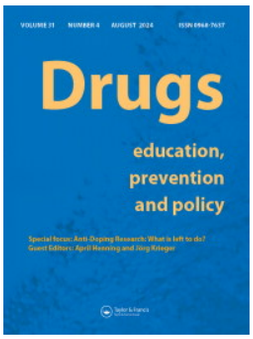

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Alcohol consumption among UK football supporters: investigating the contested field of the football carnivalesque

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This paper investigates alcohol consumption within cultures of football fandom through the innovative combination of theories of the carnivalesque and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital.

Methods: Focus groups (n=79) were conducted with football supporters in England and Scotland. Semi-structured interviews (n=15) were also conducted with key organizational stakeholders. Research explored the importance and role of alcohol consumption for supporters when watching or attending matches..

Results: Participants confirmed the cultural significance, perceived normalcy and historical links between football and alcohol consumption. Supporters highlighted the importance of the sociability, friendship, and social capital aspects of alcohol consumption. Participants believed football supporters are perceived differently in comparison with supporters of other sports, arguing that legislation surrounding alcohol consumption at other sports allowed supporters to enhance the carnivalesque by drinking alcohol, whereas football fans were more restricted. Participants agreed the habitus of excessive drinking and violence associated with football supporters led to a bad reputation, however, this view was outdated. Participants also recognized a growing drug culture in football.

Conclusion: The findings draw attention to the alcohol-sport relationship and the contested relations, and diverging interests and influences, within the social field of football.

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Alcohol use; football supporters cocaine; social bonding; Bourdieu; carnivalesque

Introduction

The relationship between sport and alcohol has been described as a dyad or nexus (Palmer, 2011, 2012) and there is a strong cultural association between certain men's team sports and alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom (UK). In this country for example, men's football and rugby union have deep historical and cultural links with alcohol (Dixon, 2014). The masculine subcultures of supporters and players place alcohol consumption, often to high levels, at the heart of social relations surrounding sport events (e.g. Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Collins & Vamplew, 2002; Dunning & Sheard, 1979; Vincent & Harris, 2014). Alcohol has also been pivotal to the material structure of the UK's modern sport-leisure economy, from sponsorship revenue provided by alcohol corporations through to the tradition of retired athletes taking over public houses (pubs) (Collins & Vamplew, 2002, Pearson & Sale, 2011; Purves et al., 2017).

Alcohol consumption is generally viewed by football supporters as a predominantly social activity, providing opportunities for bonding with friends, escapism, excitement, and enjoyment (e.g. Crawford, 2004; Giulianotti, 2011; Knijnik, 2018; Pearson, 2012). However, the alcohol-football relationship has sparked debate about the health and social harms associated with a 'culture of intoxication,' as drinking in football contexts is perceived as normalizing high-risk alcohol consumption among supporters (Hutton et al., 2013; Percy et al., 2011). Excessive alcohol consumption by match-going supporters has potential repercussions for public safety (violence, antisocial behavior, potential fan injuries) and public health (high-risk consumption, binge drinking). Indeed, there has been wider societal concern over the 'culturally entrenched' position of alcohol in football with a need to address concomitant harms caused by alcohol within the sport, which has direct implications for various stakeholders, including police, health services, and supporters' families

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(Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Ostrowsky, 2014; Strang et al., 2018).

Research to date on football supporters and alcohol consumption has primarily centered on issues relating to violence and antisocial behavior (e.g. Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Ostrowsky, 2014; Pearson & Sale, 2011). From the 1960s through to the 2000s, this focus reflected the predominant concerns of social scientists with football hooliganism, including the possible roles of various social and cultural factors, including alcohol consumption, with respect to these violent subgroups of supporters (e.g. Armstrong, 1998; Dunning & Waddington, 2003; Giulianotti, 1991; Mann, 2012). Prior work also indicated that pubs were a prominent social location for hooligan and many other fan groups (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2002; Dixon, 2014; Weed, 2007, 2008).

The significance of the link between alcohol consumption and football supporters' disorder has been questioned. Previous research has examined how the dominant identities of supporter groups can be transformed, and in some cases inverted, even as levels of alcohol consumption remain consistent. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, Scotland's 'Tartan Army' lost its earlier reputation for violent disorder, and became more publicly known for friendly, boisterous, and explicitly anti-violent practices, while continuing to engage in, and celebrate, high levels of alcohol consumption (Giulianotti, 1991, 1993). Other national team football supporter groups—such as those following Denmark, Ireland, and Holland—have historically been known for similarly positive social behaviors alongside high alcohol consumption, in ways that confounded dominant narratives on alcohol, football and supporter violence (Eichberg, 2007).

Since the 1970s, public policy in the UK on football supporters and alcohol has largely centered on imposing restrictions in order to maintain public order (Frosdick & Marsh, 2005). However, there are important legislative differences between countries. In England and Wales, for example, the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol) Act 1985 makes it illegal to enter a football stadium while drunk, consume alcohol on official transport to matches, take alcohol into a stadium, or consume alcohol within sight of a football pitch. Alcohol is available on general sale within stadia up to 15 min before kick-off and at half time, but supporters are not allowed to carry alcoholic beverages on to the terraces or consume alcohol in their seats. In contrast, Scottish law is more restrictive. In response to then high levels of disorder and violence in and around Scottish club and national team football, the 1977 McElhone Report recommended a ban on alcohol at football matches which was subsequently enshrined in law by the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980. Thus, in Scottish football stadia, alcohol is not available for sale to supporters, with the exception of hospitality areas; alcohol consumption in corporate areas which overlook the field of play is forbidden unless the blinds or curtains are closed.

