

Toward a Cultural Sociology of the Consumption of “Fantasy Football Hooliganism”

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Football hooliganism has a wide appeal within popular culture. Numerous books, films, documentaries, digital games, and even stage plays have featured representations of the phenomenon. All are presentations of what could be termed “fantasy football hooliganism” in that they are attempts by the entertainment industry to represent, reproduce, or simulate football-related disorder for our leisure consumption. This article offers a conceptual framework (underpinned by the work of Blackshaw & Crabbe) for the sociological analysis of the consumption and production of these fantasy football hooliganism texts.

Le vandalisme propre aux fans du soccer est très présent dans la culture populaire. Plusieurs livres, films, documentaires, jeux vidéo et même une pièce de théâtre ont représenté le phénomène. Toutes ces tentatives de l'industrie du divertissement construisent ainsi le « fantasme du vandalisme au soccer » en tentant de représenter, reproduire ou simuler le désordre présent au soccer pour les consommateurs de loisir. Cet article offre un cadre conceptuel (tiré des écrits de Blackshaw et Crabbe) pertinent pour l'analyse sociologique de la consommation et de la production de textes mettant en jeu le fantasme du vandalisme au soccer.

Football-related disorder, or what is more commonly referred to as “football hooliganism”—encompassing behavior ranging from verbal abuse and aggressive posturing through to rioting and even murder—has been a regular subject matter of books, DVDs, Web sites, digital games, feature films and documentaries in Britain over the last two decades. These media products all amount to what I define as “*fantasy* football hooliganism,” in that they are attempts by various sections of the entertainment industry to either represent, reproduce, or simulate football-related disorder in different textual or visual forms for leisure consumption. Such is the subject’s growing prevalence that Crawford (2004, p.135) has claimed: “In recent years ‘hooliganism’ has become a genre in itself within popular culture.” At the very least, it should be recognized as a subgenre of a fast-developing (and

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apparently sought-after) broader genre of violent media texts and technologies. But what is the appeal of this form of sports-related violence as a salient element of entertainment, and how are we to understand the consumption (and by implication, the production) of fantasy football hooligan texts?

Crawford (2004) offers us some observations. He cites the emergence of the “lad mag” culture in Britain in the 1990s—with the popularity of men’s magazines such as *Loaded* and *FHM*—as indicative of how a “recipe of beer, fighting and sexism” can appeal to young male audiences (see Carrington, 1998). Crawford (p.135) explains: “Football hooliganism provides the pinnacle of this voyeuristic journey into the (under)world of alcohol, danger, violence and overt masculinity for the consuming public to enjoy in the comfort (and safety) of their own homes.” He contends television programs and videos or DVDs about football-related disorder serve to “allow people to peer into and voyeuristically experience this ‘deviant’ culture” (Crawford, p.151). Giulianotti (1999, p.53) has suggested that they “provide hooligans (both old and new, real and imagined)” the opportunity to “visualize the violence of themselves and others.”

In this paper I want to move beyond Crawford’s and Giulianotti’s thoughts on the prevalence of hooliganism in popular culture and assumptions about its consumers as “deviant”—and to theoretically build upon previous work (Poulton, 2007, 2008)—by developing a sociological understanding of the reasons for the production and especially consumption of fantasy football hooliganism. I offer a preliminary theoretical explanation of the reasons for the phenomenon’s popularity and appeal as entertainment. I argue that fantasy football hooliganism is consumed in various media forms as a means of satisfying a human, though more usually male, interest in experiencing deviant or transgressive practices by proxy. The consumers are not necessarily deviant themselves, but their consumption allows them to vicariously sample the deviancy of others.

To try to make sense of this consumption, I want to contextualize my analytical framework by drawing on a range of theoretical work that, I believe, is essential to my general case. This includes Turner’s (1992) concept of “liminal leisure” and Blackshaw and Crabbe’s (2004) work on sport and “consumptive deviance.” The focus of this paper is therefore primarily theoretical, but is underpinned by some empirical research that involves both textual analysis and tentative inquiry into the production and consumption of these texts. I will use case study material, drawn from an extensive range of primary and, of necessity, secondary sources, to illustrate some of the textual forms of fantasy football hooliganism and to inform my arguments. Before I address several methodological issues, I wish to contextualize my conceptual framework for understanding the consumption of fantasy football hooliganism.

The “Buzz” of the Real Thing: Liminal Transgression and Consumptive Deviance

Despite their, at times, acrimonious and antagonistic debate over the historical longevity and causes of football-related disorder, or the ethnographic integrity of the research into the phenomenon, exponents of conflicting schools of thought have all at least acknowledged how hooliganism is underscored by aggressive

masculinity and how aggression and violence can be experienced as pleasurable and exciting, particularly by men (Armstrong, 1998; Armstrong & Harris, 1991; Dunning, 1999; Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1988).¹ Giulianotti (1999, p. 52), however, claims that "sociologists have tended to underestimate psychosocial pleasures of football violence," or what participants themselves would describe as the "buzz" of "steaming in" to confront and fight opposing firms (hooligan gangs) or the police (see, for example, Ward, 1989).

This intense emotional state, akin to the exhilaration gained through thrill-seeking pursuits like extreme sports, is affirmed by Dougie Brimson, a successful writer of numerous fantasy hooligan texts, who explains: "Hooliganism is the original dangerous sport, and the buzz you get from it never diminishes because you never know what's going to happen next" (personal correspondence, March 2007). Analogies with the climactic highs of sex and drugs are also common in the following hooligan literature. For example, the central character in *The Football Factory* describes a fight with a rival firm as "better than shagging a bird" (King, 1996, p.32).

