

CASE REPORT

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The Hooligan's Mind

ABSTRACT: Football hooliganism is a world phenomenon and an everyday matter. Society spends a lot of money to prevent and control it. We need to know what hooligans think in order to anticipate their actions and prevent their violent behaviors. In this paper, I propose a theory of the hooligan's conscious mind, by analyzing the thinking of a real Italian hooligan who was my patient. I will show that violent behaviors of hooligans are not unconscious, because the mental states (both beliefs and goals) of hooligans are explicitly represented in their mind. In contrast, I will suggest that both supporting and fighting are planned (i.e., goal directed), because "recognized supremacy" is explicitly represented as the ultimate goal. In fact, hooligans support and fight in order to be recognized as good hooligans, i.e. as good supporters as well as good fighters.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, behavioral science, violent behaviors, hooligans, supporting, fighting, goals, recognized supremacy

Football hooliganism is a world phenomenon (1) and an everyday matter. Data show that violence, which is related with European football and several North American sports, has steadily increased from the 1960s (2), becoming a pressing problem in many nations. Violence erupts at sports with significant frequency (3–10), although both incidents with little reader appeal (11) and misconducts, that are not seen by the police or that do not justify an arrest (12,13), are underreported by the media and official estimates. Violent behaviors take place on both match and non-match days and in other contexts (i.e., bars, pubs, shops, railway and bus stations, streets, etc.) apart from the stadium, making it harder for the police to anticipate clashes.

The violence itself and the efforts made to control it are experienced as problems by society (14). Tragic events make society spend a lot of money (10,15) to prevent and control football hooliganism. One way to do it is to know what a hooligan thinks in order to anticipate his (notice that the "masculine" pronoun has been used as the majority of "hooligans" are male) actions. As Haggmann (16), p. 572, observed, "research into football hooliganism is one of the few burgeoning areas of violence research in Europe." Unfortunately, the social-psychological literature lacks a full theory of the hooligan's mind. Both popular and academic explanations (i.e., alcohol or drug consumption, player violence, unemployment, affluence, situational or environmental factors, individual or physiological differences, identification with a team, personal history of violence, traditional rivalry between the teams, etc.) are not enough (17). As some researchers (18,19) suggest using observational methods, both popular and mass-psychological explanations are not supported by evidence. For example, alcohol consumption cannot be said to be a direct cause of football hooliganism, because not all hooligans drink before fighting and not all of them who drink later fight (20).

Nor can player violence be said to be a direct cause, because incidents take place before, after, and during a match.

Case Report

In this paper, I will try to construct a theory of the hooligan's mind by analyzing the thinking of a real hooligan.

D. B. is 33 and he is an official "ultras" (Italian hooligan) of "Torino Calcio" (Turin soccer team). Because of his heroin-dependence disorder, he was my patient for 2 years. According to DSM-IV (21), he had no comorbid mental disorders.

According to the available data on the social origins and current stratificational rankings of football hooligans in Belgium (22), England (20,23–26), Italy (27–31), the Netherlands (32), and Scotland (12), D. B. had all the social characteristics of the majority of football hooligans. In fact, he came from the lower reaches of the social scale, he worked in a manual occupation, and he had a low level of formal education.

D. B. sheds light on his dysfunctional behaviors, such as his soccer-related misconducts (because of them he had legal problems), which he planned carefully:

We meet at the bar every day. Furthermore we attend a weekly formal meeting, in which we talk about next matches ... We meet to plan our strategies for the match. We plan the best strategy of supporting our team and defeating our enemies in order to dominate their hometown ... We plan to fight against them and to destroy their things and their hometown.

Many authors (23,33–37) agree about planned violence. According to the operational notions of "goal" and "purposive behavior" (38–40), planned behaviors are "goal-directed" because they are currently and directly regulated and controlled by internal anticipatory representations of actions, effects, and results. Goals (i.e., desires, intentions, objectives, motives, needs, ambitions, duties, obligations, etc.) are based on beliefs and are hierarchically ordered in the mind. Violent planned behaviors

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need an explanation of the hooligan's conscious mind (both beliefs and goals) to make them clear.

