

Georg Simmel spoke about the metropolitan mind. Does this theory of psychology say anything about contemporary existence?

Georg Simmel became one of the first sociologists to attempt to analyse 'street life' during the late part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. Amongst his papers, he wrote 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in which he outlined and tries to explain how a cities environment skews its inhabitant's mental state. Living in Berlin for most of his life, he had a first class case study on his doorstep with it being a leading city in the western world. Although this paper may have been written over a hundred years ago, it remains relevant to today's society with the same problems of stress and anxiety still present. However, the ways in which these nuisances manifest themselves has changed considerably alongside people's attitudes and surroundings. To answer the question above, I found it necessary to pinpoint a certain area of 'contemporary existence' to prevent this thesis becoming vague. An interesting area that seemed to have limited association with Simmel's work was unnecessary violence. At several points during 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', he touches upon the subject of the "blasé attitude" of the public that can cause a "mutual strangeness and repulsion which will break into hatred and fight at the moment of closer contact" (Simmel 1997). This kind of aggressive reaction is something that has been characterised by football hooliganism in recent history. Commonly seen as the ugly side of 'the beautiful game', it has become a culture in itself for several generations and as Huntington says, "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural." (Huntington 1993).

It is thought that without a common culture to associate them with, people struggle to communicate. With football being the most popular spectator sport in Britain (approximately 4-5 million attending a year) (University of Leicester 2002), it seems to be the perfect way to form a widespread bond amongst the public. Of course, it isn't as simple as that. Football is split into hundreds of different teams ranging from the Manchester United-types to local pub sides that all draw in varying crowds. This creates a problem in terms of rivalry. Whether it is healthy or not, by supporting a particular team, there will always be somebody else trying to beat you on the pitch. Simmel outlines that other people will always be enemies. By having something to be especially passionate about only heightens these feelings of hatred. Following your favourite club may give you a special bond between your own supporters, however by doing this you also set up a large group of enemies. This especially becomes a problem when a metropolis has more than one club in a small geographical area.

London typifies this for within one city there are multiple football clubs only a few miles apart from one another. Other good examples can be found in places such as Manchester and Birmingham however perhaps probably the strongest rivalry in Britain can be found in Glasgow. Here, it is the backdrop of religious affiliation that adds to the bad feeling towards each other's sides. With the Rangers fans being predominantly protestant and the Celtic supporters being mainly catholic. Out of these kinds of situations, the 'football hooligan' is born. Through their research, Zani and Kirchler found that "the stereo typology which has attached itself to the football hooligan over the past two decades, approximately, is that the typical football hooligan is: male, lower working class, often unemployed and between the ages of 18-22." (Zani & Kirchler, 1991). Although these stereotypes may exist, they are not necessarily true. Being able to narrow this kind of violence down to such a select demographic seems very unlikely.

When people demonise others outside of their own boundaries it is not only themselves that are going to be involved in the conflict but innocents will also be caught in the crossfire. Football creates this problem when animosity between rival supporters reaches boiling point. A prime example is the highly publicised death of two men before the Leeds United versus Galatasary clash in Turkey. Although this tragic event may have been the result of provocation, the people surrounding the incident also found themselves involved. A quote from a BBC report confirms this by saying, "Loftus, a 37-year-old single man from Burmantofts, was also killed in the clashes. Four other Leeds fans were injured, one of them seriously." (BBC, 2002). Despite two Englishmen dying in a foreign country, the media somewhat overlooked this tragic fact and went straight for the jugular of football by condemning its comparatively small hooligan contingent. Whether or not the two victims were looking for trouble or not, these are people who have family and friends and deserve some dignity in death. Simmel backs this reaction up when he says, "An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy" (Simmel 1950). This also supports the notion that there is such a thing as the 'metropolitan temper' where there is a lack of sympathy for another urbanite. Although the press shows this kind of insensitivity regularly, the upcoming 2006 World Cup in Germany may prove interesting due to that fact.

Although it may be thought that these kinds of incidents should deter any further violence it can also have the opposite effect. Having such a strong bond amongst a bunch of men can make their 'firm' seem like a family. In effect, having a fellow supporter killed will only spurn the need for

revenge. Certain things strengthen this kind of affinity. The 'modern condition' is said to rely heavily on image. Apparently one of the most effective ways of reaching other people is to have a common appearance. This is easily applied to the football supporter but not so to the hooligan. Looking at a typical crowd on a match day there will be two predominant sets of colours at either ends of the ground. This gives the supporters a sense of togetherness. However, although the hooligan element may support the same team, they discard the traditional colours in favour of their own attire. The reason for this may also be due to the 'modern condition'. First impressions do count, to which may in some way explain why they dress in such a manner. In a confrontation, if one set of hooligans are dressed in their team's shirts and scarves with their faces painted, who is going to look the most menacing? As Clarke says in his paper, the typical hooligan on the 1970's would more likely to be found wearing "... large working boots, often with steel toes-caps, denim supported by braces, worn with a gap between the top of the boots and the bottom of the jeans, a coloured or patterned, shaped shirt with a button down collar. Over this was worn a sleeveless pullover and for colder weather a 'Crombie' overcoat." (Clarke pg. 54).