The central attraction of extreme sports is "the courting of danger, the active taking of risks for the excitement and the sense of achievement that they bring with them" (Lupton, 1999, p.149). The work of Kusz (2004) on male participation in extreme sport in the US is worthy of note here. He argues that media narratives about extreme sport make visible the cultural politics of White masculinities. He identifies how certain media texts represent the pervasive desires held by many young men to be tough, strong, and superior to other social groups. Extreme sports provide their male participants with a means of proving to themselves, and especially others, that they are adequately masculine. There are obvious parallels to be drawn here with participation in football-related disorder. Hooliganism might offer men a similar masculine-identity testing ground, as well as similar emotional qualities (see Allan, 1989).

Giulianotti (1999, p. 53) suggests "football violence may be said to contain its own aesthetic form. . . . The innate and intensely momentary beauty of hooliganism is revealed only to those who stride somatically into the very eye of the storm, the hooligans themselves." Giulianotti argues that although the introduction of new legislation and police measures (such as CCTV and magistrates' banning orders from football stadia and international travel) have reduced the frequency of these "peak moments," they remain "highly desirable to large numbers of prospective participants" (p. 53), as well as other interested onlookers or "consumers." He appears to allude to Goffman's work as he notes that "hooligans have tended to be a compellingly attractive subculture, in being 'where the action is'" (p.53). Giulianotti claims this has led to the emergence of a "post-modern market . . . in the reproduction or simulation of football hooliganism, in print and in film" to "cater for the pent-up demand" (p.53). These observations at least partially explain the production and consumption of fantasy football hooligan texts. However, the psychosocial pleasures associated with watching reproductions or simulations of football-related violence, as opposed to actively partaking in it, warrant further attention.

Turner's concept of "liminal leisure" can help in this regard. For Turner (1973, pp.213–214) *liminality* literally means *threshold*, but it can be understood symbolically as a place in and out of time that provides individuals with a

spatial separation from the familiar and habitual, constitutes a cultural domain that is extremely rich in cosmological meaning, conveyed largely by nonverbal signals. Liminality represents a negation of many of the features of preliminal social structures, and an affirmation of another order of things, stressing generic rather than particularistic relationships.

A. King (1997), in his discussion of the postmodernity of football hooliganism, argues that real hooligan violence is a form of liminal gendered transgression in that conceptual schemas of masculinity and nationalism inform hooligan practice. I propose that fantasy hooligan violence can be understood in similar terms as a form of liminal transgression that is also gendered through discourses of hypermasculinity. A variety of media texts provide consumers with opportunities to cross the moral and cultural boundaries of being a law-abiding citizen and enter another cultural order that is characterized by aggressive, hard masculinity, violence, and criminality, albeit in simulated or reproduced forms.

Rojek (2000, p.152) argues that many aspects of modern leisure practices should be analyzed as an attempt to go beyond moral boundaries and the pacified physical standards of everyday life and identifies what he suggests is “the elective affinity between crime and leisure.” This can also be understood as transgression or transgressive behavior. The cultural criminologist Presedee (1994) explains that transgression, or wrong-doing, can become a leisure activity in itself because it offers the consumer an escape from the realities of working life. In today’s advanced consumer culture then, the desire for—and consequently leisure opportunities for—transgression are plentiful as people seek a break from the norm and their restricted, law-abiding lifestyle.

This helps to explain the appeal of actual football hooliganism. However, we might also be able to understand *fantasy* football hooliganism in this context in the sense that some people might like to experience the aggression, violence, and law-breaking of football-related disorder *vicariously* rather than through direct participation. Rojek (2000, p.168) notes: “Through film, television and genre literatures we vicariously expel tensions and play with social forms that are denied in our staple life.”

In this connection, Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002), in their reflection on the idea of a postmodern market for football hooliganism in popular culture, observe a trend toward the privatization and extended spatialization of hooliganism, because the authorities have driven it away from the public locales of the stadia to hidden landscapes like service stations and industrial estates. They note that “engagement with virtual hooliganism (through books, videos and video games) advances this privatisation of fan violence. For many active hooligans, a violent exchange in surroundings devoid of an affective input represents a concept alien to the match-day experience” (p.233). For them there is no substitute for the real thing. Others, however, might find surrogate action through a kind of transgression into the virtual landscapes of fantasy hooliganism, that is, through the representation, reproduction, or simulation of football-related disorder.

Crabbe (2003), in his study of incidents of football-related disorder during Euro 2000, makes similar observations about those content to watch hooliganism via the television news cameras. His interest is “our fascination with the deviance of others” (p.423). In this connection, Crabbe borrows the term *hooliporn* from

Allirajah's (2002) online review of a British television documentary series about hooliganism broadcast before the 2002 World Cup. Allirajah commented: "It was the very act of watching illicit hooligan action through secret cameras that gave the programme its voyeuristic appeal. This was not so much investigative journalism as hooliporn." Allirajah's observations about the apparent popularity of such documentaries can be applied to other forms of fantasy football hooliganism. As the viewing figures testify, these documentaries attract sizeable British television audiences. Allirajah attributes the sizeable audiences that watch these documentaries to their voyeuristic appeal, which works through a cocktail of revulsion and allure. These are vital ingredients of consumptive deviance, as I will show below.

