

MINDLESS THUGS RUNNING RIOT? MAINSTREAM, ALTERNATIVE AND ONLINE MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF FOOTBALL CROWD VIOLENCE

Abstract

This article examines the nature of media coverage of football (soccer) crowd violence in three European countries (England, The Netherlands and Spain). It presents an analytic framework that draws on etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspectives, and illustrates how each perspective is (re)presented in different forms of media. Whereas the mainstream media's reporting of football crowd violence generally is consistent with the notions of etic representation and moral panic, alternative media tend to construct emic perspectives and use dramatised personal experience in reporting. The framework presented provides a foundation for further analysis and empirical investigation of media depictions of football crowd violence.

Spectator violence at major sporting events has received significant media coverage across space and time. Crowd violence in sport was reported as early as the late nineteenth century, mostly in an informative fashion rather than to catch the eye and shock or sensationalise (Murphy et al., 1988). However, the nature of the media coverage of sports crowd behaviour has changed considerably over time. This article analyses the diversification of contemporary media representations of football (soccer) crowd violence, which incorporate a vast array of mainstream, alternative and online media. It presents an analytic framework that draws on etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspectives (Pike, 1967), and illustrates how each perspective is (re)presented in different forms of media. Whereas the mainstream media's reporting of football crowd violence, particularly in the popular press, generally is consistent with the notions of etic representation and moral panic, alternative media (i.e. non-professional and non-institutionalised media projects) tend to construct an emic perspective and use dramatised personal experience in reporting. Clearly, these different forms of media representation do not necessarily operate independently from one another, nor do they always neatly follow an etic–emic logic. Indeed, as will be seen, the different media types are interlinked to some degree, and the current mainstream media appear to recognise the content of alternative media. Nonetheless, there exists a tendency for these different forms of media to produce diverging representations of football crowd violence.

This tendency will be illustrated with examples from media reports and primary interviews conducted as part of a four-year research project (2002–06) on football-related violence in Western Europe, which is the region where most academic analysis of football crowd violence has occurred. The project examined the nature and extent of, and responses to, football 'hooliganism' in three European countries (England, The Netherlands and Spain), and included content analysis of mainstream and alternative media reports of football crowd violence in these countries. The specific aims, methods and sampling

strategies of this project are discussed at length elsewhere (Spaaij, 2006). Data from this project are augmented with analysis of more recent (2007–10) reports of football crowd violence in mainstream, alternative and online media in the three countries. The media outlets referred to in this article are from these countries. The framework presented provides a foundation for further analysis and empirical investigation of media depictions of football crowd violence.

Media reporting and academic critique

Academic analyses of mainstream media reporting of football crowd violence commonly draw on the concepts of moral panic and deviancy amplification (Cohen, 2002). Stuart Hall (1978: 26), for example, has emphasised the sensationalistic and exaggerated nature of press coverage of English football crowd violence, arguing that, rather than being ‘careful, measured, inquiring’, mainstream press treatment has been ‘brutal, short-hand and simplifying’. In a similar vein, Young (1986) contends that the press reports following the 1985 Heysel stadium disaster contributed to ‘a sense of public threat and panic’. On 29 May 1985, European football was shocked by the tragedy that unfolded shortly before the kick-off of the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus at the Heysel stadium in Brussels. With television channels around the world broadcasting live, a charge of Liverpool fans across one of the terraces led Juventus supporters to flee in panic, causing a crumbling wall to collapse and contributing to the deaths of 39 people, most of them Italians. The tragedy that unfolded that night was quickly considered to be the nadir of a history of football crowd violence. Young (1986: 263) found that mainstream press reports of the Heysel disaster were ‘pervaded by hyperbolic and violent language, supported throughout with vivid photographs, thick headlines and bold exclamation and question marks, the cumulative results and effects [of which] become quite alarming, and the symptoms of moral panic emerge’. Young (1986) identifies a number of precipitating and constitutive elements of the ‘amplification spiral’ set in motion by the sequence of dominant reactions to the Heysel tragedy. These include evocative and inflammatory commentaries regarding blame, ‘irrational’ and ‘animal’ behaviour, military rhetoric, the need for violent punishment, and further evils that football crowd violence could produce. The cumulative effect of all this, Young argues, was that:

for some time the dominant ‘public voice’ became very much centred around an intensified and panic-ridden law-and-order campaign, with the alleged threat offered to the general public by football hooliganism quickly gaining momentum (1986: 262).

