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Aggression and Violent Behavior, 2014, 19(2): 146-155

Sports crowd violence: An interdisciplinary synthesis

Ramón Spaaij

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Utrecht University School of Governance, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Abstract

Crowd violence is a regular feature of spectator sports around the world. Contemporary research recognizes the diversity and complexity of this violence, but serious interdisciplinary work on the topic remains sparse. This article suggests that there is a need for increased dialogue across academic disciplines. I examine how themes and issues emanating from different disciplines may be brought together to produce a fuller, multi-level analysis that integrates distal and proximate causes of sports crowd violence. Using a socio-ecological model, it is shown that fan violence arises from the dynamic interplay between individual, interpersonal, situational, social environmental, and social structural factors. I also review key continua of sports crowd violence pertaining to its scale, coordination, purpose, sources, and relation to social norms. The article concludes by presenting directions for future research on sports crowd violence.

1. Introduction

Sports-related violence continues to attract media attention and public concern in many societies. On February 1, 2012, the Egyptian city of Port Said witnessed one of the deadliest episodes of sports-related violence in modern history. Seventy-four people were killed and hundreds injured when spectators invaded the playing field after a soccer match between Al-Masry and Al-Ahly. Most of the deaths were caused by concussions, stab wounds, and suffocation from the stampede. The sentencing to death of 21 soccer fans on charges of having been responsible for the brawl sparked fierce protests on the streets of Port Said.

Fortunately, most episodes of sports-related violence are less severe. For example, in October, 2012 the inaugural National League wildcard game between the St Louis Cardinals and the Atlanta Braves was halted for 19 minutes after Braves fans expressed their anger at a controversial umpire decision by throwing cups and plastic bottles on the field. The Braves condemned their fans' behavior, describing it as "uncharacteristic and unacceptable" (Rogers, 2012, p. A1). More recently, in April, 2013, English soccer violence re-emerged in the public spotlight. Millwall fans fought between themselves during their FA Cup semi-final defeat to Wigan Athletic, with the police making 14 arrests and four officers receiving minor injuries. That same weekend, 29 people were arrested as Newcastle United fans threw glass bottles, firecrackers, bricks, and rocks at police.

Recent episodes of crowd violence have not been restricted to professional sport. The deadly assault by teenage players on a linesman at a youth soccer match in the Netherlands in November, 2012 sparked international outrage and prompted the Dutch government to introduce a zero-tolerance approach to player and spectator misconduct. "A victim of the

passions that football provokes, of the anger that this form of entertainment can generate,” wrote *The Times* (Evans, 2012, p. 9). “Referees under siege”, CNN headlined (Krug, 2013). Growing rates of violence against sports officials were soon reported in other European countries. In Spain, a 17-year-old referee was assaulted after attempting to send off a player who had insulted him. The player, a police officer 10 years his senior, struck him in the face, then delivered two kicks to the body (Krug, 2013). In Germany, violence against match officials was described as “reaching alarming proportions” (Eberle & Neumann, 2012).

Considering the frequency with which sports-related violence is reported in the mass media, it is unsurprising that the issue has attracted academic attention. Three decades ago Jeffrey H. Goldstein (1983) could reasonably claim that violence and aggression represented one of the “relatively neglected issues” (p. v) of contemporary sport, but today there exists a rich body of theory and research on sports-related violence. This literature provides important insights into the nature and determinants of sports-related violence; yet, several issues remain unresolved. There is still disagreement between scholars regarding the definition of sports-related violence, its frequency and scale across time and space, and its causes and remedies. One reason for this is that sports violence is far more diverse and encompassing than scholars typically acknowledge (Young, 2012). Explanations of sports-related violence also remain entrenched within disciplinary boundaries, which has inhibited the development of a fuller, multi-level analysis. There is a need for increased dialogue across academic disciplines to overcome this issue and to identify effective strategies for dealing with sports-related violence (Fields, Collins, & Comstock, 2007).

This article aims to contribute to a fuller understanding of the factors and social processes that influence sports crowd violence. It will do so by examining how themes and issues emanating from different academic disciplines may be brought together to produce a multi-level analysis that integrates distal and proximate causes of sports crowd violence. The

article will show that there are important areas of common ground. Scholars in different disciplines have often found similar themes and issues, while also offering different insights that, in conjunction, provide a fuller analysis of the problem (Fields et al., 2007).

Recognizing the diversity of sports-related violence (Bodin, Robène, & Héas, 2005; Jamieson & Orr, 2012), and the impossibility of doing justice to this diversity within the space of this article, the principal focus will be on violence among spectators. However, it is acknowledged that different types of sports-related violence may be driven by the same social processes and conditions. Some of the linkages that underpin different forms of sports-related violence will be identified.

This article will first clarify what is meant by sports crowd violence and identify its multiple modalities. The paper proceeds by proposing a socio-ecological model that brings together and synthesizes themes and issues from different disciplines. This model compels scholars and practitioners to acknowledge the multiple, inter-related influences on sports crowd behavior. The article concludes with ideas and recommendations for further research on sports crowd violence emanating from the proposed framework.

2. Definitions and distinctions

2.1. Defining sports crowd violence

The definition of sports-related violence is the subject of academic debate. There is no universally agreed upon scholarly definition of violence in sport. The literature reveals diverging conceptions of sports violence, ranging from minimalist to comprehensive. The term “sports violence” is frequently used in a cover-all sense, in which various forms of deviant or criminal behavior are lumped together to refer to acts that threaten the social

fabric. Minimalist definitions view sports violence narrowly in terms of physical force and physical harm or injury to others (Parry, 1998). Thus, Coakley (2009) defines sports violence as the use of excessive physical force which causes or has the potential to cause harm to others or damage to property. Most scholars consider this behavior in direct relation to the sporting environment; yet, some include in their definition the possibility of the diffusion of violent acts resulting from direct or indirect involvement in sport, where sports violence “can occur in the home, school, workplace, recreational site, at events and many other venues due to the sport contest or involvement itself” (Jamieson & Orr, 2012, p. 4). Similar to minimalist definitions of violence more generally (Ray, 2011), narrow definitions of sports violence have been criticized for not taking into consideration the wider contexts of social relationships in which violence occurs nor psychological harms. Feminist critiques of symbolic violence and masculine domination in sport are a case in point (Anderson, 2010; Messner, 1990).