Recently, the legitimacy of these restrictions has been challenged by supporters, organizational stakeholders, and politicians. First, these regulations are viewed as outdated on the grounds that, since the 1980s, football-related violence has declined substantially, while the social profiles of supporters, particularly at leading English clubs, are widely considered to have changed markedly, becoming older, wealthier, and more culturally diverse (Cleland & Cashmore, 2016; Erturan-Ogut, 2020; Penn & Penn, 2021). Second, there have been calls for a more relaxed and trusting approach toward football supporters' alcohol consumption (see Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport & Crouch, 2021), although different organizational stakeholders' perspectives on this issue are highly varied (Brooks, 2015; Martin et al., 2022; Peterkin, 2014). Third, alcohol consumption continues to be associated with adding to supporters' enjoyment of football, in terms of enhancing social atmospheres, and the vital tension and excitement in attending matches (e.g. Crawford, 2004; Giulianotti, 2011; Knijnik, 2018; Pearson, 2012). Fourth, there is evidence that current laws lead to increased 'binge' consumption of alcohol pre-match, encourage spectators to arrive at matches later leading to crushes at turnstiles, and in England, lead to crowded concourses and stairwells at half-time (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] & Crouch, 2021; Pearson & Sale, 2011; Martin et al., 2022).

Therefore, it may be that current laws regarding alcohol consumption within UK football stadia are outmoded, in ways that reflect an unwarranted or outdated mistrust of supporters, while also having negative impacts on supporters' enjoyment of (and, potentially, their willingness to pay into) the game. Sociological examination of these issues requires us to explore the role of alcohol within supporter cultures and to examine how diverse social groups and organizational stakeholders in football position themselves in relation to the question of supporters and alcohol consumption in the UK. In line with standard interpretive and broader qualitative methodological approaches, our aim is to draw out, to explore, and to compare and contrast, the rich narratives, perspectives, and lived experiences of different stakeholder groups in regard to football, alcohol and supporter cultures. Accordingly, while we discuss our subsequent findings vis-a-vis relevant academic literature, again in line with standard qualitative research methods, our aim is not to concertedly challenge or to 'correct' these participants by contrasting their narratives with the various, prior research findings of diverse academics in this field. Our theoretical route into interpreting these stakeholder narratives and insights is through an innovative integration of two analytical approaches: first, theories of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984), which enable analysis of football fan culture with respect to alcohol consumption; and second, the sociological theory of Bourdieu (1984), which facilitates investigation of contested relations, and diverging interests and influences, within the social field of football.

Theoretical approach: carnivalesque and social fields

The carnivalesque concept has been widely used in cultural sociology, anthropology, and cultural and literary studies, to explore aspects of folk or popular culture that involve diverse mixes of free or unregulated social relations, humor, profanity, hedonic excesses, and transgressive behaviors. This has historically been most associated with Medieval carnivals and other popular festivals (Bakhtin, 1984; Stallybrass & White, 1986;

Testa, 2020). The concept has gained particular salience for examining cultures of alcohol consumption, with strong gender and class dynamics, within the burgeoning night-time economy (Haydock, 2015; Hubbard, 2013). Carnivalesque practices—such as high alcohol or illicit drug consumption—represent escapes from the increasingly regulated and organized spaces of leisure capitalism, where there is some promise of autonomy from everyday conventions (Presdee, 2000). Yet, at the same time, contemporary carnivals are deeply embedded within the commercial and regulatory frameworks of leisure capitalism, through the alcohol and other industries, and the licensing and policing of carnivalesque practices and settings.

Aspects of the carnivalesque have been identified among football supporters by various authors (e.g. Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1991, 1993; Hoy, 1994; Pearson, 2012). For football supporters, the carnivalesque is manifested in a wide range of ways, such as open and informal sociability, profane language and displays of the body among some supporters, the often-raucous atmospheres and colorful spectator spectacles inside stadia, powerful senses of communitas (strong community bonds, intensified by a shared experience), high levels of intoxication, and, for some supporter groups, fully transgressive moments of social breakdown and disorder. In line with cultural theories of the carnivalesque, we are not identifying a somewhat positivistic, etiological relationship between intoxication, transgression, and the wider carnivalesque. Rather, our contention instead is that alcohol consumption—particularly to excess—has been and remains a central part of the diverse socio-cultural practices and performances that contribute to the making and remaking of football as a site of collective effervescence, ritualized drama and liminality (Rowe, 1998; Turner, 1964).

Consequently, football acts as an exceptional field to investigate the regulation of the contemporary carnivalesque with particular respect to alcohol consumption, and how legislation and impositions around consumption are experienced by participants, given that supporters face such substantial restrictions while attending matches. Furthermore, different social groups may have a variety of interests and perspectives on the extent to which the football carnival, particularly regarding alcohol consumption, is regulated.

The impacts of the carnivalesque on the wider social and political order have been viewed in different ways by academic and wider analyses, for example as functioning ritually to maintain the status quo (allowing publics to 'let off steam' for a day, thereby maintaining power relations in the longer-term); as symbolically inverting social and political hierarchies or transgressively mocking elite groups (in ways that may be playful, or more serious); or, as carrying the capacity to encapsulate discontent, leading to direct challenges toward the powerful (cf. Bakhtin, 1984; Cohen, 1993; Stallybrass & White, 1986; Testa, 2020). The theoretical framework of Bourdieu enables us to go further, in terms of rethinking the carnivalesque in more sociological terms, with particular reference to its social, cultural, and political dimensions. Through Bourdieu, as we outline here, we come to see the carnivalesque (in this case, football, and its fandom, with a particular focus on cultures of alcohol consumption) as a social 'field' that is continuously shaped and contested by a diverse array of dominant and dominated groups, which hold different and competing habitus, tastes, interests, and positions therein.