Recent scholarly analyses suggest that the mainstream media’s coverage of football crowd violence is still consistent with moral panic theory (Poulton, 2005; Tsoukala, 2009). The concept remains instructive for understanding the high level of public concern about the behaviour of football supporters, as well as the outright hostility towards the category of football fans regarded as a threat to society (cf. Thompson, 1998: 9), as reflected in calls for remedial action and punitive solutions. However, a major limitation of such an approach to media analysis is that it focuses (almost) exclusively on externally attributed meanings of football violence. Although I agree with Cohen (2002: 7) that the mainstream media play a fairly self-evident role in defining and shaping social problems, and that ‘their very reporting of certain “facts” can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic’, the procedure of ‘taking the public voice’ (Hall et al., 1978: 62) may conceal as much as it reveals.

For the present purpose, the main point is that such analyses neglect or undervalue the voices and cultural representations of those who are directly implicated in football violence (as perpetrators or victims). This analytical distinction between societal reactions to football violence as proffered in the mainstream media and the personalised stories that reveal how football supporters and self-confessed ‘hooligans’ themselves construct and

interpret football violence echoes the distinction between etic and emic representation. Etic refers to the idea of outsider perspective, which is the viewpoint of a person who has not had a personal or lived experience of a particular cultural or social setting – in this case, football crowd violence or football fandom more generally. In contrast, emic refers to insider perspectives held by those who have personal experience of a particular cultural and social setting (Pike, 1967). In the context of spectator violence in sport, etic representations held by, for example, the mainstream media and the general public tend to be at odds with the (diverse) emic perspectives held by supporters, and particularly perpetrators of violence themselves. To explore these themes, the remainder of this article examines the diverse etic and emic representations of football crowd violence proffered in mainstream, alternative and online media.

Mainstream media coverage of football crowd violence: Dominant tendencies

Mainstream media are those daily newspapers, weekly magazines, television and radio networks, and news websites affiliated with these outlets that are conceived and designed specifically to reach a large, often nationwide, audience. Mainstream media coverage of football crowd violence has been widespread in Europe, and is for the most part condemnatory, using strong and emotive language supported by vivid pictures and television coverage (Weed, 2001; Crabbe, 2003; Poulton, 2006; Tsoukala, 2009). With respect to Europe, I argue that three interrelated tendencies are observable and subject to further empirical investigation. The first tendency is the predominant reliance in mainstream media reporting on a *pathology and irrationality thesis*, which stresses the anti-social behaviour of violent football supporters (Hall, 1978; Poulton, 2005). This tendency is evident in descriptions of violent football supporters as ‘thugs’ (*Sunday Times*, 30 April 2006), ‘yobs’ (*Daily Mail Online*, 2 April 2010) and ‘crazed animals’ (*Daily Mirror*, 26 August 2009), whose behaviour is ‘meaningless’ and ‘mindless’ (*Times Online*, 25 January 2009). The use of stigmatising terms has become commonplace, and often adheres to a binary logic, divorcing football ‘hooligans’ from ‘genuine fans’ and accentuating the contrast between the violence of football supporters and the supposedly peaceful and compliant nature of the society in which football takes place.