An analytical distinction can be made between the violent conduct of *players*, either on or off the field, and violence caused by *spectators* to a sporting contest. The latter can be defined as “acts of verbal or physical aggression (threatened or actual), perpetrated by partisan fans at, or away from, the sports arena that may result in injury to persons or damage to property” (Young, 2012, p. 42). However, the requirement that spectators be “partisan” effectively excludes those forms of violence that are caused by spectators with a relatively weak or ephemeral sport/team identification, for example those who use the sports arena to express their political or ideological grievances (as in the example of terrorism below). Moreover, following Ward (2002), spectators can be taken to refer to “the crowd of onlookers and not the people watching sports on television at home or in a bar” (p. 455). The effect that watching sport on television may have on spectator aggression is an interesting issue (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), but not explored in this discussion. Pre- or post-event

violence caused by spectators away from the sports arena, such as celebration or defeat riots, will be included in this review. Finally, it is recognized that player and crowd violence can be intertwined in practice. Sports crowd violence can result from violence on the field of play, where the observation of player violence can weaken inhibitions against the expression of aggression and violence (Smith, 1976; Wann et al., 2001). Yet, many scholars believe that the roots of sports crowd disorder lie predominantly in the wider society rather than being located within the sporting event itself in such processes as on-field violence or overly aggressive player behavior (Lynch, 1991; Young, 2012).

Sports crowd violence occurs at all levels of sport, from professional and amateur adult competitions to collegiate and youth leagues. The targets of fan violence are equally diverse, ranging from fellow spectators to players, officials, coaches, administrators, police, or bystanders. A variety of spectator behaviors can involve the use of violence. Seven main categories of sports crowd violence can be identified:

- *Assault*: the application of physical force to the body of, or to clothing or equipment worn by, another person with intent to inflict (or being reckless as to the infliction of) bodily injury or damage;
- *Fighting*: the mutual application of physical force with intent to inflict or being reckless as to the infliction of bodily injury;
- *Verbal abuse*: obscene, indecent, or threatening language that incites hatred towards or serious contempt for a person or a group of persons;
- *Pitch invasion*: unauthorized entry into the playing field of sporting venues, thereby disrupting play;
- *Discharge of missile*: the throwing or kicking of a projectile (e.g., a bottle, flare, or coin) onto the playing field or in the direction of another person;

- *Vandalism*: the willful or malicious destruction of public or private property;
- *Terrorism*: a politically motivated act of violence that is committed with the aim of intimidating a population or destabilizing the fundamental political, economic, or social structures of a society.

2.2. *Key distinctions*

Sports crowd violence is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. It takes many forms which may require different explanations. To aid in the understanding of the multiple modalities of sports crowd violence, Figure 1 outlines five continua that capture key distinctions and dimensions. These continua of sports crowd violence relate to its scale, coordination, purpose, sources, and relation to social norms. The various forms of sports crowd violence fall on these continua with overlapping rather than discrete categories.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

2.2.1. *Individual and collective violence*

The scale of sports crowd violence ranges from individual violence to episodes of collective or mass violence. Individual violence refers to acts of violence carried out by a single perpetrator without reference to a collective plan or coordinated effort. Collective violence, which excludes purely individual action, involves at least two perpetrators and results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts (Tilly, 2003). Sport riots, which involve purposive destructive or injurious behavior by five or more individuals in a crowd, are the archetypical example of collective violence in sport

(Lewis, 2007; Russell, 2004). The distinction between individual and collective violence focuses attention on “how social ties, structures, and processes affect change and variations in violent incidents” (Tilly, 2003, p. 4). This distinction directs attention to the potentially diverging mechanisms that drive individual and collective violence. For example, Stott and Reicher (1998a) argue that as crowd violence becomes more widespread and involves larger numbers of people, the importance of violent predispositions as an explanation of violent behavior decreases.

2.2.2. *Spontaneous and organized violence*

The extent of coordination among violent actors is a second continuum of sports crowd violence. Fan violence can be a collectively coordinated or even planned activity, but it can also arise relatively spontaneously. Spontaneous and more socially organized forms of crowd violence ought to be distinguished for analytical purposes (Duke & Crolley, 1996; Spaaij, 2006). This distinction raises important questions regarding the nature of sports crowd violence across time and space, and underlines that many aspects of crowd disorder are culturally specific.

In several European and South American countries, soccer, in particular, has experienced a historical shift from spontaneous, ad hoc, event-focused episodes of crowd violence toward more organized and institutionalized forms of “hooliganism” (Dunning, Murphy, Waddington, & Astrinakis, 2002). Soccer hooliganism refers to a distinctive subculture among predominantly young male partisan fans and their engagement in collective violence which is primarily targeted at opposing fan groups with whom there is often a history of hostility and confrontation (Spaaij, 2006). This violent competition among socially organized groups of soccer fans constitutes one particular modality of sports crowd violence,

one to which North America has been less exposed. Indeed, soccer hooliganism and North American fan disorders “neither represent social problems of the same magnitude nor are one and the same thing” (Young, 2012, p. 69).

