

When social norms get the boot: A study of crowd behaviour among League of Ireland football supporters.

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Abstract

The aim of this research project is to investigate how the experience of being part of a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of League of Ireland football supporters. The research was carried out using qualitative research methods and thematic analysis. Data was gathered for this study through the semi-structured interviews of four participants and also through ethnographic field research. Data was collected on a voice recorder and analysed through Nvivo software. The results of the research found that while in attendance of live matches, the identity and behaviour of League of Ireland supporters can be impacted by the occasion of match-day, fan rivalry and the influence of the crowd.

Introduction

Football is arguably the most popular spectator sport in the world. The game of football has been played in one form or another for at least 2,500 years (SIRC, 2008). Since its humble beginnings as a rural British folk game, football has developed into a sport that is almost unrecognizable today in comparison to its ancestral form (Burdsey & Chappell, 2003). As the game has developed over the years, there has been one consistent factor that has been ever present which has been vital for the sport's survival and that is the presence of those supporters who passionately follow the game, the football fan.

It is the support of football fans that has bolstered the popularity of the game over the years and there can be no uncertainty that they have been of the essence to the sport's success. In discussing how football fans underpin the sport, Taylor neatly summed up their significance when he stated that "*the crowd is the supreme authority without which the golden core of the game has no currency*" (as cited in Dionisio, Leal & Moutinho, 2008, p. 18). It is a relationship of reciprocation, with football supporters getting as much benefit from the joy of the game, as the sport does from their support. Football fanatics possess a passion for the game which is of such extreme intrinsic value to them that it plays a significant role in their lives (Burdsey & Chappell, 2003). Supporting a football club can help break down barriers, improve an individual's confidence and provides an arena for social interaction where people with different backgrounds, experiences and allegiances may come together (Benkwitz, W. & Molnar, G., 2012).

The following literature review will look at previous research that has been carried out and published on football fan behavior. It is this study's intention to gain an insight into the reasons why an individual strives to be affiliated with a supporters group and to learn of

the value that is attached to being identified with a football club. The aim of the research is to learn more on the dynamics of crowd behaviour and to discover the impact that crowd participation can have on a football fan's behavioural patterns. The overall objective of this research is gain an understanding of why a person can demonstrate a change from their normal behaviour while in this environment. To achieve these objectives, the key focal points of this literature review will be concerned with fan identity, social norms, crowd behaviour, the rivalry that exists among fans and finally, fan rituals.

Football Fans and Identity

In his research paper on football fandom, Amir Ben Porat states that football fandom plays a significant role in identity development and in essence it is football fandom that produces the identity of football fans (Porat, 2010). Porat sees identity as an ongoing construction process that is formed as a result of a combination of an individual's personal elements of 'self' and the presence of surrounding social and cultural environment factors (Porat, 2010). Porat argues that the roots of identity lies within these cultural factors as these elements provide a certain degree of freedom and increase the options available to a person for identity construction. It is for these reasons that Porat sees football fandom as playing a significant role in identity development and maintains that in essence it is football fandom that produces the identity of football fans (Porat, 2010). Porat asserts that football fandom acts as an effective mechanism that enables some stability in the often complex, fluid process of identity formation. Football fandom allows the individual who avidly supports their football club to possess a stable and continual element of identity. This enables the football supporter to demonstrate their support of their football club as

the element of their profile which offers and acts as a statement of their social identity (Porat, 2010).

As identities are formed through the interaction between people, it is a rational assertion to claim that society could not exist without identity. When people take up different identities, they position themselves in the social world. Identity allows the process of socialization where the individual learns to be a member of society. When someone is labeled as a specific type of person, it can be said that a social identity has been attributed to him or her. It is identity that signifies what we have in common with some people and what distinguishes us from others. Identity also provides a link between how one sees their self and how they are viewed by others.

A person's identity is made up of an individual's personal preferences, their unique orientation, as well as a firm and consistent, fixed mental model of self that they possess (Leary & Tangney, 2005). For some people however, their identity is not always fixed and a lack of a consistent self exists. Uncertainty-identity theory seeks to offer an explanation to this condition and states that an individual, who is unsure on how to express themselves, is motivated to reduce these feelings of uncertainty through becoming a member of a group (Leary & Tangney, 2005). One theory commonly used to explain this phenomenon is Social Identity Theory, a contribution to the study of identity which was pioneered by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s.

Tajfel defines social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership" (as cited in Burdsey & Chappell, 2003). Social identity theory suggests that a football supporter's group is a form of a self-inclusive social category as football supporters possess similar self-definitions as one another which form part of their self-concept. By

identifying with a group that adopts shared attitudes and because of a human need that exists for social interaction and identity maintenance, the individual perceives this category as a part of their own social identity (Leary & Tangney, 2005). This is likely to occur when someone sees parts of their own identity in the features and characteristics of a group. This often results in a person aspiring to belong to that group and in some situations, automatically considering themselves as part of the group due to their similarities (Cook. n.d.).

For football fans, there is something special about attending a football match as it is a place where they are welcomed because of who they support and where they feel part of the crowd. Attending a football match offers an expressive support for the affirmation of the collective identity that they belong to and the positive feelings that this elicits (Burdsey & Chappell, 2003). When football supporters attend a football match, they actively engage in sharing their identity with their fellow supporters. In this instance, identity is not used to signify what distinguishes one from others but instead it is used to provide a link that strengthens one's social bond within the group.

In his research article, Neil Cook who conducted an observational study of football fan identity in the UK found that there was strong evidence supporting social identity theory, particularly the self-categorization aspect, in the crowd behavior of the football fans which he observed (Cook. n.d.). Cook suggests that their individual identities were transformed into a collective identity by virtue of their involvement in the supporter's crowd. Cook claims that a collective identity among the supporters was very much evident in the behavior of the fans, stating that their sense of identity as individuals and as a group appeared to be intricately bound during the game (Cook. n.d.). In his previous studies, Bromberger also sought to offer an explanation of the phenomenon of collective identity. He argued that football brings people

together, resulting in a collective consciousness, which allows for a temporary state of anonymity where individual differences are forgotten for the time being and the joy of being united against the opposition is appreciated and enjoyed (Bromberger, 1995).

Dr. Clifford Stott, along with his peers has conducted a number of studies over recent years which have focused on crowd psychology and the social activities of football support where the collective identity of football supporters at football matches have been examined (Stott, C., Adang, O., Livingstone, A., & Scriber M., 2007). This research highlighted the explanatory power of analyzing football matches from the perspective of the Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behavior and concludes that it is the psychological unity of this identity that empowers fans (Stott, C., Hoggett, J., & Pearson, G., 2012). Elaborated social identity model (ESIM) has its roots firmly in the social identity tradition, drawing on principles from social identity theory and self-categorization theory. The ESIM proposes that in order to gain an understanding of crowd dynamics, social identity should be considered as an ongoing process whereby both an individual's identity formation and the dynamics of intergroup interaction are mutually determined over time (Stott, C., Adang, O., Livingstone, A., & Scriber M., 2008).