Other examples can be found in newspapers and magazines (especially "lad mags"), which have shown a keen interest in featuring football-related disorder as a main staple of "infotainment"-style news reporting (Crabbe, 2003; Poulton, 2005; Weed, 2001). In recent years, however, the phenomenon has increasingly become the subject of much wider publication and interest, regularly represented, reproduced, or simulated in books, television programs, videos, and DVDs. These leisure products in multimedia formats can be understood in terms of Blackshaw and Crabbe's (2004) notion of consumptive deviance.

Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) persuasively present consumptive deviance as the concept that best understands rule breaking in contemporary social formations. Their innovative approach involves a reimagining of deviance through the metaphor of performativity. They argue:

Consumptive "deviance" is hyper-real. . . . Consumptive "deviance" is compelling in a profound way, because it is imagined to be all the things that "real" deviance is. It allows those who "buy" into it to witness or feel subversive, dirty, sexy and desired. It can momentarily promote hurt, fear, pain and entertainment without the exit wounds. Consumptive "deviance" entertains at the same time as making itself feel like the "real thing." It works ingenuously through strategies of entertainment, with comprehensive engagement not required. . . . It is able to provide imitations of the ecstasy of the dirty, the foul, the perverted, the sublime—the "feeling of deviance." (p.76)

In other words, consumers can get a taste of the hooligan action that would ordinarily be denied them, but from the comfort and safety of their own homes and without the risks involved in real-life football-related violence and disorder.

In the current highly mediated, advanced consumer culture, the opportunities for voyeurism and vicarious experience are significantly enlarged because, "With consumptive 'deviance' individuals can leave the drama of the really dangerous world for the world of consumer culture" (Blackshaw & Crabbe, 2004, p.76). In other words, fantasy football hooliganism, in its various cultural manifestations, offers consumers the opportunity to engage with but not engage in football-related disorder and violence because "consumptive 'deviance' entertains at the same time as making itself feel like the 'real thing'" (p.76). Readers of a hooligan book or viewers of a hooligan DVD might enjoy the excitement of the aggression, danger, and fear that the media text may engender and thus experience, albeit vicariously and so to a lesser extent, the thrill of the chase, the anxiety of "standing your ground," the confrontation with/evasion of the police, or the

buzz of steaming in. In explaining the news media's obsession with hooliganism more broadly, Brimson (2000) also provides an insight into why football-related disorder arguably makes for a good narrative for other media forms. He explains: "Hooliganism provides everything a good story should have: drama, tension, fear and villains. Throw in a bit of shame and the odd pinch of xenophobia and you have the lot" (p. 181).

Of course for active participants (as opposed to consumers) of football hooliganism, their leisure activities differ from the mimetic type in that they involve *real*, not imaginary, risk to life or limb or criminal record. Outlets for fantasy football hooliganism, however, would appear particularly important given Elias' observation that western societies have experienced a "tempering of violence in pastimes" (Elias, 1986, p.27). As noted above, the tightening of legislation and police measures have restricted hooligan activity and reduced the opportunity for violence and disorder in and around football stadiums. As I show below, some find satisfaction via the surrogate action of fantasy hooliganism in virtual landscapes through consumptive deviance. For others, of course, the excitement that such products can offer is unfulfilling and there is no substitute for the real thing.

Blackshaw and Crabbe's (2004) concept of consumptive deviance is therefore a particularly helpful conceptual framework for understanding the consumption (and production) of fantasy football hooliganism because it is underscored by media-entertainment practices. As I shall demonstrate, there are different forms and levels of consumptive deviance, which—to greater or lesser extents—allow for the expression of a particular kind of liminality. It unfolds on a symbolic level. The consumption of fantasy hooligan texts allows consumers to watch the violence and illegal practices of others (i.e., witness the transgression of others as they challenge moral boundaries) and so get a "*feeling* of deviance" by proxy. This typifies the consumptive deviancy of fantasy football hooligan products.

Methodological Issues

My methodological approach draws on aspects of media studies and reception theory. All forms of fantasy football hooliganism—books, films, DVDs, Web sites, digital games, plays—are of course media texts, comprised of images, words, and sounds that confer cultural meanings through their modes of representation. In the case of fantasy hooligan products, these texts confer meanings on violence, aggression, hard masculinity, crime, and law-breaking, as well as those associated with the cultural identity politics of race and class.²

Media texts are highly complex; they are produced and encoded by their authors, directors, and designers (who are a major part of the text themselves), then consumed and decoded by consumers in public or private settings. How consumers read media texts reflect what they do with these products socially, culturally, and personally. This involves an active process of making sense of their experiences and trying to understand the interrelationship among the producers, the texts, and the audiences (i.e., the consumers of fantasy hooliganism) (Ruddock, 2001). Cultural and symbolic meanings are embedded in the texts by their producers and the practices through which they are made (Du Gay, 1997). It is necessary therefore not only to understand the technical (and economic) processes and patterns of manufacturing, organization, and distribution but also the culture

through and within which books, films, and other forms of cultural software and hardware are made and given meaning by their producers, as well as their consumers.

The polysemic nature of media texts means that audiences are assumed to react to (or decode) a text in one of three ways: They can accept the preferred meaning of the text; accept parts while rejecting others (negotiated reading); or reject the text's preferred meaning (oppositional reading; Hall, 1973). For example, those actively involved in hooliganism might respond differently to such texts than those with no physical experience of it. An audience reception study was not feasible at this time, however, because of issues of access to hooligan groups and of the unlikelihood of consumers of fantasy hooliganism talking candidly about their consumption (see Giulianotti, 1999; Hughson, 1998). Instead, I drew on secondary sources. Where appropriate and when possible, the explanations given by the producers regarding the preferred and intended meanings of their texts are considered, as well as their understandings of the consumer markets they are catering for. Again, access into this subculture proved difficult, but hooligan authors and scriptwriters Dougie Brimson and Cass Pennant's insights proved very helpful.³ Although I have endeavored to provide an informed analysis, I acknowledge it remains a highly subjective, value-laden account and therefore open to interpretation.