Bourdieusian approach to the carnivalesque

A Bourdieusian approach enables us to examine how the regulation of the 'field' of the football carnivalesque, with specific respect to alcohol consumption, is viewed, potentially in contested ways, by different supporters and other key stakeholders. The concepts of habitus, field, and capital are of particular relevance. Bourdieu (1984) describes habitus as a 'structuring and structured structure' (p. 167), which is structured by past and present circumstance; structuring in that it helps to shape behavior; and a structure, because it is comprised of a system of dispositions which generate tastes and inclinations. In this context, habitus reflects the social influences and experiences that shape the habits, predispositions, and literally the tastes of diverse groups of football supporters for alcohol consumption.

A field is comprised of different objective positions, and the system or network of relations between those positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These positions are occupied by diverse social actors (or other entities), who struggle with each other for influence and status within the field (Bourdieu, 1984). Positions and relations within the field are also shaped by the diverse types and volumes of capital held by actors. Capital may be economic (income, wealth), cultural (cultural goods, educational qualifications, mannerisms, and other corporeal characteristics), social (advantageous social connections and positioning), or symbolic (tokens of honor and prestige). Within competitive fields, actors operate individually or collectively to advance their interests and enhance their positions vis-à-vis other actors, relative to the capital that they hold and with reference to their habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Actors and groups with dominant field positions possess and utilize the strongest types and volumes of capital, and strategies for its exercise. Their pre-eminence is secured by claiming 'distinction' for their cultural preferences, and by establishing a 'doxa' across the field which serves to normalize their dominance as 'common sense' (Bourdieu, 1984).

Thus, Bourdieu's theoretical framework highlights how cultural fields—such as in sport, music, or leisure activities—largely reproduce the wider set of power relations between dominant and dominated groups. For example, historically, in England, sporting fields such as cricket, golf, and tennis, have been largely shaped by the habitus and types of capital held and valued by dominant social groups (the middle- and upper-classes); thus, the doxa of modern sport is that these particular sports carry distinction vis-à-vis those more associated with the habitus and types of capital held by dominated groups, such as football, rugby league, or darts (Morton, 2021). These latter sports are liable to diverse forms of regulation and control, particularly when specific types of habitus, and forms of cultural and social capital held by some dominated groups are manifested in ways that (at least appear to)

challenge the incumbent power relations across the field and the prevailing doxa.

Consequently, football occupies an intersection between several Bourdieusian fields, which have different and sometimes competing cultures, ethics, and governance norms. It is a competitive sport, a business, a leisure industry, a place of historical memory, and the site of powerful social class, individual, family, local, national, and sometimes religious identities. Particular groups hold different positions and interests within each field, reflecting their own understanding of what football is and how they encounter it, which in turn influence how they seek to define and shape the field. In this paper we examine alcohol consumption and the laws surrounding its consumption in and around football grounds, focusing on the intersecting fields of football fandom and the carnivalesque. Whereas previous literature has understood the carnivalesque as a 'time apart' from everyday life, we examine it as a 'time with' supporter identities. We argue that alcohol embodies different senses of what being a supporter is and becomes the focus of a particular understanding of the carnivalesque as a contested space where competing understandings of class, place and football are played out. In the paper we explore how supporters live this, and how the football stadium and other associated sites such as the pub or transport to matches become places where different experiences are lived.

Our integration of the theories of the carnivalesque and the Bourdieusian field enables us to examine the carnivalesque, not just in the conventional anthropological or cultural sociological sense as a site of popular festivity and excess, but also (following Bourdieu) in a way that accounts fully for power relations and divisions therein; that is, as a contested social field in which diverse groups compete to exercise influence. In the context of this paper, this analytical approach enables us to investigate football fandom and the carnivalesque with respect to the social role and legislation surrounding alcohol consumption, and how these contested social processes are understood by football supporters and organizational stakeholders. A Bourdieusian approach also contributes significantly to our methodology, notably in our focus on different stakeholders within the field of the football carnivalesque. More broadly, our dual analytical approach—combining theories of the carnivalesque with Bourdieu—may be used for further research in many other areas, such as on drug use and youth subcultures.

Methodology

The analysis is based on data from focus groups with football supporters and semi-structured interviews with key organizational stakeholders. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Stirling's General University Ethics Panel (Reference GUEP 3677).

Football supporter focus groups

In total, we conducted 14 focus groups with supporters in England and Scotland—to gain in-depth insight into: the importance and role of alcohol consumption for those watching football; how patterns of alcohol consumption differ from those associated with other leisure activities; how current legislation surrounding alcohol at football matches influences the alcohol consumption of people attending; and to what extent supporters agree that elements of existing legislation concerning alcohol and football are fair, effective or in need of change. To gather a range of views and experiences, our sampling strategy was designed to include groups of supporters (n = 8) who regularly attended matches and supported teams from the professional leagues in Scotland and England. We also recruited groups of casual football supporters (n = 3) who did not regularly attend matches in person but preferred to watch matches on television at home or in pubs/bars. We also conducted focus groups with supporters who followed the national teams of England and Scotland (n = 3). Due to difficulties recruiting the final 'casual supporter' group post-March 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we supplemented our sample with an additional group of Scotland supporters.

Participants meeting our sample criteria were identified through direct contact, referral, and snowball sampling via supporters' groups networks such as the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) and Supporters Direct Scotland (SDS). Groups were organized via direct email communication between the participants and research team. Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form which they either returned prior to the meeting or completed on the day if the group was conducted in person. Participants were offered high-street vouchers worth £30 as a thank you for taking part. Demographic information of focus group participants can be found in Table 1.