Football Fans and Social Norms

Similar to the studies of Stott et al that sought to analyze the phenomena of football crowd behavior from the perspective of social identity and not the resulting violence that can occur due to the hooligan culture that can exist between rival supporters (Stott et al, 2012), Cook's study is more interested in the behavior of the football crowds and the process of de-individuation that occurs. From his observations, Cook argues that it became clearly apparent

that as the size of the crowd strengthened, so did the sense of collective identity among the supporters. The author feels that this comes at the expense of personal identity and that this is largely due to individuals feeling relatively anonymous while they are part of it. This anonymity Cook concludes is the reason why some football supporters demonstrate anti-social norms while attending football matches (Cook. n.d.).

In their 1998 research paper Aguirre et al discuss Emergent Norm Theory (ENT). This theory states that nontraditional, collective behavior can emerge within a group when an unexpected event which has occurred is collectively interpreted as a normative crisis (Aguirre, B.E., Wenger, D., & Vigo, G. (1998). Aguirre et al argue that this crisis creates a sense of uncertainty and urgency that forces people to interact and create a new, emergent normative structure that guides their behavior. A new norm then emerges that guide's collective action and forces the group or crowd to reassess the situation (Aguirre, B.E., Wenger, D., & Vigo, G., 1998).

According to ENT, collective behavior occurs as people are forced by this normative crisis to abandon their previously established conceptions held in regards to legitimate ways of acting. ENT argues that it is the appearance of unanimity among the participants in incidents of collective behavior that influences the emergence of dominant norms (Aguirre et al, 1998). Once a dominant norm emerges group members disagreeing with it have a tendency to keep quiet out of fear of group censure. This is often the case in social groups that are appealing for individuals to join where one feels that they can derive strength and a sense of identity from their connections to the group. In order to achieve group membership and become an accepted part of a collective unit, it is not uncommon for individuals to sacrifice their own norms and adopt those of the larger group. It is this desire to fit in and to be seen as part of the supporter's group that

can cause crowds at football matches to exhibit norms which may be contrary to socially accepted norms or even their own personal morals.

In contrast to classic models of crowd psychology, the Elaborated Social Identity model of crowd behavior (ESIM) states that collective behavior demonstrated during football matches is fundamentally normative (Stott, C., Adang, O., Livingstone, A., & Scriber M., 2008). According to this theory these norms are the resulting outcome of crowd participant's shared social identity. At football matches, it is not uncommon for football supporters to scream hostile abuse and make obscene gestures towards opposing fans. If such behavior was to be seen outside a football stadium, it would be seen as anti-social and deviant, but for some reason, as this happens in a uniformed way within the stadium, this behavior becomes the emerging norm and tends to be accepted by everyone present (Cook, n.d.).

Football Fans and Crowd Behavior

A frequently studied example of social grouping is the phenomenon of crowd behavior. The phenomenon of crowds has long been of interest to psychologists who recognized that a careful analysis of crowd formation was of obvious interest to a society. Psychologists felt that the collective action of groups at the time played an increasingly important part in social life (Milgram, Bickman & Berkowitz, 1969). This is an argument that has been supported by Gustave Le Bon who has carried out research on the mental unity of crowds. Le Bon makes the point that when individuals are gathered together in a crowd for purposes of action; this assembly can result in certain new psychological characteristics emerging within individuals which were previously not apparent or possibly in existence (Le Bon, G., 2008). Evidence of Le

Bon's argument on this social phenomenon can be easily witnessed on any given week in any football stadium through the observation of the behavior of football fans.

The studies of Stott et al are concerned with the importance that football matches have on the study of crowd behavior and state how critical it is for psychologists to learn more of the behavior of football supporters due to its potential to contribute to the study of crowd events. Stott states that as a crowd event, football matches provide important opportunities for empirical study and development in theoretical understanding of crowd dynamics (Stott, C., Adang, O., Livingstone, A., & Scriber M., 2008). Cook's observational study on football fans also investigates the phenomenon of crowd behavior linking this to social identity theory. Cook argues that football supporters that comprise a crowd at a football match assume a collective identity and that this is outlined by their shared behavior and attitudes. Cook reports witnessing primitive and instinctive behavior from the football supporters that he observed and suggests that this is brought on from a relative sensation of feeling anonymous while they are part of the crowd (Cook., n.d.).

Anthony King through interviewing football fans for his research study on masculinity and football crowds draws the conclusion that there is an obvious presence of masculine pride which evolves from being part of the crowd (King, 2010). From these findings, King proclaims that it is actually masculine pride and not team pride which is the central feature of their fandom. He goes on further to argue that football supporters obtain pride not only from the success of their team but also from being part of the crowd and that this fuels and acts as a boost to their masculine pride (King, 2010). King state that through the regular attendance of football matches, supporters reinforce their position within the crowd and come to consider the crowd as a place of security where they can expect to receive respect from their fellow supporters. This mutual

respect that the crowd has for each other further strengthens the bond of the group and secures their social status within the crowd.

Football and Rivalries

Supporting a particular football team not only facilitates a sense of belonging with fellow supporters, it also acts as a means of differentiating oneself from other groups (Burdsey & Chappell, 2003). This perception of being distinct from their rivals can play a key part in shaping a fan's sense of unity with their own group as this can elicit positive feelings for the individual and reinforces their sense of belonging with their fellow supporters. Rivalry is often described as 'binary opposition' and competition with 'opposing numbers' (Benkwitz, W. & Molnar, G., 2012). When considering football fan rivalries, it is important to gain an understanding of this opposition and competition that exists between different fan groups as rivalry can often result in the emergence of collective identities which have an effect on the operation of modern societies (Benkwitz, W. & Molnar, G., 2012).

In their studies on the behaviours of football fans, both Cook (n.d.) and Stott et al (2012) discuss the idea of Realistic Conflict theory. This theory states that when individuals form into a group, in this instance a football supporter's group, that person automatically becomes comfortable within the group due to their similarities. This closeness to the group can elicit a belief within the individual that their identity is now shared with the group. It is this connection with the group that often results in the individual becoming more aware of and to focus on the differences of other groups which contribute to the perception of these opposing groups to be seen as a threat. This is especially the case when it comes to rival football supporters who are in

competition with each other. In this instance, feelings of prejudice and discrimination against perceived rivals are common-place.

In his qualitative report, Cook discusses how prior to the match, he observed rival groups of supporters congregating in the pubs beforehand and discussing the upcoming match with genial banter and mutual respect. However, he goes on to report that there was a markedly significant change in relations between the different supporters once they were inside the stadium, where the existing rivalry between the two sets of supporters intensified and very clear identities of 'them' and 'us' emerged during the match (Cook. n.d.). Cook describes how he witnessed the crowd engage in prejudiced chanting and how both sets of fans gestured at each other in a discriminatory fashion. Cook concludes that as the game approached the final whistle, it was clear that the game represented a battle for status among the opposite supporters. The intensity of the chanting and provoking from the set of fans whose team was winning noticeably increased as the fans became more confident that on this occasion that they had won the bragging rights over their rivals (Cook. n.d.).

Football rivalries are commonplace across the globe and are usually underpinned by social, historical or cultural factors. The 'local derby' where two clubs that share an intense rivalry, due to either their historical connection or proximity, compete against each other is a prime example of when rivalry reaches fever pitch. Local derbies are emotionally charged occasions for football supporters where a positive result for their team means more than just the success in the competition but also signifies a confirmation of their superiority in the traditional confrontation of histories, class and politics that has existed between the two rivals over the years (SIRC, 2008).

