



Language Vulgarism and Inter-Club Conflicts amongst Football Fans: Critical Analysis of Arsenal and Chelsea Football Clubs

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Abstract

Globally, football activities have assumed strong factor that promotes inter-state relations. The desire for entertainment that is derived from football activities promotes cross-border movement of people all over the world and while we appreciate the importance of football activities in promoting inter-state relationship, the use of abusive words among football fans have become cataclysmic and nonetheless contributed to inter-group violence that have plagued football fans. This is evident among the Arsenal and Chelsea fans who have derogatorily engaged each other in one abusive word or the other particularly when the two teams take on each other. These vulgar words have come in form of “Ndi Owo, Arsene Wenger onye owo, Eze ka Udele, Wenger Onye Ara, Wenger Homoo, Wenger ora ashawo, visionless Wenger, trophiless Wenger and Wenger, a philosopher of loser”. In reciprocity, the Arsenal supporters would call Jose Mourinho “Ajasko, dancing master and Michael Jackson” which sometimes could lead to group skirmishes. Against this background therefore, this study tends to investigate language vulgarism and inter-club conflicts in Nigeria with the aim at unpacking why football activities that suppose to be promoting human relations have become the bane of conflicts among its supporters. Data for this study were collected from personal interview and secondary sources while Group Theory was adopted as theoretical foundation for the study. Preliminary investigation revealed that vulgar words are self-attacking, capable of translating cordial relationship to violent relations. The position of the paper is that inter-club conflicts often occur as a result of language vulgarism.

Key words: Language, Vulgarism, Group Theory, Football Fans, Inter-Club Conflicts

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Introduction

It was Maguire who quoted Nelson Mandela as saying:

sport is probably the most effective means of communication in the world, bypassing both verbal and written communication and reaching directly out to billions of people world-wide. There is no doubt that sport is a viable and legitimate way of building friendship between nations (Maguire, 2005, p 23).

The above quotation shows that sports have assumed the fastest means of communication all over the world. Applying same to football especially as it is the most popular (both in terms of watching and playing) and wide-spread sport in the world, football has become a unifying factor among people in the world. Its popularity makes it an efficient tool for manipulating people for peace building and conflict generation. While football can send positive messages of equality, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, fair-play, sportsmanship and understanding, it can, on the other hand, encourages national rivalry and hatred, racism, homophobia, nationalism and exclusion. While the invidious rivalry, racism, and exclusion could fan global conflicts, national governments around the world have increasingly acknowledged the power of football and consequently coined the term soccer/ football diplomacy. Hence, the definition of Bubalo has gradually come to elucidate the meaning of football diplomacy. In his view, football diplomacy is the use of a common interest in football to create networks (Bubalo, 2013). These networks can be used for a variety of other purposes, including diplomacy, forging political and business connections, promoting products, tourism, development and education. Through these processes, football diplomacy can be used to improve and refine the image of one's country, amplify friendship, boost peace and share comradeship among nations, encourage international development, promotion of trade and tourism, integrate minorities and improve international relations.

From the foregoing, it is believed that football is made to entertain and strengthen mutual relationships between or among people. These relationships can translate into conflict arising from the application of vulgar words during or after football competitions among club fans. Appearing though as part of the game, but quite different is the fact that some intransigent supporters always cease the opportunity of watching football matches in public view centers to



insult elders and other football lovers. Those who felt insulted hardly condone the insult and would want to retaliate. Against this odd, is the fact that they felt they were being protected by the culture and traditional practices that abhor any young person insulting an elder and might by this want to correct the person by creating more opportunities for more insults. Apart from this however, there are some elders who would always want to respond to every insult by engaging such person in verbal attacks which could lead fight between them. This has been seen in many view centers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. In Europe, cases like racial abuses have been identified as part of vulgar words which are always employed by people to bemoan their fellow human beings especially those from Africa. In the global context, the idea of football is often employed to promote international relations. Sporting activities like World Cup Football is not just a leisure activity or is it just a simple game played between two different national teams but one of the most powerful components of international relations for its impact on world politics. World Cup football matches are the biggest events in the world and most universal phenomenon, even more universal than democracy or the market economy (Boniface, 2014). Therefore, football is conceived as the fastest means of international cooperation because, it promotes intergroup relationship among people, integrate cultural diversities and pacifies peace among irate crowds. Within the individual state level, football has proven to be a unifying factor of integration of people with diverse cultural values. In Nigeria, the termagant of ethnic discontent reveals that Super Eagle and National Youth Service Corps are the only platform that brings various ethnic groups together. Implicitly, Nigeria's national team and the NYSC scheme have assumed responsive factors for nation building. There is no other programme that unite the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria than football and NYSC as people often converge together to watch Super Eagle take on other football teams.

