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## **The football fan and the pub: An enduring relationship**

### **Abstract**

This paper draws on qualitative interviews with a sample of football fans to explore their relationship with one enduring site for fandom practice, the pub. In doing so, the work discusses the significance of Structuration processes as a means of explaining the transcendent nature of this relationship across time and space. The findings complement existing ethnographic observations to illustrate that a progressive and multifaceted relationship exists between the institution (the pub) and its customers (football fans), based on: historical reference to fan culture, emotive connection to the pub as a football space, associated sociability and the perception of cultural stability.

### **Keywords**

The pub, football, fandom culture, compulsion of proximity, live spectatorship

A recent trilogy of research papers (Weed, 2006; 2007; 2008) have brought attention to the public house (commonly referred to as ‘the pub’) as an outlet for sport fandom and as a legitimate site for research into football fandom practice more specifically. The former revelation, of course, is nothing new. In other writings relating to the history of sport in Britain, scholars Richard Holt (1990) and Wray Vamplew (1988) refer to a timeless and yet fluid bond that is shared between the pub and sport. More recently Krakewitz (2008) and Author (2011a) indicate that the pub has become part of routine practice for millions of fans worldwide. Yet, in spite of such projections there is a paucity of research that seeks to investigate the lived experience of football fans and their relationship with the pub during the course of ones fandom career. Subsequently, this paper endeavours to explore this relationship in its contemporary setting, and to do so it draws on the work of Anthony

Giddens (1982; 1984) as a means of explaining how it is that cultures (and associated practice) exist and continue to exist through processes of structuration.

Favouring neither structure nor agency in his explanation of the constitution of society, Giddens expounds that it is through the duality of structure that cultural practice is produced and reproduced across time and space. Thus, according to Giddens, those structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action, but are, instead, chronically implicated in its production and reproduction (Giddens 1984: 374). This occurs, he suggests, through routine interaction between agents and institutions in the moment and extends across time as part of a practical consciousness that is simply known to participating agents as ‘the way things are’. In this sense, it is important to note that structuration is not a theory of cultural stagnation, but rather, it is concerned with the order and transcendence of human relationships, practices and cultures:

Neither the subject (human agent) nor the object (‘society’ or social institutions) should be regarded as having primacy. Each is constituted in and through recurrent practices. The notion of human ‘action’ presupposes that of ‘institution’, and vice versa. Explication of this relation thus comprises the core of an account of how it is the structuration (production and reproduction across time and space) of social practices takes place (Giddens, 1982: 8).

Accordingly then, the key for Giddens, is to grasp how action is structured in everyday contexts of social life, while simultaneously recognising that the structural elements of society are reproduced by the performance of action (Elliott, 2003: 136). Consequently, he explains that social practices have a broad spatial and temporal extension, because they are acknowledged, followed and subtly altered by agents in practice (Giddens, 1982: 9).

In what follows then, this paper aims to expose the process of structuration within football cultures by drawing on the experiences of football fans. It explores the structuration

of an evolving and multifaceted relationship between the pub and the fan that encounters not only cold commerce, but a warm, progressive consumer relationship that is dependent on comfort, emotive connection and the perception of cultural stability. Before unveiling the details of empirical investigation, it is appropriate to briefly contextualise wider historical components of this relationship.

### **The pub: a history of sport involvement**

Football cultures are a recent nineteenth century phenomenon that have their roots in the commercial sporting festivals of 1870s Lancashire where five, six and seven a-side football games are known to have been played for monetary prizes (Swain and Harvey 2012). Following this, the development of football continued through to the codification of the eleven-a-side public school game and its concomitant dissemination into a form of regular, organised, professional sport for the wider population to enjoy as participants, or as spectators (Author, 2013a; Goldblatt, 2007; Giulianotti, 1999; Russell, 1997). Consequently, as football has diffused into the lives of working men and women (indicated above), it has become part of the everyday life associated with the pastimes of ordinary people, and for centuries past, alcohol establishments were a crucial part of this (Walvin, 1994). First documented in a government survey of 1577 (though thought to exist prior to this, in the medieval period) there were three main establishments for the sale of alcoholic drink in England: the inn, the tavern and the alehouse (Jennings, 2011:19). The term 'Public House' came into use in the late seventeenth century and as Clark (1983: 195) writes, its precise origin is unclear, though it seems likely to have derived from a contradiction on the term 'public alehouse' that was also in frequent use.