In Benkwitz's & Molnar's 2012 study they discuss how the word rivalry brings with it thoughts and ideologies of conflict, domination, power and struggle which could be viewed in opposition to the functionalist ideals of what is often associated with modern sports (Benkwitz, W. & Molnar, G., 2012). As football gives rise to intense rivalries, a study into rivalry is important in order to understand the underlying factors that shape oppositions and social identities. Rivalry forms a fundamental part of a football fan's support which is emphasized in their desire and perception of their club being superior to their rivals.

Football and Rituals

The demonstration of rituals of various kinds by football supporters are a common feature present at football matches. Participation in match day rituals by football supporters is a means of expressing their support and a way to convey proof of team loyalty. Fan participation in rituals can be as straight forward as making sure that the match-day programme is purchased and read before a game. Ritualistic behavior is also expressed through regular, active attendance at games and participation in the chants, songs and other rituals which contribute to the pleasure of the occasion (SIRC, 2008). Match day rituals strengthen social bonds among supporters and confirm one's affiliation as a member of the group.

A ritual is defined as a religious or solemn ceremony of series of actions performed according to a prescribed order. For fanatics it can be reasonably argued that a football match is akin to a sacred ceremony (Bromberger, C., 1995). It can also be reasoned that through the passion that they have for their team, football supporters have developed tribal behaviours. This behavior can be seen in their use of specific terminology and symbolism that is associated with

their team, such as the erection of banners and the rendition of specific chants (Dionisio et al, 2008).

In her 2012 study on Interaction Ritual theory, Marci Cottingham argues that an exploration into the meaningful rituals and emotions experienced by fans is fundamental to understanding fan behavior (Cottingham, M., 2012). Interaction Ritual theory (IR theory) is grounded in Durkheim's work, who stated that the main object of ritual ceremonies was to secure the continuity of collective consciousness which works to assert one's belief that they belong to the group (Bromberger, C., 1995). IR theory, contributes to this work by providing a critical lens for understanding the emotional and ritual behaviours of fans and attempts to gain meaning of what these rituals provide to their fandom (Cottingham, M., 2012). Interaction Ritual (IR) theory conceptualizes emotion as a socially emergent, rather than a socially constrained positive energy (Cottingham, M., 2012). This offers an explanation behind the reasons that football supporters participate in such rituals as interacting with other supporters, erecting banners in the stadiums and joining in with their favorite chants, as it is the involvement in such rituals which produces positive emotions for the fans. This outcome is achieved due to the presence of common attitudes and beliefs that exist among supporters, who share a collective desire for the same, positive outcome, essentially, their team winning.

Pre- and post-game rituals are important in creating a sense of community among fans. Rituals such as meeting up with other fans for a drink in a certain pub before and after the game are important to fans as these occasions foster a strong sense of belonging to the fan group which strengthens the sense of closeness to the group (SIRC, 2008). Football fans describe themselves as 'the twelfth man' and see the ritualistic singing and chanting that they perform during the

game as an essential ingredient that motivates their team and intimidates the opposition. Chants are an expression of the fan's affiliation and commitment to their team and are verbal expressions of the dominance and supremacy which they believe they possess while attending football matches.

League of Ireland football fans and Research rationale

If you were to ask any Irish person which soccer team they supported, they are far more likely to name an English team than a League of Ireland team. The percentage of Irish soccer fans that actually support a League of Ireland team is very low compared to those who support English Premier League teams. While the level of support for the League of Ireland has seen a rise in its popularity over recent decades, the number of crowds that it attracts is rarely, if ever, as large as those which attend inter-county Gaelic Football matches (DoChara, n.d.).

The reason for this can be traced back to the past rules of the GAA, the administrators of Gaelic football and hurling, who for many years, considered soccer as a 'foreign game' and therefore stipulated that any member of their organization, were forbidden to play soccer or even to attend a soccer match as a spectator. It wasn't until this ban was lifted in 1971 that many people in Ireland started to play and support both soccer and GAA games (DoChara, n.d.). This late introduction to soccer within Ireland can be seen as the reason that soccer did not take as strong a hold in Ireland as it did in other European countries.

To this day, the Irish league remains semi-professional, with most clubs in the league struggling to survive financially, resulting in Irish players not getting as highly paid as they would in other European leagues. This discrepancy in wages can be seen as the main cause of

Ireland's better players and all of its international team, leaving Ireland to play with English professional clubs, where earnings are much higher. The Premier league is also considered one of the best leagues in the world as it contains high-profile teams and attracts super-star players. It is for these reasons that the Premier league is of enormous interest to many Irish soccer fans which has been at the expense of the League of Ireland.

Despite the glamorous attraction of the Premier league, there remains a small but passionate group of Irish football supporters who shun it in favour of supporting an Irish team in the League of Ireland. While there have been numerous studies conducted before on the crowd behavior of different football supporters from all across the globe, there appears to have been very little research conducted on the traits of League of Ireland supporters. This is where this research differs from previous studies on fan behavior, in that it concentrates specifically on the behavior of those supporters who follow the League of Ireland. The rationale behind this research project is to improve our understanding of why this support can sometimes lead to changes in the behavior of supporters while attending football matches, as well as to gain an understanding of how the crowd can influence a League of Ireland football supporter's behavior. The question that this research will seek to find the answer to is:

How does the experience of being part of a football crowd influence the behavior and identity of league of Ireland fans?

Methodology

This research project is an investigation into the behaviour of football fans who attend League of Ireland football matches. It is the researcher's intention to learn first-hand from the participants, the value that they attach to supporting a football club. The aim of the research is to gain an understanding of the impact that crowd participation can have on a football fan's identity and behavioural patterns. The purpose of this study to explore the reasons behind why a person can demonstrate a change from their normal behaviour while in this environment.

Design

A qualitative method of research was chosen for this study as it was felt that given the subject matter, this was the most suitable approach to ensure the collection of rich data that would be received in a subjective manner. A quantitative research method was not considered as this type of design often creates a generalization of findings which cannot be further developed to gain a deeper understanding of their meaning. Qualitative research on the other hand, allows for the attainment of subject and situation related statements that are empirically well founded and properly formulated (Flick, 2006). Another reason that a qualitative research design was chosen was because it is a more naturalistic, interpretive approach, which provided the researcher the opportunity to observe their chosen participants from a phenomenological perspective. Through the spoken and detailed representations of the participants, the qualitative design of this research allowed the researcher to hear first-hand the meanings which they attached to phenomena within their social worlds (Richie & Lewis, 2003).

Qualitative research methods are more complex than quantitative and can involve multiple methodologies and research practices of data collection such as interviews, observation and use of documentary data (Punch, 2005). For the purpose of this study, research was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviewing procedures. This research procedure allows the researcher to speak directly with the participants which provides the researcher with a greater capability to fully explore and understand the data collected, as well as placing the researcher in a better position to seek further clarification on responses when necessary. This insight increased the researcher's probability that successful analysis of the underlying reasons, opinions and motivations behind the responses was achieved.

A fieldwork strategy was also under-taken whereby Qualitative data was collected by means of observation at two League of Ireland football matches attended by the researcher. Observation situates the researcher in the world of the subjects, affording the freedom to study the subjects in their natural settings which made it easier for the researcher to make sense of the activity.