In Europe, there usually appears a great enthusiasm among club fans watching their teams play other teams. This enthusiasm most often can be translated into conflict when immediately; people seize the opportunity to make use of vulgar words that tend to denigrate others. Most often, these skirmishes can result to violent conflicts leading to the destruction of properties, arson and murders. In 2017, there was a fight between Chelsea and Arsenal fans



after an Football Association Cup match in London. In the pos- match press release, a British Transport Police reported that:

two groups of Arsenal and Chelsea fans were seen fighting after an FA Cup final game. The two groups of rival supporters were seen squaring up to each other at 9.26pm after the clash. An Arsenal fan with a red scarf kicks a middle-aged Chelsea fan who responds by throwing a punch. The pair then comes together again and grapple before a second Chelsea fan join in and the Arsenal supporter hugs a metal pole for support. The Chelsea fan hits him several times on the back of the head before the scuffle is broken up at Wembley Park station in North West London (Fruen, 2017, p.8).

The reason for the brawl was attributed to Chelsea defeat to Arsenal and probably some insolent displays of happiness demonstrated among the Chelsea fans as signs of victory and possible some unguarded statements like cream-puff players Arsenal, little lads, beatable team and many others. The above statements were considered directly opposite to Arsenal philosophy of football among the Arsenal fans who in an attempt to defend their players attacked the Chelsea supporters which the result was a fight between them. In February 2015, there was a similar incident of racial abuse between Chelsea supporters and Soulymane Sylla Paris commuter staff. The incident occurred when four Chelsea fans: Joshua Parsons, James Fairbarin, Richard Barklie and William Simpson prevented a black man (Souleymane Sylla) from boarding a metro train to Paris to watch a match fixture between Chelsea and Paris Saint German . The fans were said to have shoved the black man out by chanting Chelse! Chelsea!! Chelse!!! meaning we are racist, we are racist and that is the way we like it. According to Angelique Chrisafis, the Chelsea fans who racially abused Soulymane Sylla were caught on video chanting “we are racist, we are racist and that is the way we like it”, the fans were pushed by Sylla and on the second time, they chanted “fuck the IRA”(Chrisafis, 2015).

Historical Background of Chelsea and Arsenal Football Clubs

Chelsea Football Club was founded on Match 10th 1905, in The Rising Sun Pub on Fulham Road. A year after Gus Mears had purchased the Stamford Bridge Athletics Complex and was looking to turn it into a football ground, he offered it to Fulham FC founded in 1879, but the club refused the offer. As undeterred as Mears, he decided to form his own club and debated on



calling it Stamford Bridge FC, London FC or Kensington FC but eventually decided to call it Chelsea FC.

From 1970s up to 80s, Chelsea FC were relegated to division league having bounced back in the earlier years of 1981. In 1982, they were relegated to the third division but had to win the second division and earned a promotion. In 1987-88, the club was relegated for the third times but won the 1988-89 season and had remained in top flight ever since. By 1999, it made first European appearance while beating Liverpool in 2002-2003 to qualify for champion league. By 2012, Chelsea won her first ever UEFA champion league with Rorberto Di Matteo as the head coach. Despite these successes, there has been intermittent disengagement of coaches arising from poor performance of players every season even though the club had fought vehemently to remain in top four.