Prior to the codification of football, the pub and recreation sport have always maintained a relationship of one form or another. Even before the industrial revolution Vamplew (1988: 26) indicates that the pub could be relied on as a stable space for plebeian

recreation and the publican, as a supporter of organised entertainment. With a long and established history, the pub has fulfilled multiple purposes. It has taken the role of a shop, a bookmaker, and a place for working girls, musicians and magicians to apply their trade. Moreover, publicans have shown their hand as patrons for prize fights, cockfights, animal baiting and football teams (Vamplew, 1988). Hence, the pub has become a timeless supporter of various recreational activities that were used to attract custom. This, according to Holt (1990: 63), explains its enduring institutional success. He suggests that ‘the staying power of the alehouse’ ought to be attributed to its chameleon-like ability to adapt to ever changing social attitudes and consumer demands; a contention that has particular relevance for the pub attaining status as the cultural home of the football fan (Holt, 1990; Weed, 2007).

For instance, Huggins (2004) explains that once spectator football had gained in popularity throughout the nineteenth century, football clubs and supporters often aligned themselves with the local ale house as a stable space to discuss the result of the latest match or the prospect of the next. Indeed, as Collins and Vamplew (2002: 70-73) suggest, much of the pre-industrial idea (detailing the sporting event as an occasion for drinking) was carried over into modern football, with the consumption of beer and sandwiches and the meeting of friends, an essential part of the match-day experience. This, of course, could be prosperous for publicans. The directors of Mitchells and Butlers, for example, commissioned a study in 1910 which revealed that pubs near the Hawthorns (West Bromwich Albion’s ground) showed increased takings on the Saturday of home matches and additionally, local public houses became key outlets for the sale of Saturday night Sport Specials newspapers, which themselves were filled with advertisements from pubs (Collins and Vamplew, 2000: 7).

Some connections ran deeper still, in the sense that a proportion of public house establishments were instrumentally linked to the genesis of football clubs. Mason (1980: 27) points out that in order to associate themselves with the local football club (often for reasons

of commercial gain) they would rent out grounds as changing rooms. He explains that in the early years ‘there would be few other places in towns or villages which would be able to let out rooms in which a football team could change or hold meetings’. This, for Russell (1997: 15) is further evidence of the rich range of services that the pub supplied during this period, and in turn, the pub football team would become a neighbourhood club based on friendship groups, pub loyalty and civic identity. Holt (1989) suggests that by 1890 pub-teams were the most common type of all, with establishments offering a place to change, a venue for news and information, and a place where teams, management and supporters would convene and embrace as their communal football home. Perhaps Weed (2007) best summarises this position when he makes reference to the amalgamation of three emblematic factors that have been crucial to the development of football culture in pubs: (1) football, (2) alcohol (3) and male bonding: He writes:

The pub has been a place in which to read about football, to talk about football, and to meet with friends before going to a live match. The pub provides a place where the male holy trinity of alcohol, football and male bonding come together (Weed, 2007: 400).

Whilst many of those historical functions remain, advancements in media technology have coerced pubs to transform once more in order to accommodate the media driven football revolution of the 1990’s when the British Sky Broadcasting group (BSkyB<sup>1</sup>) secured the exclusive live rights for televising the newly created FA Premier League in a deal worth three-hundred and four million pounds (Giulianotti, 1999; Boyle and Haynes, 2004). It is worth noting however, that early evidence of football fandom during this period does not make reference to live televised broadcasts in public houses. For instance, during the first year of the Premier League in 1992, scholar Anthony King collected evidence from a group of Manchester United Fans that he coined ‘the lads’. He recalls that the lads were using the pub in the ‘traditional’ manner that Weed describes, above (pre and post-match); i.e. to collect and discuss the match. However, one key difference, described by King (1998), is that