Discussion

Supporting

First of all, hooligans wish their team would always win. Furthermore, they believe that, according to the matches, there is always a chance that they can win. The hooligans believe, however, that winning is always possible, i.e., there is always a chance to win. So they always support their team. Nobody would waste his time and strength to support a team if he does not believe that there is the least chance to win. D. B. says:

We follow our team everywhere. We make every effort and sacrifice to support it . . . We always go to stadium long before the match and go home long after. Before the match we have to prepare the choreographies. After, we have to clean up the stadium . . . We have to stay long in the sun or in the cold. In the midweek matches we have to leave our own work to go to the stadium to help our friends . . . We spend a lot of time during the week to plan our strategies for the match.

There are two mental states: a belief, "winning is always possible," i.e., "there is always a chance to win," and a goal, "to win." Furthermore, hooligans believe that they can contribute to the achievement of the goal (to win) because of their enthusiasm. They believe that the result of the match is under their influence. They believe that their team will win whenever they encourage its players and discourage the opponents. They believe that they can make this happen by means of songs, choruses, and choreographies. D. B. says:

We have to make the choreographies pleasant, so that the stadium is pleasant to the eye. The stadium has to be beautiful. Each player has to be struck by listening to the songs and watching the choreographies. Opponents have to be struck in order to realize that we command.

Each hooligan needs choreographies and choruses to encourage his players and discourage the opponents. Encouraged and well supported, players can improve their performance and be more efficacious to win. On the contrary, the opponents, discouraged and denigrated, can decrease their performance and be rendered ineffective to win. Furthermore, each hooligan needs choreographies and choruses to communicate (to all the people who are watching) his cleverness as a supporter, i.e., his skill in prevailing over his opponents and influencing the outcome of the match, as D. B. says:

Choreographies and songs are signs of our strength. Watching our choreographies and listening to our choruses strike people who realize our care, attention and attachment to the colors of the team. People have to say we are clever, we are good fans, because we spend a lot of time . . . We want to be good supporters, the best football fans in the world.

In summary, each hooligan wants his team to win. He believes that there is always a chance to win, but he also believes that his team needs his support. So he spends his time preparing songs,

choruses, and choreographies for the match. Furthermore, each hooligan wants to be considered by others as a good supporter-hooligan. So he believes he needs to show his skills in supporting.

Each hooligan believes that, as his team wins (thanks to his support), that victory is his as well, because each hooligan identifies himself with the team that he supports (41–44). He wishes his team would always win, so he, too, can win. Here is what D. B. says:

Every time our team wins, we win. Victory is always ours . . . Every victory belongs to us, to all people. The winner is our hometown . . . The real winners aren't the players, but the colors of the team, that is the colors of the town . . . and the fans who identify themselves in those colors . . . Players come and go, only ultras remain. The colors remain . . . We are faithful to our team for our lifetime . . . Whenever our team wins, that is to say that we have won.

D. B. says that victory belongs to hooligans. D. B. believes that his team represents the town where that team is situated, and the culture, values, and the people of that town, because fans are faithful to their team for their lifetime. So each victory of his team is a victory of his culture, of his values, of his town, and of himself, in his nation and in all the world, because he believes that he belongs to that culture and to that town and he identifies himself with them. Identifying himself with the team, colors, town, neighborhood, and nation, he believes that each victory of his team is equivalent to his victory.

Recognized Supremacy

We are examining a situation of competition between two antagonists. There is the team that we support and that we want to win. And there is the rival team that we want to lose. Furthermore, there are the rival hooligans that, in contrast, want their team to win and our team to lose. We know that they, too, support their team, encouraging their players and discouraging their opponents. In fact, besides what we believe and want, we know what our enemies believe and want, because we have representations (both beliefs and goals) in our mind and of the mind (both beliefs and goals) of others (45). Whoever supports a team knows that rival fans think and behave just like him. They, too, wish their team would always win and think that winning is always possible. They, too, think their behaviors could influence in a positive way their favorites and negatively their enemies.