The second tendency is a focus on *law and order* and upholding the value of security (Tsoukala, 2009: 125). Mainstream media coverage of football crowd violence portrays violent football supporters as a serious threat to the social and moral order of society – hence its rhetoric of ‘fear’ (*El País*, 3 May 2002), ‘rampage’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 2003), ‘mayhem’ (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 April 2010), ‘terror’ (*El Periódico*, 5 February 2010), ‘pitched battles’ (*Observer*, 2 April 2000), ‘terrace wars’ (*Sun*, 9 December 2010), ‘gun battles’ (*Guardian*, 2 May 1999) and ‘invasion’ (*De Volkskrant*, 8 June 2008). The law-and-order message focuses on fatalities, injuries, destruction of property, intimidation and looting. Media reports also regularly call for remedial action and punitive solutions, such as the possibility of issuing police with more weaponry, and tougher legislative and sentencing options to counter hooligan behaviour (e.g. *De Telegraaf*, 25 September 2001; *El Periódico*, 23 January 2003). Media accounts of football crowd violence have also adopted a predictive style of reporting about potential violence, which may trigger an increased media presence and more widespread reporting of the most minor incidences of trouble. For example, *The Guardian* (29 October 2004) wrote about how ‘Hooligans Launch Fightback’, while the *Evening Standard* (26 September 2003) pre-empted the upcoming derby between English football clubs West Ham United and Millwall by arguing that ‘amid all the talk of rucks and riots it’s easy to forget that there’s a football match to be played ... though the result may not dominate the headlines’. In relation to the predictive nature of press coverage, Murphy et al. (1988) argue that the mainstream press have played a

significant role in defining match days and football grounds as times and places in which fighting could be engaged in and aggressive forms of masculinity displayed. This tendency contradicts available empirical evidence on the types of behaviour that are associated with football crowd violence, thereby skewing our broader understanding of the extent and nature of the problem. In the United Kingdom, for example, the majority of crowd behaviour incidents take place away from football grounds – that is, not inside, near or outside them. The level of football crowd violence inside football grounds is generally low (Frosdick and Newton, 2006: 410).

The third tendency of mainstream media representations of football crowd violence is what Hall et al. (1978: 223) call the *convergence* of two or more activities that are implicitly or explicitly linked, leading to the possible amplification of the perception of latent disorder, ‘not in the real events being described but in their threat potential for society’. Such convergence is evident, for example, in the image of ‘violent firms’ (*Sun*, 9 December 2010) led by hooligan ‘generals’ or ‘ringleaders’ (e.g. *Times*, 3 February 1988), which discursively links football violence to the separate problems of organised crime and (armed) insurgency. The Spanish newspaper *El Periódico* has used a ‘mafia’ label to portray a football hooligan formation (Casuals FCB) as a ‘criminal organisation’ engaging in drug trafficking, extortion and other types of organised crime (*El Periódico*, 11 September 2010). One of the articles on the subject was entitled ‘Casuals, a Catalan mafia’ (*El Periódico*, 19 September 2010). Media accounts that use such imagery tend to stress the meticulous planning and organisation involved in football violence, as in the following extract from the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (19 November 2010):

A new generation of teenage football jobs has sparked a resurgence in hooliganism across Britain, and particularly in Yorkshire ... They employ new tactics to try and sneak under the police radar, driving in convoys rather than travelling on trains or specially hired coaches and focusing on lower league matches which are less heavily policed than the big clubs.

Other types of convergence portrayed in the mainstream media include the hooligan drug dealer (linking hooliganism to drug trafficking), football ‘lager louts’ (linking football violence to heavy drinking) and the racist hooligan (highlighting the supposedly racist and xenophobic ideologies of football supporters). For example, in the lead-up to the Euro 2000 tournament, *The Independent* (11 June 2000) published an article with the headline ‘Hooligan Drug Dealers Move to Exploit Euro 2000 Fans’, quoting British detectives’ claims that ‘organised criminals plan to use Euro 2000 as a ready-made marketplace for drugs, fake designer clothes and counterfeit currency’.