the pub had become a meeting space for disfranchised Manchester United fans that could no longer afford to attend the stadium. So, whilst he does not recall the pub as a space to watch live football on television, he indicates that a nascent market was beginning to open up, ready for the next logical step to be taken. The first scholarly evidence of life for football fans as spectators in the pub (post-Premier League) was presented by Weed (2006) through ethnographic observations of the 2002 World Cup championships. Opening the way for academics to discuss the motives of football fans for consuming live televised broadcasts of scheduled matches in the public house, Weed offers a description of fandom practice that is carnivalesque, loud and potentially dangerous.

The carnivalesque party atmosphere continued into the early hours, with many people who had never met before chatting to each other, not only about their experiences of the football and the result, but also about their experience of watching the match in the pub! ...Some of my experiences in pubs during the 2002 World Cup gave a clear indication of the potential for 'football related public order offences' in the UK around England's EURO 2004 defeats. (Weed, 2006: 87-90).

Whilst providing a valuable account it is important to place portrayals of the pub, like this one, into context. The representation offered by Weed (2006; 2007; 2008) and similar versions by other scholars such as Gibbons and Lusted (2008) capture an important and yet specialised moment in time that represents the more frantic side of fandom practice in a pub during an international football tournament featuring the England national team. Whilst participant observations (like those associated with the authors above) can help to illustrate this phenomenon in specific circumstances, it should not masquerade as a typical representation of everyday experiences of football fans in the pub. Furthermore, whilst scholarly observations are a useful means of 'getting a feel' for a lived phenomenon, it is important to take into consideration the views and lived histories of football fans in order to gather narratives from those directly implicated in practice (Author 2013b). Consequently, this paper attempts to bridge the hiatus in the existing scholarly narrative with an investigation into the everyday relationship between fans and the pub. Using the pub as its

setting and verbatim accounts from a sample of fifty-six English football fans to add a narrative, this paper offers a rare insight into the structuration processes involved in this relationship.

## **Methods**

The analysis presented here is based on in-depth interviews carried out as part of a doctoral programme of work (Author, 2011b). Whilst interviews covered a multitude of issues in relation to the genesis and evolution of football fandom culture, one key area pursued, related to dominant and emergent sites for the practice of football fandom culture. When addressed by participants, the ‘public house’ was a consistent feature of the narrative without exception. Participants were able to offer personal accounts to explain the role of the pub as an integral aspect of fandom practice both over time and in the moment. All interviews were conducted in public house venues across the north-east region of England at the request of the participant. Whilst the public house is an unusual site to conduct scholarly interviews, it was beneficial in two ways. First, participants would feel comfortable in an informal setting; and secondly, participants could draw on rich cultural cues in relation to their practice of football fandom culture (Author, 2011b).

## **Participants**

Fifty-six football fans (32 male and 24 female [aged 18 -56]) were interviewed during the course of this investigation. In terms of supported teams, forty-seven participants were fans of one of the following 2008 English Premier League Clubs: *Newcastle United; Middlesbrough; Sunderland; Liverpool and West Ham United*. Of the remaining participants, nine were supporters of one of the following teams: *Hartlepool United and Darlington*. Key characteristics of this sample are shown below.

**[Insert table 1 here]**

## **Data analysis**



Verbatim transcripts of the interviews served as the raw data to be analyzed using a framework of thematic analysis as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Each transcript was read a number of times to gain a thorough understanding of the participant's accounts. The transcripts were then re-read in full and emergent themes were recorded. A combined list of themes was then produced and new themes were tested against earlier transcripts in a cyclical fashion until saturation was reached.

Consequently, the findings of the work are communicated via verbatim responses, giving a voice to those whose story I have set out to uncover. This approach to writing allows the culture of the field to reveal itself to the reader via the discourse that football fans have themselves constructed and which has constructed them (Blackshaw, 2003). Accordingly, the data presented is representative of common themes and ideas that have emerged from the words of a sample of football fans. Those narratives selected here offer a thorough and accurate description of the range of opinions, experiences and reactions that were expressed by all subjects in relation to the role of 'the pub' within football fandom culture. Thus, in what follows the work focuses on two main recurring issues that help to explain processes of structuration, and to challenge some common assumptions that have found a stable base within scholarly writings. First I discuss the origins of live spectatorship in the pub, before going on to explore the evolution of this phenomenon in light of the implications of contemporary consumer choice.