Apparatus

For this research a handheld Olympus VN-2100PC Digital Voice Recorder was used to record each interview session. To assist in analysing the collected data that was transcribed verbatim from these interviews, NVIVO software was used. During the two field-studies that were undertaken, for observational purpose a Smart-phone was used to visually and audibly record the fieldwork. A note-pad was also used to take short-hand notes of the relevant incidences that occurred during this time.

Participants

The selection of candidates plays a significant role in the success of the interview processes (Punch, 2005). Qualitative research uses non-probability samples for selecting the population for study. To ensure that the data collected is of the highest possible quality, candidates should be selected on the basis that they offer the strongest reflection of the overall group and possess a sufficient level of knowledge to be able to discuss the research topic in detail. This will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes which the researcher wishes to study (Richie & Lewis, 2003). When candidates of this calibre are acquired, the researcher has found a purposive sample that is well suited to small-scale, in-depth studies that should provide quality results (Richie & Lewis, 2003).

With this focus in mind, a purposive method of sampling was applied whereby participants were chosen by the researcher in a deliberate way under the conditions that they currently supported a League of Ireland team, attended their team's matches on a regular basis and that they considered themselves to be loyal, passionate supporters. The researcher selected a total of four participants that were felt to fit these criteria. Three males were chosen to take part in this study, along with one female who was chosen as the researcher felt it was important to obtain cross-gender accounts.

The participants were recommended to the researcher through an acquaintance involved with the League of Ireland who also made initial contact with them on behalf of the researcher. Upon receiving word that potential participants had expressed an interest in partaking in the study, the researcher then contacted each individually to assess their suitability to the study and to make the necessary arrangements for the interviews. The written consent of each participant

confirming their willingness to be involved in the process was received prior to the interviews taking place.

Procedure

All interviews were arranged at an appropriate time that suited each participant. Various venues deemed to be suitable environments to allow for interviews to be adequately conducted were suggested by the researcher. This arrangement however, was agreed by only one participant, who was subsequently interviewed in the Gresham Hotel. It had been suggested by the remaining three participants that instead the interview be conducted in their place of residence, an arrangement in which the researcher was happy to oblige.

To ensure that the researcher was afforded some flexibility during the interview process, this research was conducted using in-depth, semi-structured interviewing procedures. Semi-structured interviews should always be interactive in nature; '*conversations with a purpose*' that give the interviewer an opportunity to hear the personal accounts of the relevant people concerned and to grasp their point of view (Richie & Lewis, 2003). The interviews conducted by the researcher consisted of 20 prepared open-ended questions which were designed to be sufficiently flexible to allow the interviewer to cover the topics that it was felt were most suited to the research but also to encourage the participants to talk freely and expand on any particular areas of interest or relevant personal experience. This flexibility permitted for additional topics and themes to develop spontaneously during the course of the interviews and for new areas to be explored. A Dictaphone was used to record each interview. These varied in length, lasting between approximately 25 to 45 minutes.

Ethnographic field research was also undertaken, whereby the researcher attended two League of Ireland football matches, Bohemian FC v Shamrock Rovers FC on Friday 21st March, Kick-off: 8pm, and Shamrock Rovers FC v Sligo Rovers FC on Friday 28th March, Kick-off: 7:15pm. When participating in this observational study, the researcher had the dilemma of having to decide on the necessary distance that was required for good observation, as well as the matter of deciding on how much participation was required by the researcher.

In their studies on crowd observation, Alder and Alder state that the researcher should obtain complete access and become infused with the research object. Alder and Alder state that the researcher needs to work out the type of '*membership-roles to assume – the peripheral, the active or the complete member*' (Flick, 2006). For studying delicate fields, Alder and Alder suggest a combination of '*overt and covert roles*'. This means that the researcher does not disclose their actual role of researchers to all members in a field in order to gain insights that are as open as possible (Flick, 2006). Bearing this in mind, it was decided by the researcher that the reasons for their attendance would not be disclosed to the supporters at the game. Instead, the researcher quietly observed what was happening around him, while discreetly taking short-hand notes.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis using NVIVO software was used by the researcher to assist in exploring and analyzing the data in accordance with the research question. Once the data from the interviews had been transcribed, evaluated and studied repeatedly, the researcher then used NVIVO to create numerous codes that related to particular data. As these codes were grouped

together, the coding system progressively presented a number of common themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the raw data collected during the interviews.

Ethical considerations

In order to ensure that a research study is disciplined in its approach and maintains an acceptable level of integrity the issue of ethics must be considered. Ethical considerations are particularly important when carrying out qualitative research, as the in-depth, unstructured nature of qualitative research can often raise issues that had not been previously anticipated by the researcher (Richie & Lewis, 2003). It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the interests of those who take part in the study are protected at all times (Flick, 2006). It was therefore imperative that prior to the interviews, the researcher had considered all of the potential ethical issues that the line of questioning may raise and in the event of a participant expressing concern, that the researcher was sufficiently equipped to put them at ease and to gain their trust.

When carrying out this research, it was important that the ethical issues that would need to be addressed were identified by the researcher. The steps taken to ensure that this research adhered to ethical guidelines included ensuring that informed consent was received from all participants prior to the interviews taking place, that a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality was provided to all participants, and lastly, that an assurance was offered to the participants that they would be protected from harm.

Each participant was informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. It was made clear to all participants that if any question should cause any discomfort, they did not have to answer it and that the interview could be terminated at any stage upon

request. To ensure full disclosure was obtained, the consent form clearly explained that the content of the interview can be published. To overcome any concerns that participants may have had with this, they were reassured that their identity would not be revealed at any point and their anonymity would remain preserved.

Participants were also assured that everything that they say was completely confidential and that the study would avoid the attribution of any comments that may put their anonymity at risk (Richie & Lewis, 2003). Confidentiality is a crucial measure that needs to be adhered to in qualitative research at all times. When a researcher includes comments that can be easily attributed to or linked to a particular participant, they not only compromise the integrity of the research but also put the participant's reputation and well-being in jeopardy. For these reasons, the researcher made particular care to ensure that all information gathered disguised the identity of each participant. It was also ensured that the transcripts of the interviews were securely stored on a password protected USB stick.

Results

Interviews

The purpose of these interviews was for the researcher to gain an insight into what it means to a football fan to passionately support and to be identified with a football club. The researcher was interested in hearing the opinions and attitudes that the participants had towards the crowd behavior that they either participated in themselves or that they witnessed while supporting their team. The researcher also sought to discover the views that the participants held in relation to their own behavior and to determine if they considered that the behavior of others in the crowd had an influence on their own demeanor. During the analysis several themes were identified, which will now be discussed.

Behaviour change

Analysis of the data revealed that it was common for a football supporter to exhibit a change of behavior while at a football match. All the participants agreed that the excitement of the occasion and the lure of the crowd sometimes had an influence on their behavior and caused them to act in a different manner than they normally would. Interviewee A discussed how she would sometimes surprise herself at how immersed in the game they would get and how it could be difficult to control her emotions:

“Sometimes I’d feel myself getting angry and I’d hear myself shouting and I’d feel myself getting embarrassed for shouting, I’d be like I can’t believe I’m after getting that upset, you sort of get lost and pulled away with the crowd y’know.”

