

What are the main features of football hooliganism



This essay will firstly look at the phenomenon of football, it will then explain what football hooliganism is and its main features. It will then identify the explanations for it in terms of social class, analysing the theories into why certain social classes are involved in football hooliganism. It will then critique the explanations of football hooliganism that are solely based on social class in light of the new 1990's hooligan who has been hailed as a superthug,/headhunter.

Future suggestions for explanations will subsequently be briefly analysed. Football in the 21st century is the most popular British spectator sport, which attracts in excess of 30, 000 spectators each week, well above its nearest rival greyhound racing. Every year throughout Britain football attracts around 4-5 million people, therefore it is not surprising to learn that with such a large number of people present at one given time and place that some form of conflict arises, this has been coined ' football hooliganism' According to Dunning et al 1986, the concept of football hooliganism is very complexed. As it features a wide range of features ranging to swearing and horseplay to pitch invasions and serious physical violence.

It is very different from other forms of violence where the motive is often profit, however as well as being violent in nature it also attracts other criminal activity such as drug dealing and counterfeiting. Certain spectators of football who claim to be supporters treat fighting an aggressive behaviour as part and parcel of attending a football match that adds to the excitement and pleasure of the whole experience. Football hooligans are those who go to football matches and engage in aggressive and violent behaviour before, during and after the game (Kerr 1994). Furthermore Cowie, 1989 described

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then as noisy, young, violent and generally destructive. Football hooliganism has many features and can take place in a number of contexts.

It ranges from a hand-to-hand punch up between two rival supporters to a huge fight between hundreds of supporters with weapons such as missiles, petrol bombs, coins, fireworks and knives. Such fights also vary in location. In the past hooliganism was mainly focused in and around the ground, however since the late 1980's with the increase in police controls, CCTV and seat segregation, hooliganism now takes place in and around the town centre, in pubs and on council estates, away from police presence before and after the match. Songs and chants are often sung at the match as part of the match but moreover they are a feature of the hooliganism, as they are challenges to fights, involving threats of violence, racist taunts and boasts about previous victories. They are used to challenge aggression and violence between rival supporters and the police.

The chant about Harry Roberts which is often sung is a direct reference to the killing of two police officers in 1968. Violence, aggression, fights in and around the ground and chants have been the main features of football hooliganism since the media and government recognised it as a serious problem back in the 1960's. which was also around the time of moral panics among the young (Cohen 1973). However today the features of football hooliganism have become more clever, resilient and more resistant to the powers of the police. Confrontations and fights between rival supporters are pre-arranged via the internet and by mobile phones. New football hooligans often support extreme right wing racist organisations such as the BNP and National Front.

In the past hooligans tended to wear identifying colours and travel on special football coaches, however the new football hooligan wears designer labels that reflect the current fashions are generally stylish and travel to the game in their own cars, on the train or in hired vans in order to distinguish themselves from rival supporters and the police. Many sociologists, such as Dunning et al 1982/90, Harrington 1968 and Trivizas 1980, believe that football hooliganism can be explained in terms of social class. It has been popularly explained as a predominately working class phenomenon. The statistical evidence throughout the years supports this belief.

Since the 1960's those convicted of football hooliganism come from social class 3 and 4. Harrington 1968 found that 64% were from social class 4 and 10% were from social class 3, a trend which has largely remained constant up until the present day. Where Dunning et al 1990 found that 65% of hooligans came from social class 3, whereas only 13-15% were from social class 2, 2-6% social class 1. Social class according to Taylor 1976, can explain football hooliganism amount the working class because of footballs strong traditional links with working class communities. Football has largely been regarded as a Working class sport. In the mid 1960's the media's portrayal of football hooliganism drew many more young males from the rough sections of the working class to the sport, this in turn encouraged many of the respectable supporters to withdraw their support, leaving behind the rough working class.

For the working classes football is an appropriate attractive expression for their masculinity, aggression and violence, which would otherwise be frowned upon outside of a football match. The working class have strong

kinship and locality ties therefore hooliganism is a way of expressing hostility and defending their own, their gangs and the towns reputation against rival football supporters. Furthermore, the subculture and socialisation of the working class at home, work and in their peer group tolerates values and encourages open aggressive behaviour because violence to them is a source of excitement, meaning and status. Due to the fact that the working class generally do not have the same educational and occupational opportunities for success.

Clarke argued that hooliganism among the working class was and is a form of resistance against the middle class who have enforced their own interests and changes upon their working class sport. In other words the commercialisation of football and the packaging of the game as entertainment. However, Taylor 1987 has argued that social class alone cannot explain the recent rise of the superthug, organiser and orcenstrators of violence who are from the lower middle class strata. Or indeed the football casual who is at the heart of English football hooliganism abroad i. e.

Euro 96/00. The statistical evidence which these explanations rely upon lack reliability and validity. The police, according to Harris & Armstrong 1991, are not interested in the social class of the hooligan and only ask and record it because there s space for it on t charge sheet. For the charged hooligan it appears to be safer for them to be unemployed or working class as the police might ask questions at their work place, therefore many lie about their occupation when charged. There has been a recent 8% rise in the number of football hooligans according to the recent figures realised by the National

Crime Intelligence Service 2000, which coincides with the trend in the new 1990's football hooligans.

According to Keating 1985, they are middle class, males in their late 20's early 30's, married with children and a mortgage, have previous convictions for violence, are organised and keep a diary of events. The behaviour of these new hooligans cannot be explained in terms of social class as their subculture and experience's do not constitute football hooliganism.

Armstrong 1997, supports Taylor's argument and further believes that explanations based on social class is a over generalised and over simplistic view of football hooliganism. Since hooligans are in fact very diverse in their make-up and can include supporters from across all classes.

In conclusion, it appears that social class despite being an incomplete explanation of football hooliganism due to the new middle class football hooligan can explain the majority of football hooliganism since 65% are working class. However, social class fails to explain football hooliganism among the middle class. Therefore, the troubled state of English masculinity which affects individuals from across all social classes regardless of subculture and past experiences is a more plausible explanation of football hooliganism. In the future in light of the recent rise in football hooliganism and the expected football trouble at the world cup, next month explanations need to focus upon why some young men are drawn towards football hooliganism, social class and masculinity are only two fundamental factors in the phenomenon of hooliganism.