The distinction between spontaneous and organized violence points to the possibility that different causal or precipitating factors may be involved. Hooliganism is typically only loosely connected to the sporting event itself. It does not depend upon the events of the game; rather, it can happen the day before the game, away from the sports arena, or any time around the period when fans are assembled (Collins, 2008). On-field violence is often less relevant as an explanatory factor for this type of violence. In contrast, more spontaneous episodes of crowd violence that occur during a sporting event often appear to be related to events on the playing field. In this context, Collins (2008) argues that sports spectators are subject to the same rhythms of dramatic tension as players, and that it is mainly to experience this tension and to express their emotions collectively that spectators are attracted to attending a sporting event.

2.2.3. Expressive and instrumental violence

A third continuum of sports crowd violence refers to the purpose of the act, and ranges from violence which is expressive in character to instrumental violence. Violent acts can fulfil instrumental and expressive functions with equal efficacy (Riches, 1986). Yet, it appears that violence always veers, on balance, towards one pole or the other (Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1988). Violence is instrumental when it is intended as a means to the achievement of a given goal, such as inducing another person or group to alter their behavior. Violence is expressive when it is engaged in as an emotionally satisfying end in itself or when it takes place under the impact of a powerful negative emotion, such as frustration or

anger (Dunning, 1983). This includes what Schinkel (2010) calls autotelic violence: violence for the sake of itself, without extrinsic meaning, but purely destructive.

The distinction between instrumental and expressive violence has its problems, for it does not correspond to the distinction between the rational and the non-rational (Parry, 1998). Moreover, instrumental and expressive violence are not mutually exclusive; instead, many instances of violence involve a combination of the two. For example, expressive violence can be instrumental when it bolsters a spectator's reputation and status among their peers, as has been demonstrated in relation to soccer hooliganism (Spaaij, 2008). Even for those fans who claim to engage in violent behavior because of the pleasurable emotional arousal it generates (Kerr, 1994), the same act of violence can also be interpreted as an assertion or defence of values, a reaction or protest against a perceived injustice, and hence more than simply an end in itself (Mignon, 2002). In other words, the affective experience in sports crowd violence is often blended with elements of instrumentality. Conversely, it can be argued that violence will always involve a heightened state of affective arousal even if it is aimed at instrumental gain (Ray, 2011). Still, as Ray (2011) notes, the analytical distinction between expressive and instrumental violence might "assist in making distinctions between patterns of violence and its resolution, even if the two are likely to be present in many instances of violence" (p. 11).

2.2.4. Issue-relevant and issue-irrelevant violence

A fourth continuum of sports crowd violence refers to the sources of violence, which range from issue-relevant to issue-irrelevant (Smith, 1983; Wan et al., 2001). Issue-relevant violence has its origins outside the sports arena; it is a variety of structural strains or grievances that are believed to be the cause of this violence. Examples of issue-relevant violence are coordinated attempts to disrupt an event in order to draw attention to a cause

(“demonstration riots”), or clashes between spectator groups where there is history of hostility and hatred (“confrontation riots”) (Smith, 1983). In contrast, the sources of issue-irrelevant violence are to be found inside the sports arena; it is the immediate environment in which the event occurs that holds the key to understanding this violence. Examples include violent reactions to a defeat, a victory, or a controversial decision by officials. Issue-irrelevant factors refer to psychological phenomena that are often present in sport crowds, such as anonymity, lack of fear of retaliation, diffusion of responsibility (Wann et al., 2001), feelings of collective effervescence, and in-group solidarity (Spaaij & Anderson, 2010).

2.2.5. *Legitimate and illegitimate violence*

The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence has long been the subject of scholarly debate (Williams, 1981), but it takes on new meanings in relation to sport. Violence is legitimate when it is required, authorized, or approved under the rule or norms of the society or social group of the actor. Violence is illegitimate when it is prohibited or deprecated by the society or social group of the actor (Gelles, 1974). Notions of legitimacy and illegitimacy are culturally and situationally specific, and change over time.

Sport can be viewed as a relatively autonomous social world with its own allowable rule violations. Normative codes relating to the use of violence in sport are different from those that govern most other societal domains. Legitimate, although aggressive, bodily contacts are an integral part of many sports. Although players or spectators may be concerned about violent bodily contact, they generally accept it as “part of the game” (Anderson, 2010; Coakley, 2009). Many forms of sports violence constitute a culturally tolerable deviance which violates a normative code but is not interpreted by audiences as a threat to the collective or moral good (Atkinson & Young, 2008). Yet, conceptions of sanctioned and

unsanctioned violence vary greatly across different sports. The same behavior might be judged legitimate in some sporting contexts but not others. Guilbert (2004) distinguishes three classes of sports practices with differentiated representations of violence: hard violence sports which require physical contact and where winning often requires physical harm to the opponent (e.g., combat sports, mixed martial arts, basketball, soccer); soft violence sports that allow other forms of violence, especially psychological and verbal violence (e.g., tennis, volleyball); and sports where violence does not exist or is hidden (e.g., swimming, shooting).

Crowd violence differs from player violence in this respect because most forms of sports crowd violence, especially physical violence, are not considered “part of the game”; instead, they are increasingly perceived as illegitimate and criminalized as such. Although certain forms of verbal or physical violence may be legitimized or even praised within the subculture or social group of the actor, crowd violence is typically constructed by audiences, media and authorities as behavior that threatens the social fabric (Tsoukala, 2008; Ward, 2002). Sports crowds have been subjected to pervasive social controls and regulatory regimes at local, national and international levels which target a wide range of “deviant” patron behaviors (Mastrogiannakis & Dorville, 2012; Warren, 2003).

3. Towards a comprehensive understanding of sports crowd violence

The aforementioned continua and definitions underline the multi-faceted nature of sports crowd violence. This is one main reason why a comprehensive theory of sports crowd violence is yet to be developed. Another reason is that, as Ward (2002) notes, scholars “typically fail to integrate their work with the work of others” and “no serious interdisciplinary work on the topic has appeared” (p. 70). As a consequence, few innovative, original insights into sports crowd violence have been produced in recent times. Much of the

contemporary literature reinforces rather than bridges theoretical and disciplinary divides. This development is unfortunate because if a comprehensive theory of violence were possible, it would need to be profoundly interdisciplinary (Ray, 2011). Conventional explanations of sports crowd violence remain partial as they fail to capture the dynamic relationship between internal and external influences of violence. A key challenge, then, is to bring together and integrate structural explanations with analyses of immediate origins and experiences of the act.