Football crowd violence in alternative media

Football-related violence has proven a popular genre within the global news and entertainment industry. The available products include an ever-expanding range of books, documentaries, films and digital games (Poulton, 2008b). Although some of these products reflect mainstream media coverage in terms of their form and content, others are best understood as alternative media: non-professional and non-institutionalised media projects. The three main types of alternative media are literature (fanzines, books), visual media (documentaries, films and videos) and online media (websites, blogs, social networking spaces). Alternative media, Atton (2002: 12) argues, ‘provide information about and interpretations of the world which we might not otherwise see and information about the world that we simply will not find anywhere else’. Atton (2002: 154–55) notes that:

The ability to express and publish opinions and viewpoints in the alternative media is radically different from the situation in the mass media. Whereas access to the mass media by readers is severely limited, in the main being through letters to the

editor, the alternative media claim a democratic, participatory ethos, where readers are very often able to contribute articles ... even becoming editors themselves.

In the context of football crowd behaviour, the alternative media's responses to the discourse of the mainstream media not only comprise critiques of this discourse but also the construction of alternative interpretations and explanations of events and stories. Their content thus offers ways of rebalancing media power and enables football supporters to construct and voice their own interpretations, experiences and concerns in ways that are often ignored or marginalised by dominant media institutions. Whereas the mainstream media tend to privilege the voices of politicians, police and so-called experts who become 'primary definers' of events (Hall et al., 1978), alternative media use a 'different cast of voices' in privileging voices from below and 'native reporting' (Harcup, 2003: 360). However, in most cases the voices reflected in alternative media reach a smaller, more specialist audience (i.e. those who are at least vaguely interested), compared with mainstream media reporting, which tends to have more generalist appeal.

Alternative media may contest mainstream media representations of football crowd violence in a number of ways, notably by highlighting how the mainstream media exaggerate, distort or misrepresent spectator misbehaviour, and how heavy-handed policing and ill-informed policy measures affect the match-going experiences of well-behaved supporters and may themselves be a cause of football violence. Alternative media have also been used as a platform for the mobilisation of football supporters to protest against proposed anti-hooligan legislation or other issues. Furthermore, alternative fan media often attempt to emphasise to law-abiding fans (which are the overwhelming majority) – for example, by stressing the positive contributions of football supporters in providing match-day entertainment and creating a vibrant atmosphere inside the stadium. Supporter groups and associations can use these media to publicly demarcate themselves as law-abiding fans, and to demand more effective safety and security policies. This can be done by communicating the need for targeted intervention instead of generalist measures that affect all supporters, as reflected in public statements by Dutch football supporters that 'hooligans are not supporters' and 'punish the hooligans, not the supporters' (e.g. *De Telegraaf*, 25 September 2001). Thus official supporter associations generally applaud the remedial action and punitive solutions proposed by journalists and politicians, but they also warn that well-behaved supporters should be exempt from such counter-measures.

Literature

Notwithstanding these commonalities, there is great diversity in the form and content of alternative media. Football fanzines and other literary forms are a case in point. The fanzine potentially offers one of the few counterpoints to the mainstream media's depiction of football crowd violence (e.g. Taylor, 1991: 13–14), and can be seen as a site of cultural contestation (Jary et al., 1991). There are nevertheless important variations in the cultural properties of football fanzines, and the cultural meanings and messages of the stories and images they produce. The majority of football fanzines explicitly or implicitly distance themselves from the hooligan stereotype, and attempt to construct and promote alternative fan models; indicative of this trend is the following extract from the Dutch fanzine *Ultras Magazine*:

Every week hundreds of football supporters at different Dutch clubs spend many hours organising a wide range of ambient activities to demonstrate their support for their club, city and region. Many tens of thousands of supporters enjoy these activities every week and players are also highly appreciative of them. Unfortunately, week in week out the established media prove that they have more attention for the negative by-phenomena than for positive ones. The football association and (local) government are influenced by [this media fixation] to the extent that they keep introducing new measures which make it more difficult for football supporters

to attend football matches. By means of this magazine we seek to showcase the positive tendency that has been developing in Dutch stadiums in recent years. (*Ultras Magazine*, May 2005: 4–5)