Data collection with football supporter focus groups

Focus groups were conducted between November 2019 and February 2021. Groups conducted before March 2020 were conducted face to face in venues either organized by the supporter groups or the research team. Groups conducted after March 2020 were facilitated online using Microsoft Teams. In line with previous research, the different formats (in person vs online) did not impact our study, participant responses or data (Woodyatt et al., 2016). Each focus group comprised of five to six participants and lasted on average 72 min. In person groups were conducted in a private room to allow participants to speak freely. Focus groups were utilized not as a multiple interview tool, but as a method of exploring supporters' opinions through discussion with their peers (Cyr, 2016). While focus groups have been criticized for their dynamics, including social pressures, groupthink, and desirability bias, it is argued that the pressures and biases they entail are like the ones induced by everyday conversations (Gamson, 1992; Hollander, 2004). As such, focus groups can be a useful tool in exploring people's understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon.

Researchers who moderated the groups utilized a topic guide designed to facilitate the conversation, allowing the discussion to continue and develop freely and uninterrupted among participants. The topic guide covered: attending football matches,

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of focus group participants.

Characteristics	Participants (n = 79)
Gender	
Male	61
Female	6
Prefer not to say	12
Country associated with	
Scotland	42
England	37
Type of fan	
Club	45
International	17
Pub/casual	17
Age (years)	
18–24	4
25–34	18
35–44	11
45–54	20
55–64	11
65–74	3
75+	0
Prefer not to say	12
Ethnicity	
White	62
Asian/Asian British	1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	4
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	0
Other	0
Prefer not to say	12
Religious beliefs	
No religion	42
Catholic/Protestant/other Christian	15
Buddhist	0
Hindu	0
Jewish	1
Sikh	0
Other	1
Prefer not to say	20
Highest level of education	
Higher education & professional/vocational equivalents	45
Highers, A levels, vocational level 3 and equivalents	11
Standard grades, GCSE/O Level grades and equivalents	11
No qualifications	0
Other qualifications, level unknown (including foreign qualifications)	0
Prefer not to say	12

attitudes and understanding of current legislation, watching football at home, watching football in the pub, drinking during other sports/leisure pursuits and the role of alcohol in society.

Mindful of social desirability effects and potential bias existing within focus groups, efforts were made for homogenous groups (participants of similar age, education, etc.) to be assembled, allowing for in-depth discussions among participants (Smithson, 2000). While biases within each group cannot be avoided, Kidd and Parshall (2000) argue that in a homogeneous group, a discussion through agreement and disagreement among participants can lead to a more accurate account of their views. To ensure that not only the collective voice of each focus group was heard but also individual opinions, follow-up questions were asked to encourage views from all participants.

With prompting from the moderator, emphasis was drawn on any points of disagreement within each focus group, to ensure that all viewpoints were discussed equally, as Kidd and Parshall (2000) suggest. The moderator also tried to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute, by inviting any silent participants to agree or disagree with previous statements made (Smithson & Díaz, 1996). Additionally, debates were encouraged in each group, allowing individual views to be expressed and multiple perspectives on each topic to be elicited, rather than one jointly produced position, to limit the groupthink effect (Cyr, 2016).

Organizational stakeholder interviews

We sought interviews with organizational stakeholders to gain in-depth insight into: the consequences of alcohol consumption for those watching football from the perspective of those responsible for match day safety and those who will be instrumental in any potential legislative changes; to find out the options for legislative change and how these are received by different stakeholder groups: and to what extent organizational stakeholders agree that existing laws concerning alcohol and football are fair, effective or in need of change. In total 13 organizational stakeholder interviews were conducted with 15 individuals from various organizations including the UK and Scottish Governments, Police, football supporters' groups, safety organizations and academics.

Stakeholder organizations were identified through direct contact, referral, and snowball sampling. Interviews were organized via direct email communication between the participants and the research team. Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form which they either returned prior to the interview or completed on the day if the interview was conducted in person. Participants were offered £30 worth of high-street vouchers as a thank you for taking part. Demographic information of organizational stakeholders can be found in Table 2.

Data collection with organizational stakeholders

Organizational stakeholder interviews were conducted between April and September 2019. Interviews were conducted via a mixture of face to face and telephone interviews, with both the interviewer and participant in a private setting where possible, allowing them to speak freely. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured topic guide designed to solicit views around organizational stakeholders' background/main concerns, knowledge and attitudes toward current legislation and possible changes to legislation (Martin et al., 2022)

Data analysis

Focus groups and Organizational stakeholder interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was read and reread by two researchers independently (CB & JGM). Framework analysis was employed to analyze each transcript. This method was chosen as it lends itself well to an in-depth analysis of each transcript. The data were summarized into a framework grid utilizing NVivo 12 (QSR International Ltd., Melbourne, Australia). The wider context of participants' accounts is therefore not lost across each

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of organizational stakeholder interviewees.

Characteristics	Participants (n = 15)
Gender	
Male	13
Female	2
Country associated with	
Scotland	7
England	4
UK	4
Organization	
Football governing body	5
Safety organization	1
Government	2
Football supporters' organization	2
Academic	1
Police	4

transcript. A combination of deductive (guided by the topic guide and literature) and inductive (reading the transcripts) reasoning was employed. Within our framework grid (row = participant, column = theme) summaries of participant's accounts were written in relevant cells. To assist with data management each summary was hyperlinked to match participants' speech. Following this, high level themes were identified by the principal investigator and discussed with CB and JGM who then re-examined the data and conducted further in-depth analyses.