However, the history of Arsenal Football Club between 1886 and 1966 covers the time of the club foundation. Arsenal FC was founded in 1886 as munitions workers' team from Woolwich, then in kent in southeast London. They turned professional in 1897 and joined the football league two years later. In 1904, the club was promoted to the first division but had financial liquidation. To reform and improve the club financial standing, Sir Henry Norris moved it to Arsenal Stadium, Highbury, and North London in 1913. The financial crisis distorted the performance of Arsenal Club and its standing in the league table which means that they could not challenge for the league trophies within that period. Therefore, its first major success came within the periods of 1930s, and late 1940s and early 1950s respectively with the club subsequent decline to mid-table status in 1960s after Sir Henry Norris arranged for the promotion of the club back to first Division in controversial circumstances at the end of First World War. In 1925, the appointment of Herbert Chapman brought major success in the club. In 1930s, Arsenal won five first Division titles and two FAs. By 1986, the club was renamed Royal Arsenal following its convincing victory over Eastern Wanderers and later, Arsenal Football Club.



Methodology

Data for this study were collected from the personal interview conducted on the supporters of the two clubs and information derived from the use of newspapers, magazines, textbooks, journal articles and online materials. The materials established the relevance of the study in chronicling conflict as part of the game of football.

Theoretical Foundation

Group Theory is adopted as theoretical framework of the study. The theory arose from the need to deal with group interest. Proponents of the theory include Arthur F. Bentley who in his profound research work “The process of Government” was regarded as the father of Group theory (Lavine, 1995) before it was popularized in David Truman’s work “Social Order and Disturbance”.

In Group theory, G. David Garson further constructs a history of interest groups as participants in the policy process. Garson examines the historical tension between two rival theories of groups in the context of political science as: Pluralism and Elitism (Garson, 1978). The theory sees state as being composed of actors, both institutional and non institutional, and these actors are products of their historical, socio-economic, political and other various contexts. Implicit in this concept is the idea that groups have common competing sets of interests and the state acts as a controlling mechanism. In fact, like Bentley, there is no group without interest. According to him, there is no effective individual interest, every group has its interests and these interests always result in group action and that there is no one group interest that includes everyone in the society. In this argument, Bentley holds that all things involving government are determined by the conflicting group pressures and these group pressures are the determinants of the course of government policies. This emphasizes why people fight for political and socio-economic benefits because the activity of people fighting to attain their goals takes place not individually but through groups in which they are united by common interest. Its emphasis lies on why various discriminations based on social abuse and use of vulgar words among people often resulted to group violence.



Arsenal and Chelsea hostilities have come under a comprehensive explanation of Group Theory. Their rivalry emanated from the fact that most referees in English Premier League lack the expertise to independently officiate league matches. The mistakes of these referees more often than not, favour one club against the other thereby resulting to the defeat of such club. In this context, the supporting fans of such club usually adopt a vulgar word to bemoan the referee or racially abuse their opponents by creating a tense atmosphere for crisis. This has manifested in numbers of matches played by the two teams in which the referees single handedly won the match for Chelsea. Therefore, this theory has succinctly adumbrated group fights between and among Arsenal—Chelsea fans and elucidated how poor management of football matches by referees stoked group conflicts among football lovers.

Origin of Chelsea-Arsenal Rivalries

Chelsea's friendship with Arsenal started when Chelsea Football Club was founded in 1905. The two clubs have never considered each other primary rivals and thus, have always pulled the largest crowd whenever the two teams meet to play each other. The league match between the two clubs took place in 1907 at Stamford Bridge. It was the first football league First Division game played by the two London clubs which drew a crowd of 65,000. By 1935, the match between the two London clubs at Stamford Bridge again recorded a crowd of 82,905 to mark the second largest recorded attendance in English league match (Murray, 2015). Therefore, the history of Chelsea rivalry with Arsenal has been more recently considered an important derby after the Chelsea's rise to the top class of the Premier League in 2000s. Although, some scholars dated it back to 1930s when inter-club skirmishes started between the two club fans. In December 2003, the Arsenal fans in an Internet Fans Survey Report dubbed Chelsea as their third rival after Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur while Chelsea fans responded by tagging Arsenal their main rival but however considered Tottenham and Fulham as their main traditional rivals (Murray, 2015).