With these methodological issues in mind, I developed a search strategy to identify fantasy football hooligan texts and to chart their prevalence as a subgenre in popular culture. Fantasy football hooligan texts were broadly defined as any attempt to represent, reproduce, or simulate football-related disorder in different entertainment media forms. More specifically, the texts could be categorized into one of the following the media formats: books, films, DVDs, Web sites, digital games, and stage plays. Illustrative examples of the different texts were initially sought by means of Internet search-engines. The findings opened up further avenues to pursue. Once sourced, extensive samples of each form of media text were collected. These were then subject to a textual analysis to explore their representations of football-related disorder and violence based on previous research findings (Crabbe, 2003; Hall, 1978; Poulton, 2005, 2006).

Fantasy Football Hooliganism

As noted above, fantasy football hooliganism may take many forms (see Poulton, 2007). Because I have paid critical attention to "celluloid hooliganism" and hooligan documentaries elsewhere (Poulton, 2006; Poulton, 2008), my focus here is on books, DVDs, Web sites, and digital games as illustrative forms of fantasy football hooliganism.

Literary Hooliganism: "Kick-Lit" Action?

Known variously as "Kick-Lit" (Wells, 2003), "Hoolie Lit" (Brimson, 2006), or "hit and tell confessional tales" (Redhead, 2004, 2007), the emerging genre of hooligan-related literature has become a British cultural phenomenon, which can be seen as part of a broader popular interest in true crime and deviance that has developed since the late 1990s. Ward's *Steaming In*—runner-up in Britain's

prestigious William Hill Sports Book of the Year awards in 1989—was the original that paved the way for others to follow suit and as such is widely regarded as a classic in the field.

Memoirs by retired or reformed hooligans usually follow a similar format: telling readers “how it was” for them, explaining how and why they got involved, giving an insight into the culture and fashion (the “casual” style) of those involved, with endless accounts of evading the police, running battles with them and opposing firms, and of time served in prison for football-related offenses. Through these narratives a sense of transgression into a different (deviant) cultural order is constituted. Another recurring theme in literary hooliganism is testimony to the psychosocial pleasures involved: the buzz to be had from the violent confrontations, with parallels drawn to those achieved through sex and drugs. O’Neill (2004) enthuses about the “pure violence, proper adrenaline, sheer excitement, the real buzz” (p. 21), and Nicholls (2002) contends: “It’s an addiction: drink, drugs and football thugs, all the same” (p.398). All use overtly masculine terms of reference and as such are a fertile terrain for the reaffirmation and valorization of hypermasculinities.

That all of these books are written by and, it would seem, for men is significant and helps construct the hooligan casual culture as very much *male*. Any mention of women is often derogatory and occurs usually only in reference to promiscuous sexual conquests and relationships with wives or girlfriends that have suffered as a result of the participant’s pastime (or occasionally served as an epiphany by helping the participant “retire”). The books are heavily laced with macho bravado and are based on what Wagg (2000, p.406) describes as “Been-There, Done-That dramatized personal experience.” A textual analysis of a sample of these books reveals how recurrent discourses of hard masculinity play an important role in reproducing a central, normative, and superior position for hard (more often, though not exclusively, White) masculinity through their celebratory stories about football hooliganism.

The genre is often ridiculed for being economical with the truth through exaggerated tales of macho bravado and also for bad writing, characterized by simplistic language, poor grammar, excessive expletives, and bragging. Fist and Baddiel (2006) and Cheetham and Eldridge (2006) for example, parody the genre with spoof titles. Some books have been charged with containing misogynist and racist discourses and titillating the reader or even elicit football-related disorder. Brimson (2006, pp. 88–89) acknowledges that their accuracy is occasionally questionable but is also dismissive of the criticism and defends the genre on all counts, especially against the crass accusations about readers responding to the stimuli of the violent content. Certainly there is the propensity for authors to provide jaundiced accounts for self-glorification, as well as the possibility of partiality toward or against certain football clubs and their associated firms.

Despite (perhaps in spite of) the criticism and allegations, there certainly appears to be a popular market for literature on the phenomenon. Pennant (personal communication, February 6, 2007) notes: “Today there are some 110 fan culture book titles actually wrote from the fans’ experiences from a market of only around 10 titles between the years 1989–99” [sic]. The online store *Sports Books Direct* lists over 50 titles on football violence, whereas *Amazon* stocks about 70. Only a handful of these are academic texts; the rest can be classified into four

distinct categories. First, the majority are either autobiographies or biographies that give insights into the authors' respective firms (e.g., Johnson, 1999; Nicholls, 2002; O'Neill, 2004; Pennant, 2002).

A second contribution to the genre are "insider guides." Robson (2000, p. 23) describes these as detailing "the aetiology and dimensions of football-related disorder," such as those by Brimson (2000) and Pennant and Nicholls (2006). Third are investigative studies such as the seminal study *Among the Thugs* by Buford (1991), an American who spent 8 years traveling at home and abroad with English hooligans. Fourth, other authors have written extremely popular fictional novels about hooliganism. Brimson (2006, p.89), who has written both fiction and non-fiction, explains the appeal: "For many people, the fictional accounts of hooligan life are actually more readable than the real life stuff given that they are, by definition, devoid of any claims, rumours or bullshit. Yet strangely, few have managed to make it into print."