Simmel says how the "brevity and infrequency of meetings" (Simmel 1950) means that an appearance has to make a striking impression and this sort of attire certainly helps. By wearing these kinds of outfits, hooligans automatically intimidate. The same kind of theory can be applied to other culture movements such as punk and goth. The fashion may have changed in more modern times but the same rule still applies. An alternative theory that would help to explain this disregard for their team's colours may be explained by the relationship between image and the grip that money has on the 'metropolitan mind'. Although violence may be seen as the main attraction of this culture, there are other less clear parts to it. Intimidation is important to the appearance of a hooligan but in today's society, fashions have moved on from the description above. Maybe Redhead et al explain it best when they say "the casual is constantly changing, emphasising expensive clothes, with competition among rival 'fighting crews' over that is the most stylish. Respectable dress allows these fans to travel to away games undetected by local police". (Redhead and McLaughlin 1985). This shows that part of the victory is psychological and not physical. By evading capture and looking better than the people surrounding them, they elevate themselves from a "feeling of the same worthlessness" (Simmel 1950).

It isn't just at home that hooligans cause public disorders. The international stage is another way to prove to other cultures that your area and/or club are one to be feared. As with religion, political

situations can also add fuel to the fire by giving the travelling supporters something to hold a grudge about. A fitting example for England would be their international fixtures against Germany. With the historical background of two world wars and several infamous run-ins in high profile competitions, the feelings behind these kinds of matches are intense. As well as Simmel, Geertz also writes about these kinds of emotion when he observes a Balinese Cockfight (Geertz 19??). He believed that the fight, in many ways, resembled things within male supporters' lives. As with the 1990 World Cup semi final penalty shoot out, the cockfight symbolised the strength of the people behind it.

However, even with the possibility of these fixtures, the nature of today's society makes the idea of being a full time football hooligan absurd. Moonman and Bradley highlight this when they write "The National Front's Carl Roberts sees the football match as a once-a-week opportunity for the kind of self-expression denied him in more controlled and orderly social environment" (Moonman and Bradley 1989). This could be conceived as a result of the blasé attitude. The mind builds up a surface to deal with the constant bombardment of information that the working week creates. The tension is then finally released as a violent reaction on a Saturday afternoon. As Kerr says, "no other activity, sporting or otherwise, provided thrills in such abundance and was available in most of the large towns and cities in Britain and Europe on a frequent and regular basis" (Kerr 1994). However, using Simmel's theory, if these meetings were too frequent, then hooliganism would probably lose its appeal as there wouldn't be enough tension to constitute another outburst. With the players being put on a pedestal as heroes for the fans, they want to show the same passion and fight off the pitch. It provides a return to more primitive instincts that lashes out against the technology-obsessed metropolis.

Simmel himself makes these kinds of primal comparisons. He links the city to an urban jungle with the people who inhabit it as animals. Whether the clubs and fans are conscious of this or not, some of their behaviour mirrors them. A look at some of the nicknames of the teams in Britain shows this. With Millwall being 'The Lions' and Leicester being 'The Foxes', they seem to take pride in having some of the same characteristics as these creatures. Using the lion as an example, it has pride in its territory, strength and a bold appearance. All these things are factors that the supporters would like to emulate in themselves and their team. Especially important is the close surroundings of the hooligan's home ground. A good example would be the East End of London, home to West Ham United and their ground Upton Park. A well known figure within hooligan culture, Cass Pennant says "Take the East End...they've all been born to fight, it's the way to survive...you learn young to survive." (Hooligan

2002) Being a top member of the notorious I.C.F. (West Hams Inter City Firm), Pennant has had to show strength to become the revered figurehead he is amongst supporters today. This backs up Simmel's key to the urban condition as he says that everyone is struggling to be a somebody in a place of millions of nobodies. The hierarchies that firms show can also be linked to the above. To earn your place amongst the main group you must gain status through fighting. Former footballer and reputed hard man Vinny Jones highlights this from his point of view when he quotes "If I was on me own and there's a gang of lands and they're gonna start on me, I would go in and whack the biggest and toughest straight away." (Giulianottio et al 1994). However, the younger men who aspire to be like their elders have to punch at their own weight first. Maybe this is why many gangs now have an 'Under 5's' element who fight other similar aged groups. This faction would be made up of teenagers and young men who are seeking to assume the dominant male role amongst the gang. It is the competition amongst the hooligans that takes the role of natural selection. The better you can fight the more chance you have of becoming a known face amongst the crowd.