Results

Our results focus on four common themes which were identified across both the focus groups and organizational stakeholder interviews. These are: 1) Cultural Norms, Habitus and Social Capital; 2) the Differential Regulation of Carnivalesque; 3) Football Supporters and Violence; and 4) An Emergent Alternative Football Carnivalesque. Each theme is described below, supported by representative quotes from focus group participants and organizational stakeholder interviewees. These views of stakeholders are narrative accounts and are presented as research participants rather than informed individuals who would be familiar with the established academic evidence. It also important to note that female supporters (n = 6) were underrepresented in comparison to male (n = 61) supporters therefore the majority of quotes originated from male participants.

Cultural norms, habitus and social capital

In broad terms, all participants confirmed the continuing significance of underpinning cultural norms in the tolerance and perceived normalcy of alcohol consumption in football and related social contexts. Thus, for many supporters, their collective habitus continued to be marked significantly by the routine consumption of alcohol in football contexts, and an acceptance that encounters with drinking were integral to the match-day experience. Three main points followed from these broad observations.

First, some supporters reflected on the habitual, normalized, automatic, and culturally exceptional relationships that they had, in football contexts, with alcohol consumption. One English club supporter reflected on how individuals singularly go to the pub before games, rather than pursue other forms of entertainment such as visiting the cinema: 'It's how it works. It's almost like we're programmed to associate the two [alcohol and football] together.' The same association applied when watching games on television: as one casual English supporter noted, having a can of beer during televised matches is an 'automatic habit.'

Second, in their reflections, some supporters pointed to the deeper cultural and historical links between football, alcohol consumption, and the habitus of UK working class men. As one Scottish supporter stated:

> Yeah, well, it's a working-class sport at the end of the day, and … going to the pub is traditionally the thing that working class…it's a male dominated sport, that's changing slowly, but that's mainly what people have done for centuries probably, working class blokes going to the pub and having a laugh with their mates. Inevitably that just rolls into football, I think. (Scottish Premiership club supporter)

One supporter from south London developed this point further through historical observations on local working and leisure-time routines, football and alcohol consumption:

> So instead of being at work for the [Saturday] afternoon, they [the fans] would be at the football and that is why—if you take all the factories that used to be along the river here—that is why [the club] has such huge crowds, because all the fan base came from all those people who worked in the factories there. So, they'd finish work at half past twelve, one o'clock, or whenever it was and then go to the pub until kick-off time. (English Championship club supporter)

Third, many supporters and organizational stakeholders highlighted alcohol's crucial role in facilitating and maintaining social ties, friendships, and enjoyable sociability. Notably, drinking in football contexts was viewed by many supporters as an exceptional social practice for nurturing and sustaining these bonds. As one English supporter noted:

> Generally speaking, here at home games, certainly for me, it's a social activity before and after the game, where I meet up with the same people who I've met with for years, who I only now see at home games, a lot of them. We have a pint before, and we have a drink afterwards. (English L2 club supporter)

Similarly, a Scottish club supporter explained that football and associated drinking were the sine qua non for sustaining friendships, 'the glue that that has kept us together over maybe forty or fifty years.' Developing the same metaphor, an English club fan commented:

> It's some kind of social glue and I think it's extremely important yeah, massively important…. There are people I want to see, that I've been friends with for thirty, thirty-five years. There are people I actually wouldn't see if it wasn't for coming here [the pub] every other Saturday. (English L2 club supporter)

One English supporter indicated that the social aspects of drinking at football may be as or more important than watching the match itself.

> I'm just going to say something about friendship. I'm just thinking, for away games, I tend to see people who I wouldn't see at any

> other occasion. In fact, if it wasn't for football, I'd probably no longer [see those friends]. So actually, having a drink and a bite to eat before, is really important. That is the time when you do find out about what they are doing with the rest of the lives. Once you're at the match, who cares? So, nine times out of ten, so this is your chance to catch up with friends. If we just came for the football, then I wouldn't see them. (English casual supporter)

Organizational stakeholders from both government (DCMS) and supporter groups concurred on the sociability of drinking in and around football. The DCMS representative indicated that football, and settings for alcohol consumption, were associated with exceptional levels of social capital, in drawing people together and providing a common focus:

> Football is a very good social and collective experience isn't it and I think people enjoy that aspect of being part of a group and being part of following something collectively. I don't think there is a condition on it, but I think it's [drinking before attending football matches] a much more acceptable kind of practice…. Absolutely. We've touched on it a bit with the kind of coming together, the kind of social groups that have been formed and a football group can come together with people that are of a similar mind set, that are determined to find a vehicle in society that are of a similar mind. Whereas in other walks of society it is very difficult to get those groups together, in football it is much more accessible, and we still get it. (DCMS representative)

> Social, bonding, being part of the gang if you like because as a football fan you can walk into any pub and you are not a stranger, even if you are if that makes sense. (FSA representative)

Overall, football supporters and some organizational stakeholders confirmed the continuing cultural significance and perceived normalcy of alcohol consumption in football. Some supporters located this nexus in cultural historical terms, in the old habitus of industrial working-class men. Notably, many fans and other stakeholders highlighted the deep importance of the sociability, friendship, and social capital aspects of alcohol consumption in football contexts.

The differential regulation of carnivalesque

All of our participants believed that football supporters are treated and perceived differently in comparison with supporters of other sports.

