass riots (Della Porta et al., 2006; Waddington and King, 2005). Reicher (1996), for instance, has noted how classical theories of collective violence have systematically overlooked the fact that many confrontations are generated by the intervention of official forces.

Stott and Pearson (2007: 200) argue that violence involving English soccer supporters abroad is usually not caused by known troublemakers but by failures in policing strategies and crowd management. In response to indiscriminate hostility towards fans by the police, or police inactivity in the face of violent attacks by local youths on English soccer fans, the social identity of the crowd is transformed, uniting previously disparate groups of ordinary fans and hooligans through a sense of common victimhood. Ordinary fans may see violence as something to avoid. However,

13

when affronted by police they may legitimize it as a form of 'retaliation' and 'self-defence'. Within this context, 'hooligans are no longer a differential social category, but representative of the group in general' (Stott and Pearson, 2007: 110).

Stott and Pearson also found that a non-confrontational, 'friendly but firm' style of policing results in a considerable reduction in the scale and intensity of soccer fan violence. This policing strategy relies in the first instance on police officers in normal uniform, working in pairs or small groups to patrol crowds and interact with fans in an approachable and friendly way. At the same time, they intervene rapidly to avoid conflict escalation. 'These interventions are low-impact and focused specifically on fans transgressing behavioural limits, leaving ordinary fans free to enjoy themselves' (Stott and Pearson, 2007: 152). Because these interventions are not indiscriminate and are conducted in a more constructive manner, this policing style is generally experienced by fans as positive and legitimate, encouraging informal social control among fans. In other words, where the police adopt a more targeted, proactive and less confrontational approach, the risk that ordinary soccer fans pose is clearly reduced.

Discussion

The study by Braun and Vliegenthart (2008) is commendable because it seeks to avoid particularistic explanations of soccer fan violence. It concerns itself instead with 'more general explanations that have been tested and for which some support has been found'. In this regard their work complements that of Eric Dunning (1999: 154), who has expressed his concern that 'an aggregate of merely descriptive studies of hooliganism in particular countries will not constitute much of an increment to knowledge unless such studies are related explicitly to a theory'. However, whereas Dunning argues for the development of an internationally adequate theory of soccer fan violence 'by means of systematic, theory-guided, cross-national empirical research', the former authors speculate that their findings are also valid in other time periods and countries.

While the former aspiration may be unrealistic given the diverging realities and contexts of sport-related violence in different societies, the problem with the latter claim is that despite its solid analytical and methodological framework, it runs the risk of oversimplifying the phenomenon of soccer fan violence in three ways. First, it conglomerates different forms of fan violence, which as we have argued need to be differentiated for analytical purposes. There is the evident danger that the data are so removed from the individual perpetrators, their circumstances and the situational conditions of violent acts that it is difficult to draw any

meaningful conclusions from what has been proposed. Second, it fails to explicitly acknowledge the mediating and moderating influences that facilitate or inhibit soccer fan violence. Some of these influences are, as we have shown, well established in contemporary research on collective violence. Third, the approach appears to underestimate the ways in which soccer fan violence is embedded in, and stems from, particular social and cultural conditions which produce considerable spatial variations in the scale and intensity of violence.

We wholeheartedly agree with the authors that research should seek to overcome the limitations of static approaches by scrutinizing how various factors influence the temporal and spatial fluctuations of soccer fan violence. However, we also believe that a more holistic approach is needed to fully understand critical causal factors which influence soccer fan violence (and collective violence more generally). The interpersonal experience of violence so deftly articulated by Randall Collins must be related to the macro-level influences that shape fan habitus and collective identities, which in turn affect the expression of soccer fan violence. Moderating factors, such as interventions by agents of social control, must also be included. Herein lies a challenge for scholars of fan violence in particular and for the sociology of collective violence in general.

The overarching aim of this article has been to establish common linkages between sport violence research and the sociology of collective violence and to contribute to ongoing efforts to identify and understand the meanings and mechanisms behind different forms of collective violence. Our model is instructive in three respects. It recognizes the critical importance of the collective mind and dispositions which can be investigated and understood through the lens of social identification and habitus. Identification with a collective is what makes group behaviour possible. The habitus does not only apply to the individual, but has a collective aspect that disposes individuals to certain shared actions.

This approach further enables us to link the social identification of individuals with a collective to an object of their contention, i.e. processes of (externally oriented) categorization (Jenkins, 2000). That object may be an agent of the state, opposing teams or other social groups who are identified as contentious by an individual in a collective. Contention between rival collectives has a reciprocal character. The extent to which this is manifested may also have an effect on the escalation (or de-escalation) of tensions between rivals and the ensuing violence which may occur. However, these actions are also influenced by context-dependent moderating influences which co-shape the scale, intensity and direction of collective violence (see Reicher, 1996).

Finally, our model offers the potential to develop, measure and test indicators of latent constructs related to social identification. In concert

with that, it seems feasible to ask individuals about their behavioural intent with respect to an object of contention. By appealing to the theory of planned behaviour (Azjen, 1991) one may then argue that, *ceteris paribus*, the intent to engage in contentious behaviour such as soccer violence is strongly predictive of its likelihood. This is an avenue for further empirical research.

Note

1. The term habitus, basically meaning 'second nature' or 'embodied social learning', was also regularly used by Elias (2000 [1939]). Bourdieu traces the term back to, among others, Hegel, Husserl, Weber and Durkheim. Elias used the term habitus to argue that as the structure of societies becomes more complex, manners, culture and personality also change in a particular and discernable direction, first among elite groups, then gradually more widely. Bourdieu, who popularized the concept among sociologists, seems more likely to have picked up the word in the first instance from other writers (Kilminster and Mennell, 2003: 192).

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