John King (1996, 1997, 1998) is an author who has earned both commercial success and wide acclaim for his trilogy on football fan culture. His novels, particularly *The Football Factory*, are popular with literary critics and the hooligan fraternity alike. Pennant (2005) cites many testimonies to its popularity and realism, such as his interviews with "top boys" from various hooligan firms in his book of the same name. Redhead (2007, p.90) also writes favorably of King in his academic critique of what he calls "an iconic piece of popular cultural writing and its transformation into a controversial 'deviant' sport film," highlighting how English working-class culture, hard masculinity, and violence form the prime subject of the writing. However, he adds that the social realism of *The Football Factory* is "an highly constructed modernity and plays with notions of 'the real'" (p.102). These issues of working class culture, hard masculinity, violence, and represented reality not only characterize the fast-talking stream-of-consciousness narration in *The Football Factory* but are also all thematic discourses prevalent in many fantasy hooliganism texts.

Although informative data on consumption is scarce and difficult to come by, Brimson (2006) comments: "Believe me, they sell . . . enough to keep the various publishers happy and ensure that the flow will continue for some considerable time" (p.87).⁴ Pennant revealed he had sold "170,000 and latest figures are due to put me close to the 200,000 mark for 8 bestselling titles; sales of *Cass* and [*Congratulations: You Have Just Met the ICF*] make up 110,000 of that total" (personal communication, February 6, 2007). He also told how:

While the book trade was in turmoil and fear of the growing electronic computer digital new era, our sort of books were shifting by the bucket load, and to prove a point, I got 3 different titles into the *Sunday Times* Top Ten over a period. In May 2003 the [*Running With the*] *6:57 Crew* book I co-wrote [Pennant & Silvester, 2004] was at No.6, just 100 copies behind Mrs Maggie Thatcher's [the former British Prime Minister] autobiography *State Memoirs*.

These testimonies to the books' popularity say nothing, however, about the demographics of the readers. Such data are also elusive. Football journalist Steven Wells (2003, p.60) claims that these books are "not only bought by other former bad lads eager for a quick and gratuitously violent nostalgia fix"—they actually

“sell better in the nicer part of town.” Pennant concurs with the socioeconomic assumptions about geographical location, explaining that:

The books are popular with people in all walks of life. I thought they’d be big in places like Bermondsey [a deprived London borough], but I was told I sold best in Cheltenham [a typically middle-class historic Spa town in the English Cotswolds]. People like to look into another world. (personal communication, February 6, 2007).

Phil Thornton (2004), author of *Casuals*, contends:

Hooligan books are popular because they are: a) nostalgic; and b) violent. This is a potent mix and applies to everything from crime thrillers right through to books about terrorists, bouncers, drug dealers, gangsters and other brutal people.

Such populist publishing can also fill gaps in historical and ethnographic work in the sociology of male football fan cultures (Redhead, 2004, 2007) despite dismissive claims to the contrary (Frosdick & Marsh, 2005). These auto/biographical testimonies arguably provide valuable, “first-hand” insight into the hooligan casual culture and the life histories and lived (hypermasculine) experiences of those involved in a way that few academic works—or other textual representations such as those discussed below—can legitimately claim to do.

They might also, of course, help provide readers with a literary form of consumptive deviance through either a trip down memory lane (for those with active experience) or a peepshow into the hooligan culture through their chronicled tales of violence and lawbreaking, which transgresses normal patterns of behavior. Pennant’s comments earlier in this article reflect Blackshaw and Crabbe’s explanation of how consumptive deviance works: those who buy into it—in this case literary hooliganism—are able to feel subversive and deviant through reading accounts of the aggressive masculinity, violence, criminal records, and custodial sentences of others. This allows noncombatant consumers to enter and immerse themselves in the hooligan world, experiencing the deviant behavior of the hooligans and their altercations with the police and criminal justice system and so transgressing the (moral) boundaries of their normal, law-abiding lives. Although graphic literary descriptions of hooligan violence may sate the appetites of some consumers, others might prefer the more vivid nature of the moving audio-visual image.

Real-Life Hooliganism: Filming the Action

The vast majority of mainstream celluloid hooliganism is considered to be unrealistic and unbelievable by the hooligan fraternity and a few of the more savvy film critics (see Giulianotti, 1999; Poulton, 2006). The exceptions are Alan Clarke’s *The Firm* (1988), Dougie Brimson’s less known short film *It’s a Casual Life* (2003), and the 2004 film adaptation of John King’s novel *The Football Factory*. These exceptions could be seen as “soft-core hooliporn.” Apparently, other films do not accurately simulate the action and therefore fail to stimulate some audiences. For active hooligans, then, most mainstream cinematic offerings could be a routinized experience and consequently fail to provide much excitement.

This is why some documentary films appeal (see Poulton, 2008). Giulianotti (p.53) has noted that hooligan documentaries are "often found in the video-libraries of football hooligans and reviewed at regular intervals." Documentaries at least contain "real" footage of football-related violence rather than unrealistic representations of the reality.

Modern media technologies have facilitated the emergence of alternative leisure markets for those who do not find satisfaction in fantasy hooligan films and who, we can assume, want to watch more of the real thing. However, although some hooligan documentaries contain real footage, they have ordinarily been subject to the conventions of journalistic and editorial practices, as well as the censors, so they might not be fully satisfying either. Instead, consumers might find more of what they are looking for on Web sites that actually trade in "real" hooligan footage.⁵ These sites offer "good rates of pay" for "live hooligan footage" that has been filmed by spectators or participants with digital cameras or mobile phones, or illicitly accessed from CCTV and burned to DVDs. This is part of a broader trend toward the popular consumption of violent media texts and technologies.