In contrast, representing a small yet significant section of alternative media that glorifies ‘hooligan culture’, some fanzines openly celebrate football violence and aggressive masculinity. Such fanzines may promote explicitly the use of violence within or outside the football context. Furthermore, some of the more moderate fanzines regularly contain references to football crowd violence. Prominent (ex-)hooligans may contribute to these fanzines by commenting on recent incidents or by recounting the heydays of football violence at their club. According to the editor of an English football fanzine, these contributions tend to boost the sale of the fanzine: ‘The stuff they write, people want to read it. People like their stories and, to be honest, they are quite prominent figures among [fans].’ (Author interview, 2004)

To this particular strand of alternative literature we should add the various memoirs and autobiographies written by self-confessed hooligans and ex-hooligans. Starting in the late 1980s, several British ex-hooligans have turned their past exploits into best-selling books featuring ‘a carousel of reputation and myth, claim and counterclaim, tall tales and journalistic dispatches from the front line’ (Robson, 2000: 22). This form of alternative media praxis represents a form of ‘native reporting’ that is quite distinct from the mainstream media in both product and process. The emic accounts of football violence offered in these books emphasise first-person eyewitness accounts by participants, and are usually unashamedly partisan and boastful, recounting years or even decades of violent male football fandom associated with a particular football club and its hooligan formation (Redhead, 2004: 395–96). In 2003, London’s leading sports bookshop Sportpages stocked 45 different hooligan-related books (*Evening Standard*, 2 June 2003). This development is comparatively new and less widespread in other European countries, where self-confessed hooligan supporters have been more reluctant to publish their accounts, although certain Dutch supporters have featured in hooligan memoirs at home and abroad. Some fan formations in the Netherlands and Belgium have published illustrated histories of their groups and their violent exploits (e.g. Pieloor et al., 2002; Luysterborg and Van Cauwenbergh, 2004). In both countries, hooligan-related books are popular among self-confessed hooligans and voyeurs alike, with Dutch bookstore Selexyz offering over two dozen different fan memoirs by British (ex-)hooligans. Despite their popularity, the books written by ex-hooligans are often ridiculed by football supporters for being economical with the truth, with ‘exaggerated tales of bravado and bad writing characterized by excessive expletives, belligerence and bragging’ (Poulton, 2007: 154). This form of native reporting nonetheless tends to be of great interest and amusement to fellow supporters, and can enable its authors to obtain celebrity status within the fan communities they can come to represent.

Visual media

Alternative media representations of football crowd violence can also be found in film, television and video. A plethora of mainstream and alternative documentaries on football violence have been produced, as well as a number of films. These range from movies and documentaries made for and broadcast by mainstream television cable channels to amateur productions that are available to buy on hooligan websites, and which seem to cater for the more discerning hooligan audiences who may well have first-hand experience of football-related violence (Poulton, 2008a: 341). One of the more high-profile mainstream documentaries on football crowd violence in recent years has been the eight-part series *International Football Factories*, which was based on, and is an extension of, *The Real Football Factories*, in which actor Danny Dyer interviewed notorious football hooligans across Britain and narrated the history of British hooligan culture. *The Real Football*