Each fan believes that the rival fans, too, have the goal to win (and the belief that it is possible thanks to their support) in order to be recognized as good supporters. So each hooligan believes that he needs to compete with his opponents in order to prevail over them, i.e., to support (i.e., to sing, shout, and insult) better than their opponents. Unfortunately, songs and choreographies are not enough in those matches in which there is a traditional rivalry or a history of hostility between hooligans (4) or between friends of enemies or enemies of friends (see "The Bedouin Syndrome" (11,46,47)). In such situations, hooligans believe that they need to fight against and destroy, because they believe that only fighting and destroying make them dominate opponents, so their team can win. Here is what D. B. says:

We go to the away stadiums to command . . . to dominate them in their hometown. We always do that, specially against those teams which are our enemies . . . Before

those matches we plan to fight against them and to destroy their things . . . They have to show respect for us . . . Home hooligans have to make themselves be respected. They can't let enemies command them, in their hometown. So a clash happens.

Hooligans believe that only fighting and destroying make them better than their opponents and eventually the best of all hooligans, i.e. the best supporters and the best fighters, because they believe that only violence can make their supremacy be clearly communicated and well recognized. Smith (2) said that the clash between traditional enemies is "issue-oriented" (spontaneous). I suggest that clash is "goal-directed" (planned), because "recognized supremacy" is explicitly represented in the hooligan's mind as the ultimate goal. D. B. says:

Only after the clash you can say who is superior. Destroying shops, pubs and the stadium, damaging cars and buses, fighting against enemies, all shows our strength. So others can be afraid of us and show respect and admiration.

In other words, each hooligan needs to leave strong and unequivocal signs in order to make his supremacy be fully recognized, not only by those opponents on that occasion, but by everybody, every time, and everywhere. In fact, both violent and nonviolent behaviors of hooligans have a communicative function, because they are "behaviorally implicit communication" acts, i.e., they are not specialized and codified behaviors, but unmarked, undisclosed, not manifest, and thus deniable (38,45). They become "signs" of the hooligan's mind (both beliefs and goals), and make others generate beliefs about it, not only as the result of explicit communication (special message sending) but also by interpreting his behavior. Marsh et al. (34) said that the violent behavior of hooligans is "symbolic." I suggest that it is practical: to fight, to destroy, etc. It needs to be seriously violent in order to make opponents generate the belief that he is a good fighter as a result of that behavior. All the people (i.e., both witnesses and absentees, both actual and potential opponents) have to learn, remember, and talk about what happened, in order to be struck dumb and to submit themselves. In fact, D. B. says:

Choreographies and songs are signs of our strength . . . Destroying and fighting shows our strength . . . Our goal is to leave a mark. We have to show that at one time we were exactly there . . . We have to defeat our enemies and to be admired and respected. So we need to reach supremacy, that is to command, to be the masters of their hometown.

The achievement of recognized supremacy makes hooligans win honor, i.e., be respected and admired by all the people as good supporters as well as good fighters. Such "supremacy honor" is more than "masculinity honor," which was described by some authors (20,23,34), because "supremacy honor" refers not only to fighting but also to supporting, as D. B. says:

Whenever we go into the other stadiums and watch the choreographies, which our opponents have made, we have great respect for them . . . they make sacrifices just like us . . . They have to show respect for us . . . Destroying . . ., damaging . . ., fighting . . ., all shows our strength. So others can be afraid of us and show respect and admiration . . . We have to defeat our enemies and to be admired and respected.

The achievement of recognized supremacy makes hooligans very happy and excited. Some authors say that hooligans look for pleasure and excitement to offset "boredom" (48) or "routinization" (49) in modern society. I think that such goals are too generic. In contrast, recognized supremacy is more specific. Recognized supremacy makes the behavior of hooligans unique, because it is represented only in their mind (i.e., only hooligans want to command, prevail over opponents, and be recognized as good supporters as well as good fighters).

In summary, each hooligan wants his team to win and believes he can influence players' performance, encouraging his favorites and discouraging his opponents. The victory of his team is the victory of his, because he identifies himself with that team. He also knows that rival hooligans believe and behave like him, so they can invalidate the achievement of his goal to win. So he needs to compete with his opponents in order to prevail over them, so they can be innocuous and he can achieve his goal. The victory communicates his supremacy at supporting, because the victory of his team is living proof, a strong sign, that he was very clever to support his team, and to prevail over his opponents. So everybody can recognize he is a good hooligan, i.e., a good supporter hooligan. At the same time, dominating and prevailing over opponents are just signs of supremacy, especially whenever a hooligan needs to fight and destroy, in order to make his supremacy at fighting be recognized. So everybody can recognize he is a good hooligan, i.e. a good fighter hooligan, too, because in such situations supremacy means to be clever at fighting.