In a 2009 survey by football fan census, Arsenal fans named Chelsea as the club they disliked the most ahead of their traditional rivals Tottenham. Chelsea fans on the other hand named Arsenal as their second most disliked club behind Liverpool. This followed the Bleacher Report that



ranked Arsenal as Chelsea's second-most hated rival. By 2006, the transfer of Ashley Cole from Arsenal to Chelsea stoked a bitter rivalry when Ashley Cole was caught meeting Chelsea officials a month before the transfer (Hughes, 2006). In 2007, the league cup final between the clubs was one of the most noted incidents. The game was marred by fracas involving Frank Lampard and Cesc Fabregas and others which resulted in yellow cards for the two. During the match, three players were sent off including the dismissal of Emmanuel Adebayor with the Chelsea fans throwing celery at Arsenal payers (Brodkin, 2005). The rivalry became worse under Jose Mourinho with the Portuguese using sarcastic words by calling Arsene Wenger a voyeur, a philosophy of loser and a specialist in failure (Brodkin, 2005). This came amid Arsenal clash with Chelsea. The result of the match saw Chelsea winning Arsenal 2-0.

On 22 March, 2014 in Arsene Wenger's 1000th game in charge, Chelsea's 6-0 win over Arsenal marked Chelsea's biggest margin of victory against Arsenal and the joint heaviest margin of defeat suffered by Wenger at Arsenal. Within 15 minutes of play, Chelsea had jumped out to a three goal lead while Kieran Gibbs was sent off by referee Andre Marriner for a handball committed by Alex Oxlade Chamberline. The outcome of the match showed that in the last 12 encounters of the two managers, Wenger had not defeated Mourinho. In the same match, the fracas was extended to Kenya where an Arsenal and Chelsea fan betted their wife and three storey building respectively. Chelsea 6-0 victory in that match saw the Arsenal man lost his wife to the Chelsea fan (Jones, 2013). Again, the 2-1 Chelsea victory over Arsenal on 5 October, 2014 marked another Jose Mourinho's victory over Wenger and resulted to the touchline fracas that occurred between the managers in the technical area during the fierce match (Rice, 2014).

In Nigeria, there have been series of inter-fans skirmishes occurring at Abakaliki in Ebonyi State. In one of those conflicts at a football viewing centre along Ogoja Road, Okafor maintains that the result of the matches played yesterday between Chelsea and Arsenal in which Chelsea won resulted to violent conflict that ended with the dead of Arsenal supporter (Okafor, 2018). According to him Arsenal is nowhere closer to a team that can win Chelsea. Though, they have demonstrated a bit of consistence under their new coach Emery but the antecedents of their previous matches still determine their current matches. In this way, many believe that Arsenal



team despite their current form can still be beaten by Chelsea whenever the two meet. This is because, many spectators usually believe that Arsenal players often have phobia playing against Chelsea and this phobia could be the reason they normally lose to Chelsea (Nwigwe, 2018).

The Effect of Vulgar language on players' performances

Language is an instrument for communication. It is used to pass information from the encoder to the decoder. In other words it serves as sources of conflict and as well as building human relationships. Apart from serving as a means of communication, its vulgar usage has negatively impacted on people's psychology especially as it makes them look more inferior to their contemporaries (Amiara, 2018). Language is very important in human interaction especially in sporting interaction. In a multilingual team like Arsenal, English was factored in to the youth programmes they offer. The need is to allow players who could not flow in communication learn how to interact with one another whenever they want. As a powerful instrument for negotiation during club transfer, most players use their languages to lure other players to their teams. For instance, the swiss defender Philippe Senderos was responsible for Fabegras multilingualism (Wood, 2021). When he moved to England, he was unable to speak and chose to be moving in with Senderos who speaks five languages-German, French, Spanish, English and Italian. In this context, it is conceived that such older player of the same nationality would help the younger one to acclimatize and settle in. So, it is used to mentor and attract players to a club if there is already a player who speaks the same language (Wood, 2021).

The use of vulgar languages during sporting activities especially in football matches affects player's performance. There are instances a player's racial abuse will affect his psychology by making him loss focus from the sporting events. This is evident in one of the UEFA champion league games between Barcelona and Real Zaragoza in February 2005 in which Samuel Eto'o was racially abused by the Zaragoza's fans. The fans began to make monkey-like chants whenever Eto'o had possession of the ball and hurled peanuts into the pitch. The incident threatened Eto'o to leave the pitch in the middle of the game, but was prevented by the intervention of his teammates and the referee who rushed to the pitch to calm him down. Most teammates such as Ronaldinho who suffered similar abuses quickly stated that he was fed-up



with the sounds and if Eto'o had left the pitch, he would have done the same. This was not mentioned in the post match report of the referee-Fernando Carmona Mendez who commented that the behavior of the crowd was normal (Rashleigh, 2006). The behaviour of the referee showed his total commitment to racism. This is because the lives of players will no longer be safe when referees begin to show corroboration to this abuse.