Interviewee C had no doubts that attendance at the game had an influence on his behaviour and freely admitted that he would act in a different manner than he normally would on a day to day basis:

“Yeah, I definitely would act differently, yeah. It’s not like an a,b or c answer like, I can’t really explain why I do, like you’re in the crowd n you’re just surrounded by everyone who’s there for the same cause that you’re there for. It’s the unity and everyone’s as passionate n you want to show that passion....maybe because there’s drink involved, you just get more passionate about your team n boisterous n you want to prove to other’s that you’re as passionate as they are.”

The sentiments expressed by Interviewee B on this matter, who was the eldest participant to partake in the study, appeared to show a greater level of maturity and better control of behavior than the younger participants:

“Possibly in the heat of the moment because you’re fired up, if something doesn’t go your way, like if the ref does something wrong, you’ll shout something. But I try to keep it to myself these days..but it’s not always easy”.

Interviewee D, who works part-time as an amateur sports journalist, gave a detailed account of how it feels to enthuse over a team. He described how at times he finds it difficult to show constraint even when working in a professional capacity. He goes on further to state that the stimulation that a supporter experiences at a football match is akin to a form of addiction.

“how could I say, now that I’m one of the ‘pricks’ in the press-box as they call it, I have to be very restrained compared to what I would be like if in the grand-stand and just watching the match where I think I can get a bit pent up, it can be tough though when watching your own team. It’s like before when I was younger it was like nothing else matters. I think match day is a trigger with serious fans, it’s like a kind of alcoholism, it can consume you and if you let it consume you, it will.”

Shifting identities

All of the interviewees felt that compared to the behaviour of other supporters that they frequently witnessed at games, that there was not really an issue with their own behaviour that they displayed. While the interviewees freely admitted that they may demonstrate behaviour that could be deemed as unacceptable to the outside world, they considered this to be a by-product of the passion that they have for their team which resulted in a momentary lapse of control. Whereas it was felt by the interviewees that some supporters took things too far, a point illustrated by Interviewee D:

“Like personally I never go over the top, sure I might lose the rag sometimes if something hasn’t gone our way but something clicked with me, I remember realising that you can go to your football matches and you can do two things, you can go to the game and just be effing and blinding or you can actually watch the game. That’s the difference, I know plenty of people in particular when they lose will go on the absolute piss, it will ruin their whole day, their week even, whereas I realised that was silly and clicked out of it and just leave it behind.”

This view was also shared by Interviewee B who felt that those fans who exhibited extreme levels of unacceptable behaviour during games acted in a completely different manner that was inconsistent with how they would normally behave:

“There might be moments where you lose yourself in the heat of the moment because something isn’t going right but there are people who do completely lose the run of themselves and get themselves in trouble at football but I know damn well these guys have got good jobs during the week and are y’know are quite different and acting differently than what I know how they normally act.”

From these comments, it became apparent to the researcher that these anecdotes provided by the interviewees were concerned with more than just behavioural change. Instead, the researcher felt that these instances highlighted were more in line with the characteristics of identity change. The following comment by Interviewee A, in describing a fellow supporter who they know certainly appears to back up this claim:

“Like there’s this fella I know called X, works in finance, if you met him you’d like him, a really gentle fella, really nice, he’d be shaking your hand n’all. He turns into an absolute fucking mad-thing when he’s up there. He’s gotten into more fights and charges against him for his behaviour while he’s with that crowd at the matches. And then you wouldn’t hear a peep out of him. And there’s loads of them like that.”

This argument is further strengthened by the views of interviewee C who stated the following when discussing his fellow supporters:

“Loads of them are completely different people when they go up there. Like there’s fellas that work in Banks, they’re accountants, they’re professionals and then all of a sudden they’re up

there and they're acting like head-cases, hooligans, it's like that film ID, Monday –Friday they act one way and on Friday they just let loose."

Match-day: more than just a game, an occasion.

When the researcher asked the interviewees to describe the experience of going to watch their team play, all of the participants became visibly animated and very enthusiastic in their responses. Match-day was clearly a special event for interviewee C who enthusiastically explained the excitement that he felt in the lead up to a game:

"It's great, you just get so excited, you just look forward to it. It's the buzz of it, just the lead up to it, like you'd be buzzing a couple of days before and then on match day, you get your excitement up, you'd be on the phone all day to the lads, seeing where everyone's going and who is meeting up for a pint. Then the hour leading up to the match, you'd be up in the pub singing before the game."

In elaborating on the positive feelings that he experienced on match-day, Interviewee C spoke of the pride that he felt in attending his team's games on a regular basis. With this admission, it became clear to the researcher that the attendance of games was only partly about the actual football and that it had as much to do with its use as a status symbol which acted to reinforce a supporter's sense of belonging within the group.

"I think the fact that Ireland's not a massive country for football, when you go to a game, you're seen and heard, they're might be only 1500, 1200 at your end. You absolutely love it, you're

quite proud to go and you'll always be critical of people supporting English clubs. It's like a badge of honour almost that you're supporting your local team n you're passionate about it."

Interviewee B spoke of the social element of attending games and stated that some of his best friends had been made through meeting them at the football week in, week out, year after the year.

"That's a great part of it, the social side. As you grow up you make friends with people in school, college, work but as you grow up, you lose contact with a lot of these people. But at the games you see the same people and they come back year after year, in that sense you're always going to see them when they're as die-hard as you, you're always going to see them at the games y'know?"

To illustrate his point further regarding the bonds that are created among supporters, interviewee B goes on to discuss how these friendships have extended beyond just match-days and that they have developed into more than just a weekly meet-up.

"But these are some of my best-friends now. I've been to weddings of some of the lads, as I said, they're guys that I know donkey years now. Like I said I've been going to these games with some of these guys since I was a kid. It's the whole match-day experience and the craic of seeing the lads and going to the pub and the whole social aspect of it."

The influence of the crowd

Another theme which emerged was that there were mixed feelings among the interviewees in regards to their attitudes towards football crowds. Some of the interviewees felt

that they were an essential ingredient to the occasion and were what made the experience of match-day so special. They highlighted the atmosphere that the crowd creates through their singing and chanting, stating that this helped to instil a sense of camaraderie, belonging and collective unity among their fellow supporters. This was a sentiment held by interviewee D who feels that it is the attraction of the crowd that lures people back to the stadiums.

“It is an amazing experience, I remember bringing my younger cousin to a game and he loved the chanting from the crowd, he kept turning around to me and saying ‘ohh, he used the f word’, he couldn’t comprehend all this y’know? It was just so new to him and exciting. He loved the banter of the crowd, got totally sucked into it and he’s been going to games ever since...”

These views are supported by interviewee C who discusses the elicitation that being part of the crowd brings and how it makes him feel that he is part of something special.

“Definitely, it’s that whole crowd mentality as well. If you’re in big group of lads n yer all singing, you just feel invincible, it’s just y’know how you feel in the crowd, y’know what I mean? You feel like you’re part of something, you’re involved in something, you feel like you’re a cog in a bigger wheel. Y’know not necessarily being aggressive or violent but definitely much more macho show off, y’know that kind of way?, than they would be on their own but if you’re in a big crowd like that it’s just big crowd mentality.”