Recent studies critically review diverging theoretical positions; yet, they invariably privilege a particular, discipline-based theorisation of crowd violence in sport. For instance, Young (2012) contends that psychological explanations “are clearly limited in their explanatory scope and potential” as they “provide next to no insight into the *sociological* dimensions of crowd violence” (p. 66). Sociologists like Young urge us to attend to the broader social context in which sports crowd violence occurs. In contrast, psychologists emphasize the need to move away from a focus on structural determinants towards a greater appreciation of the situational dynamics of fan violence (Stott & Reicher, 1998a), or the “metamotivational states” of individual offenders (Kerr, 2005). A welcome exception is Wann et al.’s (2001) observation that any comprehensive explanation of sports crowd violence must forge a synthesis between sociological and psychological viewpoints as both are “necessary pieces of the puzzle” (p. 132).

In order to contribute to an interdisciplinary synthesis of sports crowd violence, this article examines how approaches emanating from different academic disciplines may be brought together to produce a fuller analysis. Figure 2 outlines a five-level socio-ecological model that compels scholars and practitioners to acknowledge the multiple, inter-related influences on sports crowd behavior. The model considers the dynamic interplay between individual, interpersonal, situational, social environmental, and social structural factors. The

literature on sports crowd violence will be reviewed with consideration given to the range of dimensions suggested by the model.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

3.1. *Individual factors*

Several studies have attempted to identify the individual and personality characteristics of perpetrators of sports crowd violence. There is overwhelming evidence that it is primarily young males in groups who get involved in fan violence (Armstrong, 1998; Dunning et al., 2002; Lewis, 2007; Young, 2012). The influence of other factors on the likelihood of an individual committing an act of fan violence, such as the level of education or socioeconomic status, is less clear-cut. Some studies and government inquiries found that offenders are typically poorly educated, socially vulnerable, and have low socioeconomic status (e.g., Dunning et al., 1988; Van Limbergen & Walgrave, 1988); yet, recent research warns against over-generalization on this issue (Ek, 1996; Spaaij, 2007). Other studies have focused more specifically on the personality characteristics of spectators involved in violent behaviors (for an overview, see Russell, 2004).

Kerr's (1994, 2005) reversal theory explanation is one of the most contemporary of the psychological approaches to sports crowd violence that focus on individual differences. Reversal theory is about the inconsistency of human behavior. It explains why sports spectators may conform to rule expectations in one context, but revert to violence in others. Reversals are the sudden changes that occur between metamotivational states. There are three different conditions under which reversals can be triggered: frustration, saturation, or contingent events (i.e., changes in some aspect of the person or the person's environment).

Kerr (1994, 2005) sees discrepancies between preferred and actual levels of felt arousal in the “paratelic” metamotivational state as the source of sports crowd violence. Violence may be initiated solely by a need for high levels of felt arousal which, under certain conditions, people can experience as pleasant and exciting.

For spectators seeking thrills, being destructive and engaging in violence can be an enjoyable experience within a protective frame in which they feel relatively safe. Kerr (2005) stresses that this type of thrill-seeking behavior necessitates an element of physical risk and that, in this sense, “stabblings, beatings, and occasional deaths are necessary” ingredients (p. 111). Yet, there must be a balance, with “enough danger to maintain the perception of risk but not so much that the risk becomes too great, because then any protective frame will be ‘broken’ and many of the participants will drop out” (Kerr, 2005, p. 111). Kerr (1994) argues that some spectators become addicted to violence. This addiction process begins with early involvement in fan violence and develops in some cases to the level of violent activity characteristic of hardcore soccer hooligans, where increased and repeated involvement in violence, reinforced by positive emotional feedback loops, further reduces the alternative possibilities for rewarding experiences to take place. In time, more extreme risks are taken in order to achieve the same pleasant hedonic feelings.

Kerr’s focus on the seductive thrill of violence directs attention to the foreground forces that shape sports crowd violence. Traditionally, scholars of sports crowd violence have largely neglected these foreground forces, emphasizing instead the sociological or psychological background of those who commit offenses. Foreground forces, which examine the emergent character of violence, can explain why some people who are not determined to commit an act of violence one moment are determined to do so the next. The foreground approach can also shed light on what seduces people into committing violent acts that their underlying social or psychological background cannot explain (Samaha, 2006). For example,

in line with Kerr's approach, we could posit that at the moment of the violent act there is a transition from the choice to commit violence rationally to a compulsion to do so, driven by the thrill of violence (Katz, 1988).

The importance of a foreground approach is recognized by sociologists who similarly stress the pleasurable excitement that is often associated with fan violence (Giulianotti, 1999), to the point where it has been identified as a constituent element of hooliganism worldwide (Spaaij, 2008). There is thus common ground between different disciplines on this issue. Sociologist Eric Dunning (1999), for example, argues that Kerr does "little more than dress up in complex psychological jargon some relatively simple sociological ideas" (p. 142). However, there are also differences between psychological and sociological approaches to foreground forces of fan violence. Most notably, sociologists recognize that the foreground needs to be conjoined with background, structural factors which co-shape spectator violence. As the socio-ecological model in Figure 2 suggests, these are the broader social conditions that help create a climate in which sports crowd violence is encouraged or inhibited.

3.2 Interpersonal dynamics

Foreground approaches focus not only on the individual as the unit of analysis, but also on the interpersonal dynamics of violent situations. There are two main strands of recent interactionist research on fan violence: the interaction rituals theory, and the police-crowd interactions approach.