### **Subtle Transformations of Practice: The origins of live spectatorship in the pub**

For Giddens, practice is produced and reproduced across time and space because it is reinforced in the continuity of daily life. From the perspective of structuration then, continuity is important to agents in order that feelings of security (gleaned from implicitly understanding a culture and ones role within it) are not breached. Giddens explains that 'ontological security'<sup>2</sup> is one of the driving forces behind action and those feelings of security

are maintained through the routinisation of social interactions, the continuity of practice and the stability of ‘practical consciousness’<sup>3</sup>. Paradoxically however, Giddens notes that cultures continue to evolve through subtle nuances that are implemented in practice. In turn, those nuances take on board wider cultural and technological advancements, and in time, merge seamlessly within ones practical consciousness (i.e. a form of awareness that recognises cultural history and tradition). In the case of football fandom it is possible to observe patterns of structuration in relation to the embracement of live televised football in the pub as a virtual, but culturally acceptable way to consume live football.

Live spectatorship in the pub is now a well established mode of football fandom practice, but this has not always been the case. In order to explain the success of this late-modern phenomenon, I look initially to the personal narratives of those fans that were attending pubs during the formative years of the establishment of the Premier League, due to its association with the pay TV format for the consumption of live televised football. Yet, even before the involvement of satellite television in football, it is worth reasserting the point that the pub had always been a stable part of fandom practice for participants:

Andrew:           Being a football fan inevitably means going to the pub, drinking beer, and talking about football with other fans.

*Author:*           *Why do you think that is?*

That’s what blokes have always done. Get together over a beer to talk about their team. It’s that simple really...When I was a kid I watched my dad going to the pub with his football mates. At the first opportunity, I did the same [Sunderland, aged 44]

From the perspective of this participant and supported by the work of a plethora of academics (Holt 1989, Vamplew 1988, Russell 1997, Mason 1980) the pub continues to be is a site for masculine bonding (for some) in relation to football and an acceptable leisure pursuit for men

that is passed down by football fans from one generation to the next (Author, 2013a). Others, like Ian<sup>4</sup> reaffirm this view when they report ‘football and the pub are part of the fabric of masculine culture’, and Luke<sup>5</sup> suggests ‘on turning eighteen and probably before, lads gravitate to pubs’. However, it is important to emphasise that whilst football culture was recursive for some males in this way, most participants (the majority of both male and female fans interviewed) placed greater emphasis on sociability beyond discussions of gender, and all felt ‘at home’ in the pub. The very fact that females felt comfortable at all in public houses is testament to the structuration of practice - with football and indeed, many pubs sharing histories of gender discrimination and segregation (Colins and Vamplew, 2002). Generally speaking, this was a history forgotten by both genders and consequently discussions were dominated by more inclusive notions of sociability. Kirsty<sup>6</sup>, for instance, talks of ‘an environment where enthusiasm or apprehension is shared with friends’, and hence, because fandom is known to induce anxiety in certain instances (Banyard and Shevlin, 2001; Author, 2013b) having a stable space that can be relied on to share nervous tension was valued by participants. In this sample, the pub was noted by most as a site to manage those feelings via interactions with other likeminded souls:

Tim:                    On the day of the match it soothes anxieties...A pivotal part of football has always been going to the pub with my mates before and after the match. Even when I was eighteen and nineteen we were in the away pubs talking to away fans, it was just for the *craic* and everybody had football in common. [Middlesbrough, aged 54]

Social interactions, and more specifically engaging in ‘*craic*’, were dominant reasons given by participants for attending the pub. Moreover, the pub was renowned as an important site for shared humour and in agreement with Morreal (1991) collective laughter was thought to bond agents together and create feelings of cultural security that would override any anxieties. Tim continues:

Even if you get beat, go to the pub with your mates and its alright!...It’s only recently really that people watch football in pubs. But like - it’s blatantly obvious, if the technology’s

available then it was always going to be the next logical step for pubs. [Middlesbrough, aged 54]

Tim reflects on the seemingly omnipresent availability of Sky Sports Broadcasts in many contemporary pubs, but it is worth noting that the successful integration of this feature was not a foregone conclusion. Giulianotti (1999) observes that there were initial reservations around a pay-TV system, though it became increasingly evident soon after, that consumer demand for the product was strong enough to sustain this business model. However, according to Weed (2007: 401), in the early days of their production and promotions, BSkyB were more effective at targeting businesses, with pubs, bars and clubs making up the bulk of the new custom. Concomitantly, he argues that as a consequence of low levels of private subscription in the home, coupled with higher prices charged at live venues and the blanket installation of season ticket methods of payment at numerous Premier League clubs, many football fans turned to the pub as a form of convenience in order to retain contact with the live performance in an affordable and ad-hoc manner. Brick (2001: 8) makes a similar argument, however this vision is at odds with participant responses in the current sample:

*Author: Why would you say that going to the pub to watch football has gained in popularity?*

Graham: People always say that it's all to do with money but I've never thought that. It was more about convincing us that it was worth going...People forget how hard it was for the landlords... I mean we all did certain things on a Saturday afternoon. A number of the lads went to the match and some of us did other things that we would do every Saturday or Sunday with the missus or family or whatever it might be. So the landlords had to really try to get you into the pub. So like, if we were drinking on a Tuesday or Friday night or whatever, the landlord at 'The Perry' used to come round and say to us 'You lot coming in for the match tomorrow?' and he'd tempt us with happy hour during the match. [Newcastle, aged 43]

Graham indicates that the gravitation towards watching football in public houses did not simply happen as a consequence of those factors mentioned by Weed or Brick. For instance, the participant articulates that going to the pub on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon was anything but convenient to his routine practice at this particular time, conflicting with his

ontological security and practical consciousness relating to football. He reminds us that landlords had to work hard to ensure steady custom during these periods using a blend of local marketing and personal persuasion. In other words, there was an initial interdependency between the pub, Sky Sports broadcasts and customers. The success of Sky Sports was partially dependent on the public house trade and the commercial success of pubs was enlivened through the showcasing of live football. This trend was reaffirmed by others such as Dave<sup>7</sup> who indicates, ‘because it was new to us and was not considered routine, we had to be convinced of its merits, but lets face it, the coverage from Sky was revolutionary in comparison to the drivel on BBC and ITV’. Likewise, Matty admits:

Matty:                                   the lads initially thought that it (watching live football in the pub) was a poor mans alternative (to attending the stadium) and was something that real fans wouldn’t do...but in the end it became part of what we did, as well as going to home matches...Sky Sports became the key player in connecting the fan with the Premier League’. [Middlesbrough, aged 32]

Though Sky Sports broadcasts were appealing to participants, it should be noted that parallel imported broadcast and live internet streams are also being used in public houses to showcase local teams that may not be featuring on the broadcasting schedule for Sky Television. Davis and Millward (2012: 360), for instance, refer to ‘pub casts’ of Wigan Athletic matches and the lengths that publicans will go to in order to keep customers happy:

You’ve got the Wigan fans, the Man U fans and the Liverpool fans and you’ve seen what we do. Basically, if two of them are playing at the same time, we can only show one of the [parallel imported] broadcasts on at once, so we put the other one through on that screen or that screen [points to two large televisions] from the computer [an internet live stream] and we keep everyone happy. [Dave, landlord of the Royal Oak, Standish, Wigan 2011].

The situations, expressed above, highlight the fluid nature of football culture as structuration occurs across time and space. Consequently, findings indicate that perceptions of authenticity must also be time phased phenomena existing in the eye of the beholder at any given time (Author, 2013b). Moreover, and in the manner that Giddens (1984) describes, changes are implemented gradually and often without a conscious appreciation that any change has

occurred at all (Author 2011; Author 2013a). It is only retrospectively that fans were able to evaluate those subtle modifications to practice that have transpired since the implementation of the Premier League.