Among the DVD titles available are: *Top Mobs* and *Hooligans at Play*, together with products like *Street Fights*, *Bare Knuckle Irish Gypsy Fights*, and *UK Race Riots*—which are also illustrative of the interest in violent media texts more broadly within British popular culture. The illicit (and racial) content of some of these texts is also revealing. In addition, consumers can purchase the "classic BBC documentaries" about football-related disorder, as well as amateur and professional productions that did not make it to mainstream broadcasters. For example, *Fucking Hooligans* was "made for English television but it was deemed to promote violence more than document it therefore no TV company would show it (The Hooligan Shop, 2007)." The site also includes an extensive choice of amateur film of the exploits of various British hooligan firms, as well those from abroad.

All these fantasy football hooligan texts are packaged by their producers and retailers as entertainment—complete with pulsating soundtracks—selling the spectacle of violence, and as such they reflect illustrative forms of consumptive deviance. A feeling of deviancy is evoked from the moment a consumer logs on to such a Web site. For example, one site's prehomepage entrance carried a legal disclaimer warning that it contains graphic images of violence and adult scenes.⁶ Their 10-clause disclaimer required consumers to accept the retailer's terms and conditions before entering the main site and accessing the online DVD shop. Acceptance of the site's terms can be understood as a form of transgression into the liminal zone of the hooligan underworld. By entering this portal, a normally law-abiding and noncombatant consumer can virtually breach the boundaries of his (and perhaps occasionally, her) usual nonviolent cultural order. Once inside the site, consumers were able to buy and then view acts of deviancy through media texts in the form of DVDs that reproduce *real* hooligan action, that is, actual criminal acts of violence and public disorder offenses, underscored with gendered discourses of hard masculinity, which often involve misogynist, homophobic, and sometimes racist sentiments.

Given this, the label "hard-core hooliporn" is perhaps more applicable to the products sold by Web sites such as those identified here and others that are traded

on the black market or circulated informally, than the mainstream films and books reviewed thus far. These products evidently aim to satisfy consumers for whom fictional films like *ID* (1995) and *Green Street* (2005) are pale imitations of the real thing and are therefore unfulfilling. The content of these products is not actually fantasy hooliganism at all. Instead, it is genuine film of *real* football-related violence and disorder—the majority of which has not been subject to the censors—and so consumers can witness real deviancy, which some audiences find much more exciting and gratifying than fiction. For many, “the experience of a film can to a great extent replace the experience of reality” (Monaco, 2000, p.277)—that is, can offer a kind of transitory liminal transgression.

Whereas the consumption of a fantasy celluloid hooliganism may evoke feelings of heightened masculinity, aggression, violence, fear, anxiety, adrenalin, and elation for some audiences, other audience groups need to observe the real thing to satisfy their twin libidinal impulses of sex and violence. Whether they find full gratification in witnessing the reality in addition to living that reality is unknown and would be difficult to investigate given the issues with access into hooligan groups noted above. Those who prefer to distance themselves from the real action have other forms of consumptive deviance available to them.

Virtual Hooliganism: Playing the Hooligan

The Internet provides a diverse range of material and resources in a variety of formats. Furthermore, Hine (2000) has suggested that the Internet functions both as a cultural tool and as a microculture in itself. Inevitably then, in addition to the online DVD stores, a glut of hooligan-related Web sites, blogs, message boards, and chat rooms have developed, some of which are used by hooligan firms to arrange (and/or certainly boast about) fights (see Fafinski, 2006).

Of course, such Internet sources are subject to questions about their reliability and authenticity (Hine, 2000). Interactive message boards and chat rooms allow individuals the opportunity to masquerade, for instance, as a hooligan, or indeed adopt any persona or opinion for effect or to acquire status. Likewise, the anonymity afforded by these virtual environments can enable an individual to feign a particular stance or downplay or amplify their hooligan experiences and activities—in the latter case, perhaps to (re)assert their masculinity. Their postings therefore need to be considered with circumspection.

These Internet sites could also be seen as potential liminal zones where those not actually involved in hooliganism are afforded the opportunity for transgression by adopting an online hooligan mantle. Liminal zones are imaginary, symbolic settings, that are intended to elicit excitement of some kind, imitating the excitement produced by real-life settings. Consequently, individuals might be able to cross their usual moral/sociolegal boundaries simply by logging on *incognito*, playing the hooligan in their private space, and then logging off and returning to their normal existence.

The opportunities for voyeurism and vicarious experience are significantly increased with the expansion of today’s network society. Crawford (2004, p.135) contends that the growth of hooligan-related Internet Web sites and discussion forums has given people the possibility of “peering into the hooligan’s world” and has allowed this form of consumption “to take on a much ‘realer’ and ‘participatory’

role for the hooligan voyeur." The issue of participation is a significant one. This form of consumption—far from being private or passive—can be seen as part of a wider active or performative style that requires consumers to display their consumption (and so affirm their hooligan status and, crucially, their hard masculinity and machismo) through message-board postings, as well as through fashion and other leisure practices (see Blackshaw & Crabbe, 2004). As such, these Internet sites have helped to facilitate forms of masculine interaction, identity (re)affirmation, and group formation that might be part of a growing desire among many boys and men to recreate exclusive, males-only social spaces (see Kusz, 2006).