However, while the other participants stated that they did enjoy going to watch their team, they did express their concerns toward the anti-social behaviour that they said occurred on an almost constant basis from some sections of the crowd. A couple of those interviewed stated that this anti-social behaviour could sometimes have a negative impact on their enjoyment of the occasion and at times cause them to be concerned for their own safety. In re-counting a bad

experience that she had, Interviewee A told of how her own fans turned against her when she told some supporters to stop singing an offensive song:

“I’ve heard them shout terrible things to players on the pitches that you would never say to people, just really offensive some of the things that they’d be saying. I remember one time this fella was shouting at one of the players and do you remember there was something about child abuse in Austria, Fritzel was his name, and he was roaring about raping kids. I said to him there’s kids here, you can’t be saying stuff like that and he completely turned on me and two other people did as well and said to me the same thing, ‘if you don’t like it go over to the stand’. They just say terrible things. Anything goes and if you don’t like it, tough. It’s the norm.”

Interviewee B who made it clear that he didn’t get involved himself, described how he has heard the crowd on countless occasions singing chants to opposing fans and players that range from those of genial banter to those that are genuinely sickening and abusive. As a long time football supporter, he views those in the crowd who partake in such abuse as not real supporters and feels that they attend the games for the wrong reasons.

“I found when you got into the singing section that really there’s not that much of the match being watched. So even though the singing can be brilliant and the songs are something that makes football, I just found that the knowledge of people that knew anything about football was very poor, their knowledge of the game is actually very low compared to people that go to other parts of the stadium. I think that people will go to a lot of football matches and sing songs about stuff that they don’t understand, they don’t know the history.”

Rivalry

The final theme that the researcher felt that materialized from the interviews was that of the variation of the views that existed among the participants regarding opposing fans and the extent of the rivalry that existed among supporters. The responses received appeared to hinge very much on the age of the participant. The older participants demonstrated a level of maturity in the disclosure of their views, while the younger participants came out with more fatuous, extremist comments compared to their older counterparts. The following extracts demonstrate this variance of the participant's views on their rivals:

“Rivals I suppose would probably be the best way to describe them. But I have friends who support different teams and there's good banter between us but if Rovers lose against them, I don't particularly want to sit down and have a cup of tea with them for a few days. So my point is that I'm sure that lads that follow are good lads and sound to have a chat with but obviously when you're at games, the rivalry kicks in.”

“I can't stand rovers, I just think that they're a shower of scum-bags, Pats I don't like them either and I hate Dundalk.”

An interesting development that unexpectedly arose during the course of one interview was that of the concern of one of the male participants. This particular participant is currently in a relationship with the female participant who also contributed to this study. Having already received assurances that their anonymity would remain preserved prior to his agreement, the participant now expressed renewed concern that this study may be read by a fellow league of Ireland supporter who may be able to decipher who the couple in the study were. The participant

felt that as it was such a close knit community, it was feasible that a fellow supporter could discern who the couple were.

“Like they’d be of a certain minority, like they’d be the head-bangers.”

The female participant echoed these claims in her interview and gave the following account of the reactions that she received when her fellow supporters heard the news that she was going out with a rival fan.

“It was like I had to keep on proving that he was alright, that he was normal, that he was actually sound. It’s really weird like, there’s a couple of people up in the club that won’t even go out with me now cos I’m going out with X, to this day. They’ve never met him. A couple that have met him just are not nice to him, they’re really, really rude to him every time they meet him. He never stood a chance.”

In respecting the participant’s request, the researcher agreed not to disclose the name of the teams that any of the participants supported.

Ethnographic Field Research

Two League of Ireland matches were attended by the researcher as it was felt that in order to fully comprehend the excitement and passion which the interviewees expressed about match-day, it was necessary to experience the occasion first-hand. The matches that the researcher attended were Bohemian FC v Shamrock Rovers FC on Friday 21st March, Kick-off: 8pm, Result: 1-3, and Shamrock Rovers FC v Sligo Rovers FC on Friday 28th March, Kick-off:

7:15pm, Result: 1-0. The researcher watched both games among the Rovers supporters to ensure that he benefited from the match-day experience from both the home and away perspective.

The first match that the researcher attended was Bohemians v Shamrock Rovers, a derby match between cross-city rivals who are sworn enemies. Upon entering the stadium, the researcher was taken aback by the visual spectacle that he encountered. Throughout the stadium there were heated exchanges between both sets of fans who were shouting and making hand gestures at each other in such an aggressive manner that it could not be ignored. The atmosphere was palpable, with both sets of fans singing and clapping as loud as they could to drown out the chants of their rivals. Some of the Rovers fans set off some green flares (green and white are the colours of Shamrock Rovers) which seemed to the researcher to be an act of defiance, directed at the Bohemian supporters, as if to say '*we are at your place and we can do what we like*'. There was no ignoring the clearly evident hostility that both fans felt towards each other, which this researcher must admit added to the sense of occasion, it was exciting, almost contagious.

On observing the supporters at both games, it struck the researcher that the fans were more interested in interacting with the opposition supporters than actually watching the game. The sound of the chants from both sets of supporters appeared to the researcher to be sung in an English accent. It became evident that the supporters were mimicking the behaviour of their English counter-parts. Having said this, come the final whistle, there was no disputing the levels of passion and support that the researcher had witnessed from both sets of fans.

Discussion

This research set out to explore how the experience of being part of a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of League of Ireland football supporters. The aim of the research was to gain an understanding of the reasons why participation at a football match can have an impact on a football fan's behavioural patterns and in some cases, lead to behaviour that would be deemed unacceptable in any other part of society. In order to gain an in-depth comprehension of this topic, information was gathered through an extensive literature review. The main topics of interest to come from the literature review were concerned with fan identity, social norms, crowd behaviour, the rituals that fans participate in and finally, the rivalry that exists among football supporters.

Focusing on these particular issues that materialized from the literature review of previous studies that were relevant to this research project, the researcher sought to procure further explanation and clarity on the literature's assertions. To achieve this, additional research was therefore carried out whereby four participants were interviewed to obtain their thoughts and experiences towards football crowd behaviour. Ethnographic field research was also conducted where the researcher attended two League of Ireland matches.

The main themes to emerge from the interviews were that of shifting identities, behaviour change, the influence of the crowd, the occasion of match-day and football fan rivalry. All of these themes worked to explain how a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of those within the crowd and sufficiently contributed to answering the research question. These themes will now be discussed separately and deliberated in combination with the comprehensive

literature chosen. This discussion will then be preceded by an overview of the research project's limitations and recommendations.

Findings

Behaviour change

Overall the researcher was satisfied that the views that were received from the participants on this topic competently answered the research question. The outcome of the interviews showed that a manifestation of behavioural change of football supporters at games does occur which was coherent with the declarations of the literature that was reviewed. All of the participants agreed that the passion of their support could sometimes influence their behaviour and cause them to momentarily lose control, which was illustrated through the interviewee's admittance that they will at times shout obscenities to the referee *'in the heat of the moment'* when things aren't going their way. Interviewee A's admittance that her behaviour at games, when she finds herself shouting, comes as a surprise to her and which she puts down to being *'pulled away from the crowd'*, concurs with the views of Bromberger and Cook who state that when part of the crowd, football supporters experience a state of temporary anonymity. Both Bromberger and Cook see this as the reason why football supporters can demonstrate anti-social norms while attending football matches. This also appeared to be the case with the crowds that had been observed by the researcher at the two games that were attended.