3.2.1. Interaction rituals

Collins's (2008) interactionist theory posits that rather than concentrating on either individual characteristics or structural preconditions, we ought to reverse the focus completely and concentrate on the foreground of violent situations. Doing so, he argues, reveals patterns of confrontation, tension, and emotional flow, which are at the heart of the situation where violence is performed. The premise for Collins' analysis is that violence is difficult and risky because humans have developed a propensity to reciprocal social solidarity. Whenever people come into antagonistic confrontation, this generates high levels of confrontational tension and fear. Collins argues that violence can only occur where there is a pathway around confrontational tension-fear. The positive attractions of committing an act of violence depend on situational conditions that can be manipulated by those who have acquired the techniques to break mutual solidarity and, therefore, lower inhibitions to violence.

Collins (2008) identifies three emotional dynamics that make sports violence possible. The first is the collective effervescence in build-ups of dramatic tension in the audience. The second is the degree of emotional resonance within a team: in team sports, players share collective emotions with their teammates, and successful performance depends on emotional resonance that keeps the team coordinated as well as energetic. The third kind of dynamics comprises "emotional energy" (EE) contests between opponents: players are involved in an emotional interaction with their opponents, in which "the player or team who gains EE wins at the point where the opponent loses EE. These are the emotional turning points of a game" (p. 285). Collins (2008) argues that spectators are subject to the same rhythms of dramatic tension – collective effervescence, emotional resonance, and emotional energy. It is, therefore, not surprising that spectators often behave aggressively at roughly the same

moments that players get into fights. However, the structure of involvement is different for players than for spectators, and hence their style of physical violence is different. Fights between players tend to have the form of symmetrical fair fights, while spectator violence is often a form of physical and numerical domination, or “attacking the weak” (p. 310), in a state of high confrontational arousal.

Yet, Collins (2008) also recognizes the diversity of sports crowd violence, which ranges from game-dependent violence to dislocated, premeditated confrontations between opposing fans or between fans and police. Collins distinguishes three main types of crowd violence that happen independently from the rhythms of confrontation on the playing field. Two of those, political violence (mobilized in part by extraneous conflicts) and post-event riots, may commence at the stadium or in connection with a sporting event, but spill over into offsite violence and develop an independent course of their own. The third, soccer hooliganism, is the most extremely disconnected from the emotional dynamics of the sporting event. This type of crowd violence symbolizes the wider process of antinomian collective effervescence and the distinctive solidarity of a group that has mastered the technique of overcoming confrontational tension-fear. Soccer hooliganism, Collins (2008) argues, is “contrived to provide the entrainment and solidarity of fights, without being subordinate to the players. This violence emulates the combat structure of the game, with the hooligans raised into heroes in their own right, usurping the place of the athletes” (p. 316).

3.2.2. Police-crowd interactions

A second strand of interactionist research focuses attention on the interactive dynamics between spectators and agents of social control. Traditional explanations of sports crowd violence have neglected the fact that law enforcers play an important role in fuelling

the group dynamics that are implicated in the scale and intensity of crowd conflict and violence (Stott & Reicher, 1998a; Waddington & King, 2005). Contemporary sociological studies consider the role of police in the emergence, prevention, and control of sports crowd violence (De Biasi, 1998; King, 1995; Lewis, 2007; O'Neill, 2005); however, this theme has been most systematically investigated by social psychologist Clifford Stott and his colleagues (Reicher, Stott, Drury, Adang, Cronin, & Livingstone, 2007; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott & Pearson, 2007; Stott & Reicher, 1998a,b). The premise for their analysis is that the characteristics or predispositions of spectators are less important as explanations for fan violence than the interactive dynamics between police and crowds. Crowd behaviors develop in context such that even those who initially and ordinarily eschew violence may come to act violently. Thus, spectator violence is usually not caused by known troublemakers such as Kerr's "addicted superthugs", but rather by failed policing and crowd management strategies (Stott & Pearson, 2007).

Stott and his colleagues build on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to show that if police treat all crowd members as potentially (if not actively) dangerous or react to the violence of some crowd members by imposing restraint on all, then this will increase the likelihood of violating in-group conceptions of legitimacy and uniting the crowd in hostility and opposition to the police, as well as increasing the influence of those advocating conflict in the crowd and undermining informal social control among crowd members (Reicher et al., 2007). Thus, in response to perceived hostility towards spectators by the police, or police inactivity in the face of violent attacks on spectators, the social identity of the crowd is transformed, making them cohere as a unified group through a sense of common fate. Ordinary fans may see violence as something to avoid; however, when affronted by police they may legitimize it as a form of retaliation or self-defence (Stott & Pearson, 2007).

The two strands of research discussed here draw attention to the fact that violence derives from *interactions*, notably between perpetrator and victim, and between crowd and law enforcers. Thus, any understanding of sports crowd violence needs to address not only pre-existing individual or group dispositions or motivations, but more importantly how social norms and the propensity to commit an act of violence emerge and change in the encounter between spectators and between crowd members and law enforcers. This does not mean, however, that interpersonal processes are not fuelled and contoured by structural conditions emanating from the broad social context. Moreover, the interactive dynamics of sports crowd violence are situationally specific. It is to the latter that I will now turn.

3.3. Situational factors

Central to situational or environmental approaches to sports crowd violence is the idea that physical and social surroundings and their symbolic meanings are relevant to spectators' actions and judgments (Canter, Comber, & Uzzell, 1989). A distinction can be drawn between place-related and game-related situational factors. Place-related factors refer to those physical or psychological factors that influence the likelihood of violence. The size of the venue and the crowd, the relative openness or closedness of the venue, the proximity of spectators to players or officials, crowd composition (e.g., the age and gender of spectators), and viewing conditions (e.g., crowding, seating arrangements, temperature, darkness, noise, foul odors) can all have an influence on the sport experience, and consequently on the frequency and level of spectator violence (Nicholson & Hoye, 2005; Russell, 2004; Wann et al., 2001). Yet, as noted earlier, a significant proportion of incidents of crowd violence take place away from the sports arena. For example, celebration riots, which have become a part of the North American sports scene at both the collegiate and professional levels of

competition (Lewis, 2007; Young, 2000, 2012), can have their own distinctive situational and environmental dynamics, such as being facilitated by sports fans' access to a natural urban gathering area (Lewis, 2007).