Factories and *International Football Factories*, shown on the UK Bravo TV channel, set out to provide a glimpse into the ‘real’ world of football violence. The production company, ZigZag Productions, emphasises the series’ exploration of ‘the in-depth life of football hooligans and hooligan firms’, while the international series offers viewers ‘a look into the world of football hooliganism across Europe’ (www.zigzag.uk.com/international-football-factories). Recent films on this subject include *The Football Factory* (2004), based on the book by John King (1997), and *Green Street Hooligans* (2005). Although best understood as etic representations of football violence, former hooligans have acted as professional consultants for both of these movies. Indeed, hooligan entrepreneurs have been quick to recognise the economic and status benefits that may accrue from their involvement in media production. Mike, a 47-year-old former football hooligan portrayed in the Dutch media as a threatening ‘folk devil’, has been at the forefront of the crossover between alternative and mainstream media. Mike produces and sells live recordings of violent confrontations in the football context, including the homemade DVD sequel *Feyenoord Hooligans on Tour*. He is regularly quoted in mainstream media and has featured in several books written by ex-hooligans and journalists, and in the Dutch equivalent of *The Real Football Factories*, the television series *De Harde Kern* (The Hard Core, 1998).

Responses to alternative media representations of football crowd violence

The abovementioned books, documentaries and films all tend to portray supporters as tough and dangerous individuals, committed to their club and skilled in fighting. Emphasis is placed on positively perceived values such as courage, masculinity, physical prowess, group solidarity and loyalty (Spaaij, 2006). Perhaps unsurprisingly, such media have been accused of glorifying and even inspiring football-related violence. For example, politicians and senior police have condemned the production of television documentaries and books on football hooliganism for their potential to incite or intensify inter-group rivalries and violence. Indeed, Poulton (2006: 422) shows how moral panics have regularly been constructed upon the release of documentaries and films, ‘with critics and reviewers in the media attempting to persuade the public of an exigent threat to the “moral order” of society’. Nonetheless, there is indisputably a voyeuristic appeal to football crowd violence which increasingly is wrapped up in a wider commercial enterprise. According to Crabbe (2003: 419), media representations of English football violence provide a repertoire of texts or cultural resources ‘upon which those fans who are attracted to the “adventureland” drama of the England fan reputation can construct identities and play out fantasies in their own terms before a willing audience’. Some of the football supporters interviewed are cognisant of this and are critical of the stereotypes that are (re)produced in such media accounts. Steve, a former English football hooligan in his forties, expresses this as follows in reference to a fellow supporter who is the author of hooligan books:

Of course [he] is gonna write his books. He’s made good money writing these books. I don’t blame him. [His work] glorifies and then broadens the myth. So other people want to be involved in it, want to be associated with it. It’s actually an idea now that propagates violence ... So it’s not coming from football if you know what I mean. It’s coming from a kind of media representation ... And people like [him] have become their kind of servants. It’s dead easy to write. I could dig in to that easy enough to write a book about being a football hooligan and get into all that crap ... Academics love it. The press love it. The TV loves it. But it makes us into animals, and we’re not animals. (Author interview, 2003)

Alongside the type of alternative media that glorifies football violence and in some respects fuels the moral panic surrounding football crowd disorder, other alternative media – including fanzines and documentaries – have sought to challenge and subvert the

portrayal of football supporters as criminals or thugs and the mainstream media's dominant message of law and order. Mainstream media have at times recognised and embraced these alternative representations. Of particular historical and cultural significance in this regard is the Jimmy McGovern-written drama/documentary *Hillsborough*, which appeared on the ITV television network in 1996. *Hillsborough* is arguably best understood as an emic account of the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster, which claimed the lives of 96 Liverpool supporters attending an FA Cup semi-final match against Nottingham Forest. The Hillsborough disaster caused nationwide shock and outrage, not only because of the objective severity of the event but also because it fed into a pre-existing climate of public fear over football crowd violence. In the aftermath, mainstream media commentaries – particularly in the tabloid press – blamed Liverpool supporters for the deaths that had occurred, focusing on their allegedly appalling behaviour (Scraton, 2009). McGovern was inspired to write *Hillsborough* after being approached by two mothers who lost children at Hillsborough (McGovern, 2004). He was so appalled during their stories at rehearing tales of the 'lies and incompetence' of the police that he began to question his capacity to present a balanced account of events in writing the script. He therefore called in an experienced producer to go over his writing and to challenge his portrayal of events. This is not to suggest that McGovern's key intention was even-handedness. In fact, he makes it clear that he wrote *Hillsborough* on behalf of 'the victims or their families' to 'empower the powerless', but in so doing an appearance of balance was necessary.