> I think, unfortunately, the authorities, the clubs, the government, the media, the person in the street, will still see football fans as pigeonholed in many ways, even though we're all part of that. I'm a football fan, the media go to football games, supporters, board members; company directors, whatever, from all walks of life are all going to football games. We're all football fans. I don't think you can pigeonhole every football fan as the same, but I definitely think there is the perception that there are elements of society that go to football games that are different and they behave differently. (DCMS representative)

A representative from Police Scotland stated that they did not believe that there was any less alcohol consumption at rugby than at football matches. They went on to imply that it may be due to the dynamics of class and social relations, 'I think it [alcohol consumption] is probably on a par, but the rugby supporters would argue, you never see fighting at rugby matches. There are different behaviours, and I don't know why it is a different dynamic.' A British Transport police representative agreed with the notion of the habitus being different for football and rugby supporters:

> Rugby, you still get the drunk and anti-social behaviour and also cricket as well, it does cause some issues, however, not on the scale of football. The mob culture, animosity and so on, doesn't exist in the other sports, whereas it does in football. (British Transport police officer)

A representative from the Football Association explained that they had attended rugby matches where supporters of both teams were drinking before the game, sitting next to each other without any antisocial behavior or violence. They concluded 'I wish I could say the same for football, but I can't.' However, they did argue that other sports (namely racing and cricket) were 'catching up,' with alcohol related problems apparently on the rise. In contrast, a representative from the FSA believed that 'rugby as a game carries a bit of a dirty secret around.' They suggested that that its drinking culture was potentially worse than football and that rugby supporters could be 'pretty obnoxious.'

All focus group participants highlighted that the legislation surrounding alcohol consumption at other sports allowed supporters to enhance the carnivalesque by drinking alcohol while consuming their sport within the stadia, as these supporters are permitted to take alcohol into the seating area and enjoy the sport and a drink at the same time. In particular, participants felt that public perceptions are that football is a peripheral field in which the carnivalesque is heavily regulated owing to social divisions among sports.

> I still think it's unfair that football is the only sport that is targeted. It's an easy target… there's trouble at rugby. That doesn't stop them [rugby supporters] having a drink. (English Premier League club supporter)

> Yeah exactly. When you start talking about the rugby particularly. That lot—that lot—because it is a class sort of thing. That lot, they're terrible. I've got mates who are rugby supporters and I've got mates who play rugby, and their behaviour is far, far more offensive, and more dangerous than any that I've ever come across in football. They get up to terrible stuff. I've got mates who have gone on rugby tours around Europe and the stuff that they get up to is appalling. (English L2 club supporter)

Overall, there was a strong sense of animosity and class difference captured during discussions with focus group participants with regards to how football supporters thought they were viewed relative to rugby fans. One Scottish club supporter believed that football supporters were perceived as hooligans, out to cause antisocial behavior and violence while consuming alcohol at matches, but said 'rugby supporters, the sun shines out of them.' For another Scotland casual supporter, as suggested in an earlier quote, this was due to class dynamics:

> Yeah, I think we are treated differently, but to be devil's advocate, rugby is a minority sport. Football is the sport of the country,

> that's what the masses watch, and rugby is predominantly upper-class people as well, who they feel, for some reason, can be trusted to have a drink more than working class people from a council estate can. Whether that's right or wrong, I don't know, but I think that's the mindset when you knuckle down to it, yeah. (Scotland casual supporter)

In sum, most organizational stakeholders' accounts offered critical points of view of the continuities rather than the differences between football and rugby supporters.

Football supporters and violence

Most football supporters and some organizational stakeholders felt that serious violence at football matches was not related to alcohol consumption but rather organized violence by individuals whose intent is to cause harm within the field. One England club supporter explained that organized fights were usually carried out by individuals who had not been drinking, 'but football gets the short straw every time because we are perceived as hooligans.' Football hooligans are often identified as a group of males who perpetrate belligerent and violent behavior, normally between rival gangs.

> I think generally speaking, those people who are going to get involved in proper violence, they don't drink. If you're drunk, well you can't do what you want to do in a fight. You can't defend yourself. We've seen them in pubs [hooligans]. ……They weren't bothered about us [club] supporters, but they weren't drinking. They were using the pub to meet and to arrange a meeting with [other] hooligans so they could have their fight. (English L2 club supporter)

> Hard core football violence doesn't have its roots in getting drunk. I'm fairly certain of that. (English Football League representative)

> There still will be trouble at football and the people that are organising the trouble will be boys that will probably go and not even going for a drink. Guys like us, it's your day out and whatever and that's it. (Scotland supporter)

It was argued that on occasions due to the culture of football and the habitus of longstanding rival groups you can anticipate violence. However, as highlighted by a Head of Security and Operations, 'that is not because of alcohol being on sale at the stadiums, I'm quite sure of that.' One English Championship club supporter suggested that alcohol could not be ruled out completely, but they did not believe that it was the main driver of violence or antisocial behavior.

Participants agreed that the habitus of excessive drinking and violence associated with football supporters has led them to having a bad reputation. However, a common view was that this reputation was now outdated. This was supported by a representative from Police Scotland who indicated that, as intelligence gathering has become more sophisticated (around stadia and on official transport), there is less violence and antisocial behavior and said, 'We pick up and react on what we get intel wise, but I think the football supporters and policing have evolved and they evolve hand in hand as time goes.'

An emergent alternative football carnivalesque

A significant concern among organizational stakeholders and supporters was a perceived increase in the use of illegal Class A drugs, in particular cocaine, as an alternative variant of the carnivalesque for some supporters.

> Dare I say it now, because you are looking at alcohol, there is a wider issue now with recreational drugs in football. There are some people and we've had it within our own England support base, who openly take recreational drugs, rather than get blind drunk. Cocaine is probably the most prevalent and seems to be the one that is easily available because it gives the same amount of courage and euphoria that four, five, six, seven pints of alcohol would give, in a much quicker space of time, without the effects of the alcohol. (Football Association representative)

The view that cocaine has superseded alcohol was shared by both organizational stakeholders and focus group participants:

> Yeah, something I've noticed as well is the recreational drug consumption. To me hooliganism died in the 90s because of [use of the drug] ecstasy. They weren't going out; they were taking pills and hugging each other instead of having a fight. And now, I don't know about anyone else, I do see bloody noses [as a consequence of cocaine use, not violence] at the grounds. (English casual supporter)

A British Transport Police officer highlighted that individuals liable to engage in antisocial behavior are subject to banning orders if they have been drinking but there is no equivalent provision for drugs. Thus, in this context, alcohol 'works' within this field, but cocaine does not. This view was supported by a police representative, who noted that 'extensive' use of cocaine in recent years is a more influential factor in violence and antisocial behavior than previously.