Crowd control strategies at the event are a major place-related factor, as the aforementioned research by Stott and his colleagues highlights. Coakley (2009) argues that "if spectators are respected and treated as valued guests rather than bodies to be controlled, and if stadium norms emphasize service as opposed to social control, people are less likely to engage in defensive and confrontational actions that could lead to violence" (p. 223). There is strong evidence for this argument from studies conducted in Europe and in Australia (Reicher et al., 2007; Stott & Pearson, 2007; Warren & Hay, 2009). It is also consistent with recent research that highlights the adverse consequences of invasive crowd control strategies for spectators' civil liberties and wellbeing (Mastrogiannakis & Dorville, 2012; Tsoukala, 2008).

Many acts of sports crowd disorder appear to be influenced by game-related factors in one way or another. At least two key factors can be identified. The first factor is the meaning and significance of the match and the relationship between the contestants (Jamieson & Orr, 2012). Continuing on with the example of celebration riots, Lewis (2007) shows that such a riot is more likely to occur after championship games; if the winning team has not won a championship within five years; and if the concluding game is a close, exciting event. The increased likelihood of crowd violence during matches that have a history of intense competition and rivalry is also well known (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001; Murray, 1984; Roberts & Benjamin, 2000; Spaaij, 2006). Most sports spectators are able to identify the significance of an event either in terms of seasonal goals or in terms of relations and rivalries that have developed historically between the contestants or the fans (Young, 2012).

The second game-related factor that influences sports crowd behavior is the perception of the performance of game officials. A perceived poor decision or set of

decisions by an official can be the “igniter” of an act of fan violence during or after the event, especially when the decision is seen to impact on the game outcomes (Case & Boucher, 1981; Nicholson & Hoye, 2005; Smith, 1976). Mark, Bryant, and Lehman (1983) have termed this “justice-based sports violence”, where a perceived injustice leads to, or contributes to, an act of violence. Other game-related factors that have been considered in studies of sports crowd violence are the observation of violence on the playing field (Russell, 2004; Wann et al., 2001), and the extent of “home” versus “away” supporters’ involvement (Semyonov & Farbstein, 1989).

3.4. Social environment

Surrounding the individual, interpersonal and situational dimensions in the socio-ecological model (Figure 2) is the social environment. The social environment comprises the social organization and culture of sport which can encourage aggressive and sometimes violent behavior by players and spectators. Two key themes can be identified from the literature: team identification and group antagonisms, and masculinity.

3.4.1. Team identification and group antagonisms

Research into personality characteristics shows a significant and positive correlation between team identification and willingness to commit aggressive or violent acts in sport settings (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Wann, 1993). Team identification can be defined as “the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team’s performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves” (Branscombe & Wann, 1992, p. 1017). Individuals with high levels of team

identification are more likely to consider violent acts, and these persons are especially likely to consider violence when their team loses (Wann, Culver, Akanda, Daglar, de Divitiis, & Smith, 2005). Males are more likely than females to report a willingness to consider hostile aggressive acts (Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003).

Wann's (1993) theory of positive social identity maintenance posits that a spectator's need for a positive social identity and their degree of identification with the team are critical in setting the stage for aggression. Whereas spectators low in team identification can distance themselves from an unsuccessful team to protect their psychological wellbeing, this technique is not available to highly identified fans whose social identity is more closely associated with the performance of their team. Highly identified fans engage in a process of derogation of a relevant outgroup as a means of restoring damage to their positive social identity. Their hostility is likely to be directed at opposing players or spectators. As such, there is a heightened potential for verbal or physical violence when highly identified fans witness their team's defeat. Yet, there are also social restraints in place to deter violent behavior, some of which are to be found in the situational and the interpersonal realms (sections 3.2 and 3.3, respectively).

This body of research directs our attention to social identification as a key source of sports crowd violence. There is important common ground between the research by Wann and his colleagues on team identification and more sociologically-focussed work on collective identity and group antagonisms in sport settings. However, the former may be less satisfactory for explaining those forms of crowd violence whose connection to poor team performance is limited, such as soccer hooliganism or celebration riots caused by fans of the winning team, which appear to be more common than defeat riots by fans of the losing team (Lewis, 2007).

Spaaij and Anderson (2010) contend that the key driver of sports crowd violence is the social identification that individuals form with a collective; not only a team, but also other spectators. Following Tilly (2003), they 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 construction of an out-group or “enemy”, which can be players or fans of the opposing team but also agents of the state or other social groups who are identified as contentious by an individual in a collective. The rivalries between highly identified fans of certain sports clubs, which may also be a repository for broader divisions along class, religious, political or ethnic lines (as discussed in section 3.5), are exemplars of objects of contention. When individuals identify strongly with a collective they learn a repertoire (Tilly, 2003) of behaviors 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 when compared with acceptable standards of behavior.

Spaaij and Anderson’s approach is consistent with Ward’s (2002) finding that group antagonisms are a significant factor in sports crowd violence. There is strong evidence for the hypothesis that the intensification of in-group bonds and out-group vilification increases the likelihood of fan violence (Ward, 2002), just as strong team identification at the level of the individual is positively correlated with willingness to commit violence. There are clear linkages here with interactionist theories of fan violence (section 3.2), as well as with the macro-sociological accounts discussed in section 3.5.