Hillsborough lends further evidence to the point made earlier that, despite their opposite tendencies in terms of their form and content, mainstream and alternative media are partially overlapping worlds with considerable synergies. Some mainstream journalists monitor and consult alternative media such as football fanzines, which can be seen to give supporters some degree of voice and influence in the mainstream media. Occasionally, leading newspapers and magazines publish background articles that locate football violence within an emic rather than an etic (law and order) framework. For example, on 1 April 2006 journalist Paul Onkenhout wrote a column for the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* in which he took a strong stance against the authorities' 'amateuristic' handling of crowd behaviour during a semi-final cup match between Ajax and Roda JC. The article, entitled 'Kafka in Amsterdam, or: The Fate of 193 Roda Supporters', was well received by football supporters and widely discussed on supporter websites. Onkenhout laments not only the arrest (for no apparent reason) of 193 Roda supporters, but also the 'disproportional violence' by police against supporters during previous football matches. He quotes at length the stories of two Roda supporters who were arrested on the day – one a retired classical languages teacher and the other a senior newspaper editor – thereby challenging some of the dominant stereotypes surrounding football supporters.

Online media and football crowd violence

Mainstream and alternative media representations of football crowd violence are nowadays frequently distributed over the internet. Alternative media have been burgeoning online in recent years, using information and communication technologies to supplement and exponentially increase opportunities for public communication, sociality, mobilisation and direct action (Atton, 2002: 133). Many football fanzines now also or exclusively operate on the internet because it minimises the financial and physical burdens of printing and distributing. Their websites also provide new spaces for opinion- and identity-formation through open discussion forums and social networking spaces. The content and form of online media coverage of football crowd violence echo the diversity in alternative media representations discussed above. Zaitch and De Leeuw (2010) identify eight types of website visited and used by football supporters:

- official football club sites
- official supporter sites

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- national or international supporter sites above club level
 - unofficial supporter sites focusing on club or football issues
 - unofficial supporter sites focusing on supporters themselves
 - individual blogs
 - unofficial sites on other activities indirectly connected with football
 - private commercial websites.

Here, I will concentrate on unofficial supporter sites that focus on supporters themselves, and that are central to the production, use and dissemination of images of football crowd violence. It should be noted, however, that this type of supporter website forms only a small minority of the total number of official and unofficial football supporter websites, and that official fan associations may also use their sites to influence public perceptions about football-related violence. For example, in 2004 the official supporter association of Dutch football club FC Utrecht used its website to launch a ‘naming and shaming’ campaign against heavy-handed policing. It displayed a photograph of a riot police officer who it held responsible for the police’s use of violence against club supporters, asking the public to reveal the identity of the officer and demanding financial compensation for the victims.

The internet offers football supporters an alternative arena to construct a particular collective image to present to others, and to establish and contest (masculine) fan reputations. Many militant supporter groups have their own websites, which offer a range of material on the subject of football violence, such as press reports, eyewitness accounts, real-time video clips and message boards where self-confessed hooligans can exchange stories, experiences, abuse and threats. Some of the larger supporter groups sell a variety of products in their online stores, including jumpers, hats and scarves, and DVDs. Their websites tend to offer free access to official statements, photographs, fanzines and members-only message boards. There are also websites focusing on international hooligan culture more generally, such as www.hardcorehooligan.nl and www.ultrasworld.com, as well as a range of websites offering hooligan-related products such as DVDs. Popular websites such as YouTube also contain a variety of free video clips on football-related violence posted by supporters.