> I didn't mention other drugs because that is now becoming a big issue in football. Certainly, cocaine and others that are now being used extensively by some of the supporters that we know. Unfortunately, drugs are also becoming a far more influential factor than it used to be, certainly, five years ago, ten years ago. It's drugs now definitely, they drive a lot of the violence. (UK Policing Unit representative)

An England supporter made a similar observation when recounting their experience of attending football matches and going to the toilet and hearing fellow supporters setting up lines of cocaine.

> …like, the little tap on the portaloo, from the cubicle, you know, from a credit card or whatever it might be. And, you know, that is…that…I would say that's a bigger problem than the alcohol. Big time. Because ultimately the alcohol…if you…if you've had too much to drink really, the barman can actually make a decision on that and say…or the landlady can just say, 'you know what, you've had a bit too much, mate! Here's a glass of water, here's a coffee. We're going to get you cab back.' And…but with the drugs, there's no real control on that. They can get [high and fight] … and it's startling. (England supporter)

Both focus group participants and organizational stakeholders indicated that they had noticed increased use of

cocaine, sometimes in conjunction with alcohol; one Scotland club supporter described alcohol and cocaine consumption, in the football context, as a 'perfect mix,' pointing to their combined heightening of intoxicated, hedonic or transgressive experiences on match-days. With regards to serious violence, participants suggested that football supporters will always consume alcohol and there will always be 'small scuffles here and there,' but, as illustrated by a representative from South Yorkshire police, 'certainly there is a pickup in cocaine usage by people going out with the intent of causing serious disorder.'

In sum, both organizational stakeholders and focus group participants believed there was a growing drug culture in football. This finding reflects current British drug-taking culture whereby the prevalence of Class A drugs, particularly cocaine use among (mainly) young males has become less stigmatized and more accepted as normative behavior (Newson, 2021). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that drug issues and drug use trends have filtered through into the football fandom carnivalesque.

Discussion

Drinking and football is entwined in a complex, diverse and dynamic model of social structures and relationships where social groupings and strategies are important. In this study we have applied Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus, field and capital and Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque to show how the culture of alcohol consumption among football supporters in England and Scotland plays a major role in shaping their experiences when watching and attending matches.

Our findings highlight a disposition toward a collective habitus of routinized alcohol consumption in football supporters attending and watching games which is rooted in tradition and history. We have set out how the internalization of cultural norms generates a shared habitus among supporters that constructs alcohol consumption as normative and accepted. The continual interaction between the habitus (a set of predispositions) and this field (system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relations) generates and sustains such practices. While never exclusively a working-class activity, the rapid development of football as a spectator sport in the late 19th century and its geographical focus in the industrial north and midlands of England and Scotland, provided a powerful attraction to working-class people (Holt, 1990; Maguire, 2011). The field points to that working-class association and sheds light on social tensions that exist between those deep-seated traditional roots and the modern football crowd which consists of individuals across all social statuses. Indeed, habitus shapes behavior through past and present circumstances and hence history and tradition are central to the role of alcohol consumption for the modern-day football supporter. We also report the tensions that exist for football clubs between economic and social capital: football clubs operate as businesses, but they are also rich in cultural capital which is what interests most football supporters. The rise of football tourism (Tobar & Ramshaw, 2022) has increased these tensions leaving many 'traditional' supporters feeling isolated. Routinized alcohol consumption around the match helps retain some of that tradition.

Our study found that drinking was rooted in the social world, with a key motivator to drinking being the possibility of gaining social capital via social bonding with other supporters. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, individuals, alone or collectively, consciously or unconsciously, invest in developing networks of relationships that can be used in the short or longer-term; and thus, benefit from the assimilated capital of the sum of social networks . Our findings support previous research, which has similarly highlighted the inextricable link between socializing and alcohol use, and the relationship between alcohol and lowered inhibitions, social bonding, enjoyment, and fun (Benitez, 2021; Newson, 2019; Niland et al., 2013, Percy et al., 2011).

There is an inherent tension in football, with both supporters and some organizational stakeholders acknowledging that football supporters are perceived unfairly compared to supporters of other sports, particularly rugby. Almost all organizational stakeholders interviewed for this research believed that football supporters were more prone to antisocial behavior and violence than rugby fans and therefore should be subject to stricter restrictions and that on the whole, current legislation is justifiable. This finding highlights the contested social processes of alcohol consumption and regulation in football, whereby the carnivalesque usually represents an escape from regulated fields but attending football matches is a very strictly regulated and policed environment which places it at odds with traditional carnivalesque fields.

Supporters in this study also reported that assumptions made about social class and corresponding drinking habits are believed to be another reason why football supporters are heavily regulated in comparison to rugby fans. Consequently, this helps retain the power imbalance where dominant groups (or classes) are perceived to be treated favorably and society still struggles to disregard the historical image of the football hooligan. In this study we reported how alcohol consumption was not viewed as the driving factor behind serious violence, but rather that large-scale violent incidents involving opposing groups of football supporters referred to as 'casuals' or 'ultras' were more often viewed as the result of premeditated organization rather than the result of alcohol consumption. Research in this area also points to structural factors such as policing tactics as more likely causes of football-related disorder (Armstrong, 1998; Stott et al., 2008). This raises further questions regarding the role of intoxication in football-related disorder.