3.4.2. Masculinity

As noted, it is primarily young males in groups who get involved in sports crowd violence. How can this be explained? In many respects, the predominance of young males in

sports crowd violence reflects male adolescents' general over-representation in various types of delinquency. Like other societal domains where young males seek excitement, prestige and status among peers, participation in sports crowd violence offers them a sense of personal worth and social status through recognition from their male peers (Marsh, 1978). In most cases, this involves adolescence-limited behavior; yet, in line with Kerr's (1994) reversal theory, some men can become life-course-persistent offenders.

Still, sport has some particularities that make it attractive to risk-taking behavior among young males. Masculine identity is vigorously pursued by young males, and sports, especially contact sports involving physical strength and aggression, offer an opportunity to demonstrate one's masculine status both on and off the playing field (Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995). One of the key elements in the performance of masculinity in sport is the use, or threat, of violence (Messner, 1990). Athletes in contact sports learn to use intimidation, aggression and violence as strategies to achieve competitive success on the field, even though it may cause pain and injury (Anderson, 2010; Coakley, 2009). Because sports spectators are subject to the same rhythms of dramatic tension as players (Collins, 2008), spectators can also be socialized into a ready acceptance or appreciation of certain forms of violence, which can lead to a weakening of inhibitions against the use of violence. Research consistently shows the assertion of an aggressive masculine identity among male spectators as a key source of sports crowd violence (Alabarces, Conde, & Dorado, 2005; Armstrong, 1998; Dunning et al., 1988, 2002; Free & Hughson, 2003). Soccer hooligans, for instance, celebrate an aggressive masculine identity which is constructed through violence and derogation of the opponent, with the purpose of attaining an unambiguous sense of one's masculine status (Spaij, 2008). Herein lies an important linkage between player and spectator violence in sport.

3.5. *Social structural factors*

Most sports crowd violence does not result simply from individual or situational factors but, like other forms of interpersonal violence (Tilly, 2003), is ultimately embedded in particular social, economic, and political contexts. Sports spectators bring with them the histories, norms, conflicts, and ideologies of the communities and cultures in which they live (Coakley, 2009). As such, their attitudes and behaviors are “grounded in multiple factors far beyond the event and the stadium” (Coakley, 2009, p. 224). The broad social context is crucial to grasping the structural conditions that facilitate or inhibit sports crowd violence, even if their influence is mediated by social environmental and interpersonal processes.

The premise of macro-sociological approaches is that sports crowd violence has its source in societal strains or figurations that have their origins outside the sports arena. Whereas situational and environmental approaches consider sport a relatively autonomous institution with its own dynamics, rule-making and history, macro-sociological approaches tend to see it as a microcosm of society whose norms and belief systems reflect the larger sociocultural context. Thus, Wann et al. (2001) identify the general lack of concern for the wellbeing of others in society and (exposure to) societal violence as “issue-relevant” factors that may account for sports crowd violence. Instead, collective behavior scholars, building on Smelser’s (1962) value-added theory, explain fan violence as a hostile expression of underlying strains and grievances (Lewis, 2007). Structural strain, which is a key determinant considered by these scholars, refers to norms, beliefs, or experiences that can be a source of strain, such as a generalized sense of deprivation or conflict tied to a larger community problem, or hostile feelings provoked by an antagonistic group (e.g., the police).

From the early work of Taylor (1971) onwards, British sociologists have offered the most systematic macro-sociological analysis of sports crowd violence, with specific reference

to soccer hooliganism. While most early theories are dated, the Leicester School's figurational approach arguably has more enduring appeal (Bairner, 2006). The figurational approach posits that the aggressive masculine identity discussed in section 3.4.2 is influenced by the conditions and values inherent in the socioeconomic background of those involved (Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1986, 1988). The hooligan's relatively deprived social conditions, they argue, are instrumental in the production and reproduction of social norms which are conducive to and tolerant of relatively high levels of aggression and territoriality, especially on the part of males. Although young men with low socioeconomic status are not the only persons who commit acts of sports crowd violence, they are "the most central and persistent offenders in the more serious forms of football hooliganism" (Dunning et al., 1986, p. 240). The figurational approach has been influential in Britain and internationally (Dunning et al., 2002); yet, its focus on socioeconomic status as the key structuring factor in sports crowd violence has been criticized as having limited applicability to other, non-British contexts (Spaaij, 2007).

Dunning's (1999, 2000) more recent account of sports crowd violence puts the issues of social identification and group antagonisms into a macro-sociological context. Spectator identities and conflicts within the sport setting are not entirely situational, but often embedded in historical, social, and political contexts. Dunning (1999, 2000) contends that these identities and conflicts are influenced by the social cleavages ("fault lines") of particular societies. A shared characteristic of all societal fault lines is that they involve variants of "established-outsider figurations" in which intense in-group bonds and correspondingly intense antagonisms towards the out-group are liable to develop. 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; and so on (Dunning, 1999; Dunning et al., 2002). These figurations provide a repertoire of available meanings, interpretations and rituals which are encoded in the shared culture of a given community or society, and which, as such, spectators bring to a sporting event. In so doing, these figurations fuel and contour identificatory ties and group antagonisms in the sport setting which in turn can increase (or decrease) the likelihood of fan violence. The challenge, then, is to ascertain how macro-social factors are mediated or moderated by social environmental, situational, and interpersonal processes to produce sports crowd behaviors which range from active participation in violent acts to active suppression of violence.

4. Discussion: New directions for research

No single factor on its own can explain sports crowd violence. Rather, sports crowd violence emerges from the dynamic interplay between individual, interpersonal, situational, social environmental, and social structural factors. The reciprocal causation between the individual and the environment occurs at varying levels. The social environment and wider social context influence the behavior of the individual or collective, while at the same time the behavior of the individual or group impacts on their environments. The relative weight of each dimension or factor will vary depending on the particular nature of an act of violence, for example whether it is relatively issue-irrelevant or issue-relevant. However, such acts should invariably be understood within the broader social environment and cultural context in which spectators give meaning to a sporting event.