Simmel distinguishes something called 'objective' culture in his paper, which explains that the metropolitan man's life revolves around money. This removes any consideration for other people and as Simmel says "man is reckoned with like a number" (Simmel 1950). However, he doesn't ignore the large sections of the population who are located in more rural areas. He identifies that because their lives are less sophisticated, they have more time to form emotional relationships. This contrasts to the urbanites who are said to "react with his head instead of his heart" (Simmel 1950), leading on from an earlier point that the violence involved in football hooliganism is primitive. Because hooligans have little emotion with people outside of their club, they see the conflict as non-malicious and have limited guilt about the pain and suffering they cause their rivals. Using Simmel's theory, once the pace of life slows down, emotional relationships such as children should make the violence stop. Because the person has more time on their hands and less tasks to perform, they should show more emotion. Although according to Ward, this doesn't always happen. He says, "I grew out of my youthful behaviour. Some people don't however, and the use of weapons in football violence now by men in their late twenties and early thirties (some who are themselves parents) is a frightening fact of life." (Ward 1989) This kind of behaviour though may be the result of a psychological problem rather than the metropolitan mind. Because someone has become accustomed to a way of life (in this case football

violence), for such a long time, they become addicted. This violence can spill into their personal life and affect people who are not associated with the game.

As mentioned earlier, because the stereotypical image of a hooligan is one of the working class, it automatically gives the impression of mindless idiots. However, with the rapidly improving deterrent technology, how can this be possible? Surely if the people immersed in this culture were lacking intelligence they would be all behind bars. This is definitely not the case. As Kerr points out "The people involved in soccer hooliganism are not morons and are sometimes quite intelligent and creative". For many theorists, alcohol is a major factor as to the level of violence that can occur. Although the least able of the group can be left to drink and "enhance pleasant moods" (Kerr 1993) in order to prepare for their fights, others must stay alert to plan the afternoon's violence. The alcohol may provide escapism from their routine ruled lives by stupefying the senses but also debilitates the mind. This returns to the idea of hierarchies. Kerr backs this up with "the topmen and superthugs are reported not to drink alcohol before engaging in violence. This allows them to keep their senses fully attuned during the fighting" (Kerr 1993). This idea also concurs with Simmel saying "Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan existence". In other words, the complicated city life means that people have to be prepared and organised to succeed.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that crowd mentality may also go some way to explaining why football produces violence. Although a metropolis may provide an unlimited amount of people to interact with, as Simmel says "nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd". By bringing large amounts of people together in events such as football matches produces unpredictable results. Zimbardo supports Simmel's theory when he says "The larger the group, the less likelihood there is of being recognised and therefore the more extreme behaviour". This is a situation that the football hooligan takes full advantage of. Although the technology of CCTV may have made this less likely, it seems still to be able to partake in football violence and not to get caught. As mentioned before, the group mentality provides the gangs with a sense of innocence and someone else to blame.

In conclusion, the thesis provided should hopefully form some kind of connection between the unnecessary violence that football hooliganism creates and the work of Georg Simmel. In particular 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. While researching, although some material used his theories, it was rare to find something that linked them directly to modern society. Because his work still remains

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relevant to today's world and avoids references to specific technology, it was less difficult to put his theories to test on what seems to be a relatively new phenomenon of metropolitan aggression. Because football is so widespread, it makes it accessible to almost anybody. However, as discussed, it seems to be a certain segment of the population who seek more emotional arousal by associating the sport with something more aggressive. The location of the team in relation to the supporters home is growing less and less important, however, it may be seen that it is necessary for the club to be inside a metropolitan environment for it to produce a hooligan following. In relation to Simmel's rural versus urban theory, with Britain now having the majority of its population holding jobs in cities and towns, there are very few people left who do not have a connection with the fast paced metropolis. Therefore, although Simmel remains mostly relevant, maybe this part of his thesis is now obsolete.

It is difficult to apply every part of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' to football hooliganism. However with any culture, although there is a great deal of psychology involved, there are certain grey areas. An example of this would be the assumption that people who involve themselves with this kind of violence are unintelligent. Kerr disproved this when he identified that to organise meetings and to evade capture, a hooligan must be "quite intelligent and creative". A return to primitive violence could be the key factor in the attraction of hooliganism but it is things such as appearance and kinship that adds the extra incentive. Simmel foresaw such important issues as appearance (fashion) when he describes it as "its form of "being different," of standing out in a striking manner and thereby attracting attention." (Simmel 1950).

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