In England, the sky sports cameras were on 12 March, 2012 caught an old Arsenal fan abusing Newcastle United's Cheik Tiote in a match Newcastle later lost to Arsenal (Mockbel, 2012). Many analysts attributed that defeat to the psychological effects suffered by Tiote and on 15 April, 2012, Didier Drogba also suffered the same racial abuse when a 55 year old man abused him during the 2011-2012 FA Cup semi final. Drogba who was the arrow man for Chelsea's victory lamented on the psychological trauma of the abuse while encouraging other players to always focus on their games rather than being distracted by side talks. On October 23, 2011 in a relative development, QPR's Anton Ferdinand alleged that he was racially abused by Chelsea captain John Terry who called him a "fucking black cunt" in a match between Queens Park Rangers and Chelsea. This was denied by Terry on November 1 when a formal investigation into the investigation was announced. In January 2012, Ferdinand received death threats and a bullet was sent through a post during its trial in Westminster Court (Heneghan, 2012).

In fact, the implication of these abusive words reveals that cooperation within the international community would also be discriminated on racial basis if racist attacks among club fans and players are left unchecked. Against this background, Antonio Rudiger of Chelsea who was a victim of racist abuse was on October 2018, maintained that authorities needed to deal more with racism in sports. The essence is to promote international cooperation build on the spirit of human understanding, commonalities and oneness among players in line with the international best practices for sports and sporting activities. Indeed and to an extent, the persistent abuse of the African players in English Premier League galvanized African football fans to call for the promotion of African Leagues in order for African players to concentrate in their local leagues rather than being subjects of scorn in English clubs. Against this background, there will be break



down in international sporting activities such as World Cup, Olympic Games and many others if racism continues.

Victims of Language Vulgarism in Football Matches

Globally, cases of football abuses have become more outrageous in Europe more than any other part of the world. Between 1996 up to 2017, there are over 20,000 racist reports in Europe alone. In English Premier League, statistic records have shown that there are 53% out of 520 cases of discrimination reported between 2016 up to 2017 as against 469 report cases previously. This shows that there are about 11% racist increases in football alone. In this increase, black Africans are said to have been the most victims as they are discriminated in ascent, colour and nativity.