Terrorism is arguably the one form of violence that the socio-ecological model presented here cannot adequately capture. Hallmark sporting events such as the Olympic Games or, recently, the Boston Marathon (in April, 2013), can be symbolic targets for

planned political violence due to their public visibility and the concentration of large numbers of people in one place. This violence usually bears no direct relationship to sports spectators per se. Yet, as Atkinson and Young (2008) demonstrate, terrorist activities surrounding major sporting events may be juxtaposed against the explicit and tacit philosophies underpinning sports contexts, such as human freedoms or more contrived goals like nation building, commercialism, or hegemonic rule. In other words, even planned political violence that ostensibly has little or no direct relation to sport can be considered in terms of the structural organization and culture of sport as a dominant (western) social and economic institution. Moreover, the longer-term consequences of (the threat of) terrorist violence should not be under-estimated. Heightened security and policing at major sporting events transforms the physical and social environment as well as the individual and collective experience of sports spectators and their relations with agents of social control (Goss, Jubenville, & MacBeth, 2003; Fussey, Coaffee, Armstrong, & Hobbs, 2011).

The multi-level analysis outlined in Figure 2 enables an interdisciplinary synthesis that integrates distal and proximate causes of sports crowd violence. However, the complexity of multi-level analyses poses intellectual and practical challenges. First and foremost, the relationships between the different sets of factors require further empirical research and theory development. This article shows how themes and issues emanating from different disciplines are not mutually exclusive but rather contribute different pieces of the same puzzle. The challenge going forward, then, is to ascertain the connections between these pieces. Specifically, further knowledge is needed as to how macro-social processes influence, and are mediated or moderated by, social environmental, situational, and interpersonal dynamics affecting the expression of fan violence. Another issue for further research is how the interplay between different factors might explain variance in the frequency and forms of sports crowd violence in different societies; a question that some scholars have sought to

address in relation to North American and British crowd disorders (Roadburg, 1980; Roberts & Benjamin, 2000). Sports crowd violence is a global phenomenon, but many aspects are culturally specific (Young, 2012).

From a practitioner viewpoint, the prevention and control of sports crowd violence requires understanding the factors that influence it. A multi-level, interdisciplinary analysis enables a fuller understanding of fan violence and the likely effect of potential prevention strategies. A socio-ecological perspective compels policymakers and practitioners to recognize that effective preventative strategies should include a continuum of activities that address multiple levels of the model (Fields et al., 2007). This approach is more likely to sustain positive effects in the longer term than any single intervention targeted at only one dimension, such as the repression of violent offenders. In fact, the interpersonal dynamics of sports crowd violence predict that such intervention will be counter-productive if law enforcers treat all crowd members as potentially dangerous or react to the violence of some crowd members by imposing restraint on all. Understanding how the different pieces of the fan violence puzzle connect is critical for the development of effective prevention strategies. Further research is needed to assist in this matter.

5. Conclusion

Crowd violence continues to be a regular feature of spectator sports across the world. Contemporary research recognizes the diversity and complexity of this violence, but serious interdisciplinary work on the topic remains sparse. This article suggests that there is a need for increased dialogue across academic disciplines. The article has identified themes and issues emanating from different disciplines that may be brought together to produce a fuller analysis. By proposing a socio-ecological model, the article makes a modest contribution to

an interdisciplinary synthesis of sports crowd violence. The model provides a foundation for future research.

A limitation of this article is its focus on a single, yet multi-faceted, type of sports violence, namely spectator violence. Although a number of situational and cultural linkages between player and spectator violence are identified (i.e., the “player violence precipitates spectator violence” hypothesis, and the aggressive masculinity that is ingrained in many sports), the article has not considered in any depth the linkages fan violence shares with the broader landscape of sports-related violence. Formations of sports-related violence include not only acts of violence by spectators or athletes, but a broader range of harmful, or abusive, behaviors (Young, 2012). These different forms of sports-related violence need to be examined as a whole as well as in pieces (Fields et al., 2007). Connecting different modalities of the sports violence landscape constitutes an important way forward in the study of sports-related violence. Here, again, a multi-level, interdisciplinary approach is needed to understand the critical factors that influence violence.

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Figure 1

Continua of sports crowd violence

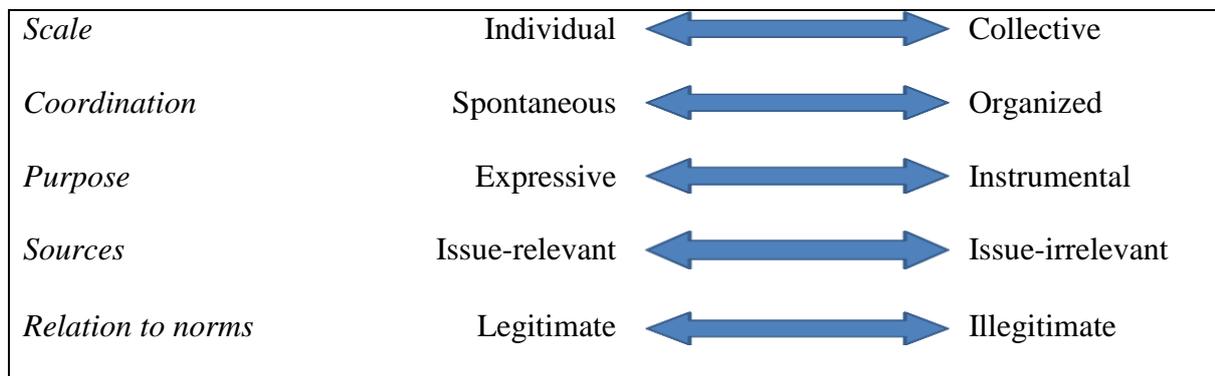


Figure 2

A socio-ecological model of sports crowd violence