The language and imagery used by football supporters who visit and maintain these websites closely reflect the more radical alternative media discussed earlier. The primary goal of these websites is to portray supporters as tough and dangerous individuals, emphasising values such as courage, aggressive masculinity, physical prowess and group solidarity. Some websites explicitly celebrate alcohol and drugs as a constitutive part of their social world. The violent potential of these supporter groups is also embodied in masculine postures in an attempt to project control, dominance and intimidation. This imagery and language is carefully read, scrutinised and commented upon by opposing supporters on websites (Zaitch and De Leeuw, 2010).

Supporter websites and blogs that provide interactive spaces for public communication and identity-formation have largely replaced more traditional ways of information exchange among those interested in football violence. Spanish football hooligan David is a case in point. David first established contacts with like-minded pen pals in the early 1990s via advertisements in and letters to the editors of the fanzine *Super Hinch*. More recently, however, he has switched to online forms of communication with supporters of other football clubs. Using a fake online identity, he regularly exchanges information – including real-life video footage and photographs of football violence shared digitally via the internet on discussion forums, message boards and blogs. This form of ‘cyber hooliganism’, he argues, constitutes a relatively safe and anonymous substitute for physical violence (Author interview, 2004).

The mainstream media recognise the significance of the internet as a site for mediated football violence, especially its potential use as a means of inter-group communication or

to orchestrate violent confrontation (cf. Fafinski, 2006). In the lead-up to the Euro 2000 tournament, *The Observer* (2 April 2000) published an article with the headline ‘Hooligans Link Up on the Net to Plot Mayhem at Euro 2000’. The article uses the strong emotive and predictive rhetoric characteristic of most mainstream media reports of football violence, but with an additional focus on the internet as a platform for communication between violent football supporters:

Gangs of football hooligans throughout Europe are plotting to turn this summer’s European Championships into an orgy of violence and mayhem ... An *Observer* investigation has revealed that thugs are already forging alliances and swapping tips on how to evade police and border controls, and obtain weapons, drugs and alcohol in the cities where games are held ... Messages on hooligan websites show that followers of Tottenham Hotspur have already joined forces with hooligans from Ajax of Amsterdam.

More recently, the online version of the *Daily Mail* (27 August 2009) reported on the ‘Rampage of the Cyberthugs’, describing how ‘veteran hooligans use the Internet to set up bloody battle’, and quoting police sources who claim that ‘the Internet is fuelling a terrifying resurgence in football violence’. The article argues that ‘fans officially banned from grounds up and down the country are using mobile phones and the web to choreograph punch-ups before and after matches’, a ‘trend’ that ‘has gathered momentum amid a surge of films and books’. Not surprisingly, supporter sites are directly subject to police surveillance and regulation. Although virtual threats are usually unlikely to result in physical confrontation, police acknowledge that online pre-match conversations or provocations may give an indication of supporters’ intentions and expectations. In response to this development, an increasing number of online football supporter chat rooms and message boards are now accessible only to registered members, somewhat restricting the opportunities for outsiders to peer into ‘hooligan culture’ anonymously (Spaaij, 2006).

Conclusion

This article has shown how, in addition to the mainstream media coverage that has been the primary focus of academic analysis since the 1970s, a plethora of alternative and online media have been established, which deal directly with spectator violence at football matches. Mainstream, alternative and online media tend to differ markedly in their styles of reporting: they not only use different casts of sources but also have different relationships between producers, sources and consumers, with alternative and online media frequently blurring the lines between the three (cf. Harcup, 2002). The burgeoning of alternative and online media has led to a profound diversification of media representations of football crowd violence, including new forms of emic representation that glorify and celebrate football violence as well as supporter activism targeted, *inter alia*, at the negatively perceived consequences of repressive anti-hooligan policies. Despite these important differences, the different forms of media are interlinked to some degree, and the current mainstream media appear to recognise the content of alternative media. As shown in this article, an analytic framework that draws on etic and emic perspectives can drive research to better understand how different media types relate to the issue of football crowd violence.

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