Another portal to the hooligan world, albeit a virtual world, is that offered through digital gaming. Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004, p.76) contend that digital gaming represents consumer culture's "invasion" of the "hallowed world of 'real deviance.'" Brimson (2006, p.92) observes: "Strangely, given their seemingly obsessive fixation with violence, one area that hasn't been able to capitalise on the interest in hooliganism has been the games industry." However, in 2002 the first football hooligan PC CD-ROM game was released: *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe*. According to Crawford (2004), this "confirm[ed] football hooliganism's location as a source of home-based entertainment." Indeed, *BBC News Online* gave notice of its impending release with the headline: "Armchair Hooligans Get Their Chance" (Ward, 2001).

Within the real-time strategy (RTS) game, players control a firm of hooligans, whose commitment and loyalty must be maintained by supplying them with drugs and alcohol and ensuring they get regular "action"—that is, fighting. The objective of the game is "to become the most notorious group of hooligans in Europe," and it is won by securing this accolade through establishing notoriety by "catching the public's attention." This is achieved by maiming, killing, and ultimately destroying opposing firms. An additional feature is that players can interact and compete against each other via the game's official Web site.

The game attracted wide-scale condemnation amid accusations that it might encourage violence or tempt people to emulate what they see on screen,⁷ which helped accord it cult status until gamers tired of its basic format and graphics (Brimson, 2006). The game provides consumers with "another source of 'safe' participation within the 'hooligan' world" (Crawford, 2004, p. 148). This issue of safety might partly explain why Brimson (2006, p.92) predicts that more such games will follow: "The games industry has most certainly not given up on this subject yet. "Beat-em-ups" form a huge part of their market and with hooliganism such a curious social phenomenon, all it requires is the right plot or even the right tie-in and they will be away again."

Games like *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe* typify the characteristics of consumptive deviance. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004, p.76) explain: "With consumptive 'deviance' individuals can leave the drama of the really dangerous world for the world of consumer culture." It is not surprising then that *BBC News Online* announced the game's release with the headline: "Live the Life of a Hooligan on Computer" (Ward, 2001). Players have the opportunity to engage in transient transgression by assuming the persona of a hooligan and possibly crossing their usual moral boundaries—through rule-breaking with "a bit of theft, drinking and mindless violence" (as the blurb offers)—from the risk-free comfort of their

lounges, offices and bedrooms, within the virtual environment of the RTS game. They can live out the fantasy of being a hooligan and experience the mimetic excitement of the action, without any of the real dangers involved.

Again, only highly complex and sensitive empirical research could hope to ascertain whether those who play at hooliganism through such a game do so as a substitute for, or in addition to, engaging in real hooligan activity. However, digital RTS games at least offer an environment whereby gamers can role play at being a hooligan and immerse themselves in the tangible tensions and excitement found in the (virtual) violent action. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004, p.76) explain, consumptive deviance, such as that provided by digital gaming or through Internet message boards, “can momentarily promote hurt, fear, pain and entertainment without the exit wounds.”

Discussion

Football hooliganism has evidently become a subgenre of a broader genre of violent media texts and interest in sports-related violence, crime, and deviance within popular culture today. Indeed, football-related disorder has been the subject matter for a variety of media texts that are all forms of what I have termed “fantasy football hooliganism.” Each visual and textual format offers consumers a representation, reproduction, or simulation of hooliganism through various discursive elements. All flirt with the spectacle of violence, to a greater or lesser extent, to entice and entertain predominantly male audiences, but there is no actual risk of harm (or criminal record/custodial sentence) to the consumers. Despite the proliferation of these texts, however, little is known about them: their discursive content; who produces them; and who consumes them.

Evidence about *who* the producers and consumers of fantasy hooliganism actually are is difficult to come by for the reasons cited above concerning gaining access to hooligan groups and the sensitive (sometimes illegal) nature of the visual or textual content, which would deter subjects from talking candidly. Rojek (2000) has highlighted the problems associated with investigating what he terms “abnormal leisure forms”—such as the use of drugs or pornography—which fantasy football hooliganism could be classified as. He acknowledges how difficult it is to obtain accurate and reliable information about the extent of these leisure activities, as well as their production and consumption.

The producers of fantasy hooligan texts, that is, the authors of the majority of hooligan literature (certainly the autobiographies/biographies and insider guides, as well as some fictional writers) are men that were (or are) active participants in hooliganism. The same might be said of some of the webmasters of hooligan sites and the film-makers of the DVDs that have been discussed. Many consumers might be active participants in football hooliganism or former hooligans who seem to want a nostalgic trip down memory lane. Some consumers, however, may have no physical experience of or inclination toward actual football-related violence; they just want to enjoy the “peep show” that fantasy hooligan texts can provide.

Fantasy football hooliganism, in its various cultural manifestations, therefore offers consumers the opportunity to engage with but not in football-related disorder and violence. Readers of a hooligan autobiography, audiences of a DVD,

or players of a digital game can enjoy the excitement of danger and fear that the text engenders and experience the full range of emotions—the thrill of the chase, the anxiety of "standing your ground," the "buzz" of "steaming in," the pain of taking a beating, the despair of imprisonment—albeit vicariously, and so to a lesser extent, safe in the knowledge that the danger is imaginary.