Interviewee C's admission that he would definitely behave differently while in attendance of a game, citing the unity that he feels from being part of the group as a reason for this, is consistent with Tajfel's definition of social identity. When Interviewee C speaks of

wanting to prove to other's that he is as passionate as they are, he is expressing a desire to be identified with a group that adopts shared attitudes, as analysed in Burdsey and Chappell's study. The behaviour change that the interviewee's discuss and admit to are also in alignment and accordance with Emergent Norm Theory (ENT) and the Elaborated Social Identity model of crowd behaviour (ESIM) which were discussed in the literature review.

A significant development arose from the comments of interviewee D who likened behavioural change at a game to alcoholism, stating that if a person allows the game and the crowd to control their behaviour, it will consume them. His comments regarding how when he attends the game as a fan and not a journalist, the crowd triggers something in him and he finds his behaviour changing and himself reverting back to his old fan persona were very interesting. Interviewee D felt that in much as the same way that alcohol can trigger the addiction in an alcoholic, attendance at a game has the potential to trigger a change in behaviour and lack of control.

Shifting identities

A key area identified by this research was that of football fans and identity. As was the necessary condition to participate in this study, all participants were passionate supporters of their team and considered this support to be part of their identity. All the participants referred to their family as the reason for them supporting their particular team which brought the researcher to the supposition that both family and football played a significant role in the identity development of the participants. The researcher had previously come across this concept during the literature review in Porat's paper on fandom and identity in which he proposes that it is social

factors, such as the role of family, as well as football fandom that produces the identity of football fans.

While the participants had absolutely no qualms with being identified with their football team, an interesting sequence of attitudes that materialized, was their opinion that their identities did not shift in anyway while attending football matches. All of the interviewees expressed no doubt that some supporters completely change their identity while attending games but were very quick to distance themselves from such a shift. Despite admitting to a transient change of behaviour that could be considered as improper to the outside world, the participants felt that this was immaterial compared to the behaviour of other supporters they observe at games. One participant spoke of knowing some supporters, who are usually quiet while on their own, that completely transform and act in an uncharacteristic manner while part of the football crowd. Other participants gave similar examples, testifying that they did not believe that these supporters normally behave in this anti-social way when they were away from the crowd, stating that it could not be feasible, as they held good jobs which would not tolerate such behaviour.

There was a general attitude among the participants that many supporters become different people when they are among the crowd. When pushed for a reason on why they thought some people completely change at the games, most of the participants put it down to fans showing off to their fellow supporters and gave the impression that these fans felt that they were proving their passion for the team by behaving in that manner. This point had also been apparent to the researcher when examining the crowds that he had observed. These accounts from the participants substantiate the material sourced for the literature review from Cook and Bromberger who both stated that individual identities are transformed into a collective identity by virtue of their involvement in the supporter's crowd. In investigating identity change among

football supporter, the researcher felt that the literature review and the data gathered from the interviews adequately answered the research question.

Match-day: more than just a game, an occasion.

The findings from this theme were unanimous among all of the participants with the data supporting the sourced material that had been previously acquired for the literature review on football supporter's rituals. All of the participants on the subject of going to watch a game specified that it was about the lead up and the occasion of the day and that the event meant much more to them than just the 90 minutes watching the game. As had also been discussed in the report by the Social Issues Research Centre about pre and post-game rituals included in the literature review, all the participants spoke of meeting up before and after for drinks. On attending the games this social activity was very much in evidence with large groups of supporters observed flocking out of the pubs just before kick-off and heading towards the stadium

The participants spoke of the social element of attending games and very much gave the impression that match-day was a social occasion. Interviewee B clearly articulated the sense of community that exists between fans, in his recount of how in some of his fellow supporters, he has made friends for life. He made an interesting point that had not been previously considered by the researcher, that through life, a person makes and loses school, college and work friends along the way but when you are friends with a fellow supporter, you have a companion who is ever-present every match-day. For the researcher, this epitomized the importance of match-day rituals.

The data from the interviews also contributes additional support to Cottingham's study on Interaction Ritual Theory which is discussed within the literature review. This was particularly apparent when analysing the data from Interviewee C who was the most enthusiastic of all the participants when speaking of the ensuing excitement that comes with match-day. When talking of match-day, the researcher noticed Interviewee C coming into his fan persona as he got more engaged with the interview and eager to talk around this subject. Interviewee C, who was the youngest participant showed signs of bravado while discussing his pride in supporting an Irish club. He explained how he sees it as a badge of honour to be seen at the games and to be associated with the collective supporters group. His support of his team was clearly a status symbol for him which provokes positive emotions which supports Interaction Ritual theory. For the researcher, it was clear that the material covered in this theme suitably answered the research question.

The influence of the crowd

Another area that the researcher sought to explore was the influence that the crowd can have on football supporters. All of the participants agreed that football crowds were an essential ingredient to match-day and spoke of the camaraderie that they experienced while part of the crowd. Interviewee D's account of how of his cousin enjoyed the experience of being part of the crowd so much that he has regularly attended games ever since presents shades of the concepts developed by Milgram et al, in their study on the power of crowds which was previously discussed in the literature review. Cook's investigation into the relationship between collective and personal identity as covered in the literature review which asserts that football supporters

that comprise a crowd at a football match assume a collective identity which is outlined by their shared behaviour and attitudes is also supported by Interviewee C's revelation that being part of the crowd makes him feel like he is part of something special and like he is a cog in a bigger wheel.

Bearing in mind the purpose of this research, crowd behaviour was an obvious theme that was likely to emerge, however the opinions that some of the participants had towards the crowd, in many cases their own supporters, did come as a surprise. As can be seen from the results, a couple of the participants expressed concern at the anti-social behaviour that they tended to witness from some fans in a particular part of the stadium. While this reaction is to expected, their attitude that these 'ultra' supporters were not real fans and in fact not as passionate about the team as they were, was unforeseen. This researcher had assumed that the fraction of supporters commonly known as the 'ultras' were as their name suggested, the ultimate fans. However, according to the views of the participant, this is not the case, with the feeling being that this fraction of supporters do not concentrate on the game or even watch the game properly and are more interested in participating in primitive behaviour and hostile interaction with opposing fans. This was also an observation that the researcher had noticed while attending the games.

Rivalry

Both the findings from the interviews and the previous literature on rivalry that had been reviewed, sufficiently contributed to answering the research question and offered an explanation to how being part of a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of League of

Ireland fans. There was no question that all of the participants considered opposing fans to be rivals. The researcher felt that the assured, strong opinions expressed by the participants on this subject, was a display of identity reinforcement with their own team. This reaction was in line with the studies conducted by Burdsey and Chappell who stated that a fan's perception of being distinct from their rivals plays a key part in shaping a fan's sense of unity with their own group and reinforces their sense of belonging.

The comments from one of the interviewees who discusses having friends who support different teams, who he is usually happy to socialize with on any other day but not on match-day when the rivalry kicks in, echoes the findings from Cook's observational study. In this study Cook discusses how he observed rival groups of supporters congregating together in an affable manner before the game but that this pleasantness immediately ceased once they were inside the stadium. The occasion then became a more serious affair, where the existing rivalry between the two sets of supporters re-emerged and intensified. Cook's assertion that from this point, there appeared to be very clear identities of 'them' and 'us' between the fans, further strengthens the argument that being part of the football crowd influences identity and behaviour. The behaviour observed at the two matches by the researcher concurs with Cook's findings.