Table 1: Selected cases of abuses in English Football Leagues from 1998

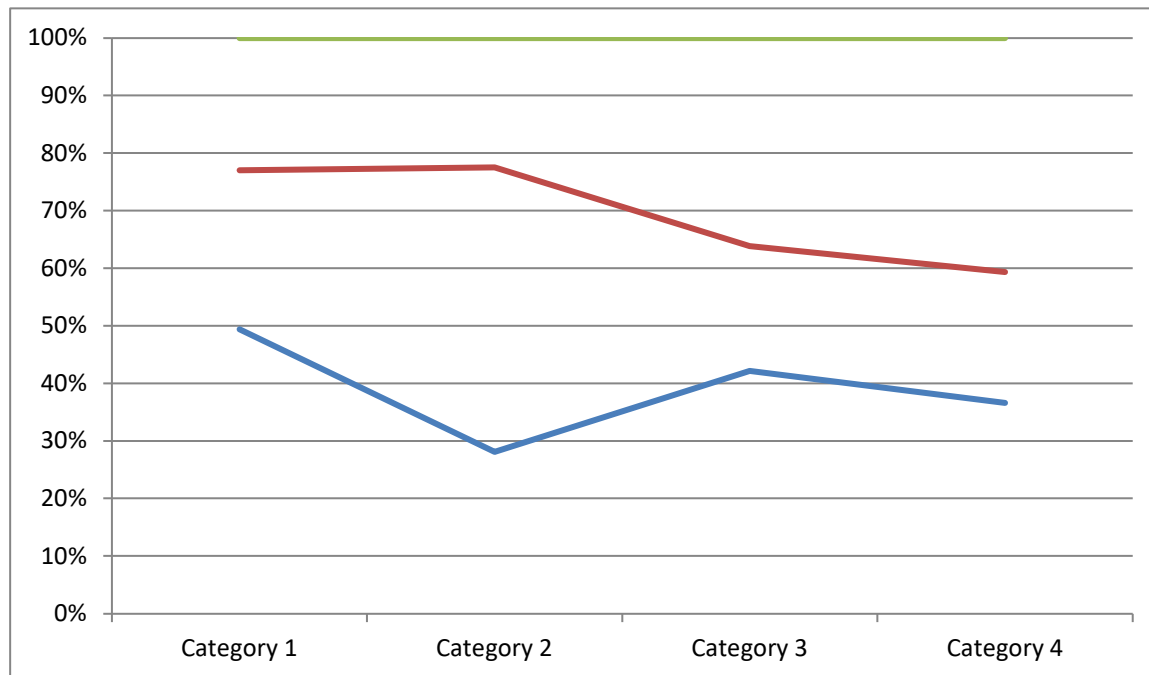
| Date | Incident | Player's Club | Outcome |
|-----------|---|-------------------|---|
| /4/1998 | Stan Collymore accused Steve Harkness of Liverpool that he racially him | Aston Villa | Denied and acquitted |
| 7/7/2007 | Gillingham keeper was racially abused by Rottherham fan | Gillingham | Life ban of the fan from the club |
| 15/3.2011 | Lius Suarez was accused of racially abuse against Patrick Evra | Manchester United | FA investigation found Suarez guilty, fined him £40,000 and 8 matches ban |
| 12/3/2012 | Sky sports cameras caught an Arsenal fan abusing Chiek Tiote | Newcastle United | Arrested on racially aggravated public order offence |
| 15/4/2012 | A 55 year-old man racially abused Didier | Chelsea | Life time ban on the fan from Stamford |



| | | | |
|------------|--|-------------------|---|
| | Drogba | | Bridge and 3 years ban from football |
| 31/10/2012 | Chelsea fan made “monkey” chant gesture to Danny Welbeck | Manchester United | The 28 year-old was given a ban for foreseeable future |
| 10/12/2018 | Raheem Sterling was racially abused by Chelsea fans | | Chelsea FC banned the four players that were believed to be involved pending the outcome of the investigation |

Source: racism in association of football, Wikipedia, 2019

From the table above, our finding shows that of all the cases of abuses recorded in English football, players from Africa or African decent have are abused than their counterparts from Europe. In 2012 alone, about 75% of African players were abused with a slight decline in 2014. The chart below represents the percentage of abuse cases from 1996 to 2018.



However, by the beginning of 2013/2014 season, racism and the use of vulgar language in England had begun to decline. This is because of the anti-racist crusade and heavy punishment adopted by English Football Association (FA) to deter fans from obdurately abusing of players during and after football matches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Language has over the years been central to the heart of man. It is used to pass information and become an important instrument for promoting human relationships. The imperatives of language lie on its effects for inter-personal or group communication hence, it assumes a special regulator for ceremonial purposes such as an instrument for action, keeping records and conveying orders and information, influencing people, and enabling self-expression and thought. In this regard, it is understood that language is used to explain what people feel about others and to pass information from one person to another. The effective use of language leads to building social harmony and unity hence it is said that it is an effective means of achieving peace and stability during conflicts time. Apart from its ability to promote good neighbourliness, the use of vulgar languages tends to convey negative impression and meaning about someone and in most



cases leads to fighting. This is evident in group gathering or association where the use of one abusive word always spurred people into misunderstanding, thus, leading to fighting.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study revealed that people always possess group interest whenever they gather to talk, relax, watch matches and it is this group interest that leads them into conflicts. Therefore, this study further maintains that as long as Arsenal and Chelsea football clubs remain in premier league, the fans will continue to derogatorily abuse themselves whenever the two teams play each other. This is due to their long standing rivalry. Secondly, there must be a dead penalty recommended by the English FA against the use of vulgar words by both players and fans. It is only through this process that players' images and psychology can be saved. Therefore, the paper recommends that:

1. National governments all over the world should outlaw the use of vulgar languages aimed at racially abusing citizens and/or foreign nationals.
2. Ban anybody proven to have abused another from either watching or playing football.
3. Reward such person that might be said to have suffered such abuse (s).

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