Thus, fantasy football hooliganism can be understood as providing vicarious liminal zones that imitate the excitement produced by real-life hooligan settings and behavior but without the associated risks of injury, criminal proceedings, and domestic or professional repercussions. By entering these liminal zones, consumers in effect transgress the law-abiding boundaries of their everyday lives to enter the cultural order of the hooligans. The repertoire of liminal symbols employed by the commercial forces behind the production of fantasy hooliganism includes linguistic and/or audiovisual imagery relating to violence, aggressive masculinity, crime, and law-breaking. The hypermasculine (often misogynist) discursive content of fantasy hooligan texts suggests that their consumers are predominantly, though not exclusively, male. The racially discursive nature of these texts has received little scholarly attention.

I suggest that the use of the fantasy football hooliganism products discussed here reflect a form of consumptive deviance that works through strategies of entertainment. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004, p.76) explain, consumptive deviance such as that provided by the narrative discourses of a book or DVD can "momentarily promote hurt, fear, pain and entertainment without the exit wounds." Only active participants in football-related disorder experience palpable fear and physical hurt and pain. For the consumer of fantasy football hooliganism these feelings are symbolic and transient, but they nonetheless serve to provide psychosocial pleasures for the consumer. Some of the fantasy hooligan products available could even serve as a form of surrogate action, as a cultural resource in place of the "real thing": that is, active participation in football-related disorder, which has become increasingly marginalized through political and police measures. The very nature of the different media products available—from virtual hooliganism by means of digital gaming, nostalgic literary memoirs of past hooligan exploits, mainstream films, and investigative television documentaries, to filmed footage of "real" hooligan activity—at least suggests that different elements of the leisure and entertainment industry cater to a range of tastes, preferences and tolerances for levels of violence.

Rojek (2000, p.192) suggests that in today's highly regulated, restrictive, "unexciting" society, "leisure becomes a way of sublimating unfulfilled energy. Through it we act out fantasies and vicariously enjoy pleasures which are denied or at least rationed in every day life." For Rojek then, "leisure cultures promote transgression" (p.165). As such, Lupton (1999) has noted how "Activities such as dancing, drug taking and sexual intercourse provide routes by which the culturally forbidden may be indulged in, at least for a time." She continues: "The courting of symbolic risk implicated by the crossing or blurring of boundaries is a central aspect of the pleasure and excitement associated with transgression and contact with otherness" (p.172). This might help to explain the growing interest not just in sports-related violence, but in crime and deviance more broadly, coupled with the burgeoning genre of violent media texts and technologies in popular culture today.

As an example of consumptive deviance, fantasy football hooliganism can be understood as a form of liminal leisure in today's highly mediated, advanced consumer culture and, consequently, as providing an opportunity to vicariously engage in a particular kind of transgression. The Freudian notion of "scopophilia" is applicable in this context, that is, getting sexual stimulation from peeping in on the private world of others. Some people "get off" on sexual fantasies through pornography. Others get off on (mediated) violence, in this case, fantasy football hooliganism. The imagery, language, and structure of these texts might even connote a sense of violent coitus in the hooligan action.

A book, film or DVD can serve as a symbolic liminal zone to allow some consumers to (safely) peer into and voyeuristically experience the "otherness" of the hooligan (hypermasculine) world: their identities, their values and behaviors. Others can use these products to temporarily transgress the boundaries of being a law-abiding citizen by acting out the fantasy of being a hooligan online or through a digital game without any of the associated risks of real hooliganism. The temporary make-believe nature of the "liminal masquerade" (Turner, 1992) may suspend the routinized existence in a restrictive consumer society. As such, the demand for—and hence supply of—these texts can be understood in the context of consumptive deviance. Consumers of fantasy football hooliganism can vicariously enjoy representations of the aggressive masculinity, violence, and law-breaking of others, sampling the "buzz" of the real action, but without the real risks.

Notes

1. Discourses pertaining to the cultural identity politics of masculinity characterize the latent content of fantasy football hooligan texts and as such are implicit in this article. A comprehensive discussion of masculinity and fantasy football hooliganism, however, is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, for a broader discussion, see Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), or, in the context of sport, see Kusz (2004, 2006).
2. There is not space here to fully discuss the pertinent issues of race and class in the context of football-related disorder at sufficient length, though aspects of White, working-class identity are implicit in the discussion of hard masculinity. For a discussion of racial politics and football-related disorder, see Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, 1999, 2001, and Carrington, 1998. For further discussion of class in relation to football-related disorder, see Armstrong (1998), Dunning et al. (1988), and Giulianotti and Armstrong (2002).
3. Both Brimson and Pennant are reformed hooligans who are now successful authors and scriptwriters.
4. I asked Milo Books, Mainstream Publishing Ltd., John Blake Publishing Ltd., and Headline Publishing Ltd., who publish the majority of hooligan literature, for the sales figures of their respective titles, but each declined on the grounds that this information was classified.
5. Such Web sites include: www.videohooligan.com, www.hooli-news.co.uk, www.english-hooligans.co.uk, www.hooliganshop.be, and the now-defunct www.hooligandvds.net. Footage of football-related violence is also easily obtainable on the popular video sharing Web site *YouTube*, which allows users to upload, view, and share video clips free of charge.
6. The Web site www.hooligandvds.net is no longer in operation.
7. The games of *Doom*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Mortal Combat*, and *Grand Theft Auto* (particularly the *San Andreas* version) have attracted similar censure over their violent nature amid moral

panics that they might incite aggression in gamers, despite a lack of supporting evidence. For a comprehensive review of literature on the impact of digital games, see Millwood Hargrave and Livingstone (2006). Similar accusations have been made about celluloid hooliganism (see Poulton, 2006) and hooligan books, as discussed above.

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