Automatic Violent Behaviors

Besides being planned (i.e., "goal-directed"), violent behaviors of hooligans are sometimes automatic (i.e., "goal-oriented"). Automatic behaviors are not goal-directed, because they are not motivated, monitored, and guided by goals, i.e. they are not regulated by internal representations of the effects. They are not deliberate, nor are they necessarily conscious. They are simple and automatic procedures that deal with our mental representations. However, they are finalistic (although deciding, reasoning, and planning are not possible) because they are purposive to survival. They are teleological in the functional way, without being intentional.

They are automatic and immediate answers that are usually mediated by very strong, negative emotions (e.g., anger or hate) as a result of the perception of being the innocent victim of some damage, injustice, or wrong, e.g., referee's mistakes, or police intimidations. Cognitive factors, e.g., "priming" (50) and "false consensus effect" (51), can influence hooligans' perception of events, so ambiguous or nonexplicit stimuli are enough to erupt in violence. Cognitive distortions, e.g. "overgeneralization," "dichotomous thinking," and "tunnel vision" (52), make people unable to consider alternative behaviors, because their mind has rigid beliefs and goals that focus exclusively on the destruction of the target.

As a result of a "hostile attributional bias" (53), hooligans perceive malevolence (54) in some behaviors or attitudes of their opponents or of the police, even when it does not exist, so hooligans engage in violent acts. Notice that the same bias can make the police be violent (35). Furthermore, both police and opponents' intimidations become signs of challenge, which make a hooligan need to fight in order to communicate his supremacy. He cannot show fear and run away, because he cannot make his goal fail, as D. B. says:

Our opponents cover our face with a scarf . . . They shake or whirl their stick . . . these sign to us to fight . . . The

police stare at us . . . They treat us badly specially in the away matches. They refuse to listen to us . . . to reach an agreement with us . . . They are offensive and provocative. They ridicule us . . . They jeer at us . . . They are prejudiced towards us and misunderstand our behaviors and our intentions. They believe that we always want to fight or to cause damages . . . So they threaten us . . . They shake their cudgel . . . So we start fighting against them.

In other words, police intimidations could unintentionally stimulate a hooligan to be aggressive in order to communicate his supremacy, or to seek revenge for the damage that he believes he has sustained (or to make a preemptive strike to forestall damage).

Conclusions

Football hooliganism is a world phenomenon and an everyday matter. Society spends a lot of money to prevent and control it. We need to know the hooligan's mind in order to plan effective measures to prevent his violent behaviors. Unfortunately, the social-psychological literature lacks a theory of the hooligan's mind. Both popular and academic explanations are not enough.

In this paper, I have given a theory of the hooligan's conscious mind (both beliefs and goals), by analyzing the thinking of a real Italian hooligan who was my patient. I have given a comprehensive theory that puts together, in a systematic and principled way, the motivational, epistemic, and emotional aspects of the hooligan's mind. I did not consider unconscious feelings, motivations, and psychodynamics, such as defenses, which are very important and require specific work. However, I did consider some processes that are not deliberate and necessarily conscious, but rather, are automatic and goal-oriented.

As a basis for further research, I have suggested that "recognized supremacy" is explicitly represented in the hooligan's mind as the ultimate goal. In fact, hooligans say that they need to support and to fight in order to be recognized as good hooligans, i.e., as good supporters as well as good fighters.

Adang (18) suggests that the behavior of hooligans could be similar to other group hostile interactions. "Recognized supremacy" seems to recall Adler's "will to power" (55). According to Adler, overt aggression may be a sign of a superiority complex. Other youth movements (e.g., Nazis, Fascists, Skinheads) feel powerful and put others down because of their race, ethnic origins, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. They cover up their inferiority by pretending to be superior. Their goal is a goal of personal superiority, and their triumphs have meaning only to themselves. As a basis for further research, this theme needs a psychoanalytic examination.

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