As previously mentioned in the results chapter, an unanticipated development that occurred during the course of one of the interviews was the concern that arose from one of the participants who was worried that his participation in the study may be discovered by fellow League of Ireland supporters. As his partner, who also contributed to this study, supports a rival team, he felt that there may be negative implications for them both if rival supporters learned of their involvement in this research project. The interviewee appeared to be genuinely frightened of the possible consequences if this should happen. For the researcher, this fear that was

exhibited by the interviewee was a prime example of Realistic Conflict theory which had been previously discussed in the literature review. Indeed, the emotions expressed by this particular participant appeared to validate the premise of Realistic Conflict theory that it is the connection that an individual has with their group that causes them to focus on the differences of other groups which contributes to the perception of these opposing groups to be seen as a threat.

Limitations

This research project faced a number of limitations. Due to constraints on time and resources, the gathering of data was restricted to a small sample, as it was beyond the scope of this project to gather data from a larger population. There was also an imbalance in the male/female ratio of participants that took part in this study. As the study comprised of three males and one female, the researcher did not receive an even share of gender accounts. Another limitation of the study was that the researcher did not have the opportunity to interview someone of the older generation. The researcher would have liked to interview someone who is now retired and has time to regularly attend games. It would have been interesting to have heard the perspective of an older person on how the crowd has changed over the years and their opinions on today's contemporary crowds. Unfortunately, the researcher was unsuccessful in his attempts to find such a participant.

Another limitation lay in the fact that of all the participants interviewed, they all supported a League of Ireland team from Dublin. It would have been useful to learn of the crowd behaviour of non-Dublin supporters. The researcher was also concerned that due to the line of questioning, there was a risk of the interviewees expressing bravado so as to appear

strong and masculine. There was also the concern that the participants may not freely admit with all honesty that they are not acting individually and were influenced by the crowd. This could be seen where the participants gave examples of other people's behaviour and not their own.

Likewise, with the ethnographic field research, the researcher only got to attend two games as it was not possible to attend more due to time and resource constraints. Both games attended were observed among the Rovers supporters so the researcher did not get to experience of being among a different group of supporters. Also, as the researcher was alone and only has one set of eyes, so couldn't observe everything that was going on.

Recommendations

The study on football supporters is a vastly studied area; however this researcher feels that specific literature regarding certain topics that developed during the research project is deficient and requires further research. The first area in need for further investigation is in relation to the comments of interviewee D who stated that behavioural change at a game could be triggered much in the same way as drink acts to trigger alcoholism. While literature was found in preparation for this project that compared football fandom to religion, no literature was found that made this comparison as described by Interviewee D. For this reason, this researcher feels that perhaps this is an area where future research is required. Interviews could be conducted with passionate supporters who rarely get the opportunity to go to see their team play live. Afterwards they could be interviewed to determine if attendance of the game had a trigger effect on their behaviour. Ideal candidates for this study could be people who have emigrated and recently returned home, having not had any recent opportunities to see their team play live.

Although Cook's seminal observational report on football fan identity asserts that a collective identity was very much evident in the behaviour of the fans, it does not discuss or explore if there was any level of awareness of this on the fan's part. Similarly, as all the participants in this study spoke of others and not themselves when giving examples of supporters demonstrating identity shifts, perhaps they themselves are unaware of their own identity change? For these reasons, this researcher considers that it would be good practice for future research to be carried out in this area through in-depth interviews and possibly playing recordings of interviewee's participation back to them if this practice was deemed to be ethically sound.

This criticism that fans can have of their fellow supporters was not a theme that the researcher came across while preparing the literature review. Likewise, the fear that the couple expressed if their own fan's learned of their involvement in this study was unexpected. For these reasons, this researcher feels that future study on the behaviour of football fans should involve intra-fan relations research which could be conducted through semi-structured interviews.

Conclusion

Prior to this study a scarce amount of research could be found on the traits of League of Ireland fans in general, let alone on the topic of how crowd participation impacted their behaviour. The reason for this possibly comes down to League of Ireland supporters being a marginal group, who pale into insignificance in comparison to the amount of supporters in Ireland and world-wide who follow the English Premier League. However, while they may be small in numbers, the researcher found the League of Ireland supporters that he encountered to possess an immense passion for their team that is of intrinsic value to them. The findings from

this research have enhanced our understanding of what it means to be a fan and have enabled us to appreciate the sense of belonging and secure social status that being among fellow supporters provides. With this knowledge now in mind, this research has offered some enlightenment on how the experience of being part of a football crowd can influence the behaviour and identity of a League of Ireland supporter.

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Appendix

Interview questions

INT: First and foremost, I should ask you what team do you support?

RESP:

INT: And how long have you supported.....?

RESP:

INT: What was it that made you choose.... as your team to support?

RESP:

INT: And would you consider yourself a passionate supporter?

RESP

INT: How would you describe your relationships with your fellow shamrock rovers supporters?

RESP:

INT: What attributes would you consider are necessary in order to be considered an avid and loyal fan?

RESP

INT: Would you get to go to many games yourself?

RESP:

INT: Could you describe to me the experience of being at the stadium and watching your team play live?

RESP:

INT: Would you say that the masculinity element of football is what attracts individuals to start supporting a team?

RESP

INT: And when you go to games do you ever partake in any match-day rituals?

RESP:

INT: Now I just want to ask you about being part of the crowd. Is there an appeal about being part of a collective unit, part of the group? Does that add to the occasion?

RESP:

INT: So it's not so much about supporting the team, it's more about the occasion?

RESP:

INT: Would you say being part of the crowd can have an influence on different individual's behaviour? Would you say that there is an air of anonymity?

RESP:

INT: Personally, would you feel any different? Would you save that your identity would shift while you are at a game? Or would you be the same person that you are on a day to day basis?

RESP:

INT: Would you say your emotions can influence your behaviour and that you would act in a different manner than you normally would?

RESP:

INT: How would you describe your relationship with opposing fans?

RESP:

INT: Have you ever witnessed any anti-social behaviour from your own set of fans or opposing fans?

RESP:

INT: And as regards chanting, have you ever heard any that you would deem to be derogatory and designed to cause upset to opposing fans?

RESP:

INT: Would you say that there's a fine line between genuine banter and chants that are just designed to offend people?

RESP:

INT: And would you feel any pressure to join in any chanting that you felt uncomfortable with?

RESP:

INT: And would you say that most football supporters would act in a different fashion at a game than they would normally?

RESP:

INT: Would you agree that there is a sense of anonymity for supporters when part of the collective supporter's crowd?

RESP:

INT: So do you think that at football games there is more acceptability and tolerance for this sort of behaviour?

RESP:

INT: What is it that is so special about match-day for supporters do you think?

RESP:

INT: Do you think fans can judge their fellow supporters if they do not feel they are passionate enough in their support for their team?

RESP:

INT: Would you say that there is a difference between Jack the person and Jack the Shamrock Rovers supporter?

RESP:

INT: Thank you very much for taking the time out for me today, it is very much appreciated. I have one final question for you, who do you think will win the league this season?