Our data point to an emergent form of football carnivalesque which threatens the existing and accepted norms of football supporters which have until recently primarily been alcohol-based. Within the field, diverse actors struggle for power and influence which is shaped by the capital held by each actor. Several stakeholders reported an increase in drug taking, particularly cocaine, which threatens the existing commercial order within football as it potentially reduces sales of alcohol by football clubs, as cocaine is easily affordable for many and was believed to be relatively easy to smuggle into

the ground compared to alcohol. We report concerns from both supporters and organizational stakeholders that cocaine may contribute more to football-associated violence than alcohol. However, it is important to note that there is a distinct lack of evidence on the link between the use of controlled drugs and football-related violence. The research which has looked at this link did not find a causal relationship between cocaine use and football related violence (Newson, 2021). It is also important to note that any views expressed regarding the effects of cocaine on football supporters' behavior, is their opinion and based on their experiences rather than being rooted in the pharmacological research on the effects of cocaine.

Indeed, following reports of people 'brazenly taking drugs and causing mayhem' during the Euro 2020 tournament, and calls for the Premier League to work closely with the police to address the increased frequency of disorder attributed to cocaine abuse in stadiums, the UK government introduced five-year bans for anyone caught supplying or in possession of Class A drugs in connection with football during the 2022–2023 season. Finally, the increased use of Class A drugs at matches threatens the norms of many supporters who see drug taking as something different to their established routine of alcohol consumption and tradition. We have described how for some supporters this drug taking has already become normalized and accepted, a result of the search for the 'carnivalesque'—with many examples of supporters openly taking drugs—but this also alienates other supporters and erodes the social capital of those supporting the same team. It can also be argued that this may increase the social capital of football supporters who use Class A drugs.

The present study has some limitations. First, although we employed purposive sampling to reach a geographical spread of football supporters in England and Scotland and a spread of leagues in the respective football pyramids, findings from our focus groups may not fully represent the behaviors and attitudes of the broader football supporter community. Similarly, individuals interviewed from the institutional stakeholders may hold differing views from those of their organization as a whole. Future studies could conduct interviews or focus groups with individuals from the same organization to ascertain whether different views exist within the same organization. Football supporters were categorized based on self-identification, which could have resulted in some supporters being incorrectly categorized. Furthermore, some of the data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when stadia were not open to football supporters and so although some participants were categorized as 'regularly attending matches,' they may not have attended a match for some months.

Conclusion

In this study, we have offered an insight into the football fandom-alcohol relationship. Our focus has been on how, in the UK, the legislative, social, and cultural significance of alcohol consumption within football has evolved (and is subject to potential change), in tandem with the contested class and economic structures of the game, as a space for both celebration (the carnivalesque) and regulation. The paper has several distinctive, highly original features, which enable its findings to have wide-ranging significance in terms of policy, methodology, findings, and theory.

From a policy point of view, we highlight the continuities and differences that arise in England and Scotland—where the sporting and legislative frameworks are separate, though there are strong continuities in the culture between the two countries– and the critical perspectives of diverse key stakeholders, both north and south of the border, with respect to football and alcohol. Our study spotlights the contested regulation of alcohol consumption among supporters (itself a key component of the football carnivalesque), and which has potential ramifications for regulatory policies and practices in other international contexts and for other sports. We would encourage future research to investigate these potentially contested perspectives and interests on alcohol consumption in other contexts, whether these are in sport or other international settings.

From a methodological point of view, this paper forms part of a rigorous and original large-scale, cross-national, multi-stakeholder comparative study of alcohol in football. This represents a significant step forward from previous work on alcohol in football, which has, for understandable reasons, been largely focused on single national contexts or on the practices of one main stakeholder (usually supporters). We encourage future studies into sport and alcohol consumption to adopt this multi-stakeholder and cross-national methodological framework, to register the full range of stakeholder perspectives and interests on this issue, and to enable illuminating, comparison-based research findings to emerge.

In substantive terms, our findings and subsequent analysis highlight the cultural centrality of alcohol consumption to the collective habitus and carnivalesque social relations of football supporters; how the football supporter carnivalesque constitutes a contested 'field,' as reflected in diverging stakeholder perspectives on supporters and alcohol; and, how an emergent form of the carnivalesque (the use of 'Class A' drugs) has materialized, and is viewed by different stakeholders, particularly football supporters. Thus, we posit that future policy work should engage with the perspectives of a full spectrum of stakeholders—and in particular, sport spectators, who are the subject of regulations and impositions—when addressing social and legal issues with regard to alcohol. Moreover, policy work should attend to increased use of Class A drugs, in terms of undertaking further research into their prevalence in football and other sport contexts, and also assessing the ramifications of this issue for potentially reforming regulations on the use of alcohol within the game.

In terms of our analytical framework, we have provided a highly original integration of theories of the carnivalesque with the social theory of Bourdieu, in order to analyze qualitative data from our research with football supporters and organizational stakeholders. We understand the carnivalesque in interpretive rather than positivistic terms: alcohol consumption continues to be an integral

component (rather than a 'causal factor') in the recurring, processual making and remaking of the carnivalesque in football contexts. As we have shown football is between what Turner (1969) called structure and anti-structure, both ordered and liminal.

Bourdieu enables us to investigate cultures of the carnivalesque in a more sociological way, specifically as social fields that are understood and contested by diverse sets of dominant and dominated groups, whose differing perspectives may be the focus for systematic social research. We argue that this combination of these theoretical approaches can be utilized and applied in order to examine other carnival spaces (such as in relation to sport, the night-time economy, youth subcultures, festivals, tourist destinations, and public demonstrations) which are subject, to different forms of regulation or contestation by diverse stakeholders, and to diverging types of policy engagement.

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