### **The Pub and the Modernisation of Internal Space**

Institutions are known to react in response to wider technological and commercial movements (Author 2012) and subsequently, this process can reveal the transcendence of cultural practice. Take, for example, one key observation made by participants relating to the (commercially laden) attractiveness of public house establishments for watching live football broadcasts. Complimentary to the need to socialise, attractiveness was often dependent on the modernization of the internal space within the pub. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the propagation of television (TV) screens within those establishments:

Darren:           ...But like, once the facilities got better and pubs tried to change the layout for football, it kind of took off... I remember in the early days being crowded around one tele in my local. To be honest it was shit, but that's all there was. About a thirty inch screen, if that - with loads of blokes crowded round. If you go into the same pub now there's like at least a dozen widescreen TV's and two large screens. [**Newcastle, aged 45**]

Likewise, participant Stacey (below) describes refurbishments to the pub as pivotal for the increasing popularity of this consumer pastime. In some instances, it seems as though pubs were prepared to undertake a total re-design in order to remove irregular shaped internal walls and booths to maximise space for 'the big screen'. All modifications were designed to enhance the viewing comfort of the customer and to adapt the internal space to suit the requirements of the consumer:

Stacey:           Big screens have made a massive difference. Loads of pubs have knocked down those quaint traditional designs in favour of the open plan bar...Everyone knows which pubs have the best layout. So, like, if there's a few of you; you know that you can all sit together and basically just have a drink and a laugh. [**Sunderland, aged 29**]

In addition to the creation of more suitable internal surroundings that are conducive to a positive consumer experience; the allure of international competition (e.g. particularly the European Championship competition ‘Euro 96’, held in England) was often quoted (i.e. by those who were old enough to attend pubs at this time) as a major turning point in the popularity of watching football in public houses. To clarify, whilst some participants had watched other football tournaments or televised cup matches in public houses prior to 1996, this tournament, according to Keith<sup>8</sup> ‘had more appeal than any other’, given that, ‘...it was our tournament [referring to England as the host nation], and pubs had really started to make an effort to make it better for the punters’. Consequently, whilst landlords had to work hard to inspire customers to attend at irregular drinking hours, it seemed that publican effort (i.e. a seemingly new attitude towards promoting live televised football), international competition, media hype and associated patriotism were enough to evoke a desire for communal televised consumption in public houses. Indeed participants were able to draw on vivid memories that stem from this period:

Paul: Euro ‘96’ in my local. I didn’t just watch the England games but we used to watch potential competition... The semi final against Germany and the Quarters against Spain had just a terrific atmosphere. I would say that moments like those probably got people coming back into pubs to watch footie. [**Middlesbrough, aged 53**]

Even conceding the fact that the 1996 European Championships were broadcast on British terrestrial television (i.e. TV licence payers had the option to watch those matches at home) a culture for watching live football collectively (i.e. away from the live venue) was beginning to develop and with this, special football moments were associated with the pub:

Helen: England v Scotland was brilliant and Gazza’s goal and what was it? The dentist’s chair<sup>9</sup>. That was brilliant...We stayed in the pub all day after that game. Fantastic game...The good thing about the pub is that you can immediately continue your celebrations, or drown your sorrows and share the experience. [**Sunderland, aged 38**]

Here participants illustrate the growing desire to consume football communally, however, it should also be noted that some landlords had initially underestimated the commercial

potential of hosting live televised football at this time. For instance, with reference to the European Championships in 1996, journalist Richard Alan reports that the pub industry had been underprepared and ultimately overwhelmed by public demand<sup>10</sup>. In the space between Euro '96' and World Cup '98', he reports that pubs underwent some major refurbishments in order to attract football fans into respective establishments. Alan refers to specific incidents, where for example, 'pubs from the Firkin brewery had spent more than £500,000 on big viewing screens and launched a cast-conditioned beer called Firkin 98, as a reaction to the industry being under prepared for Euro 96'. Furthermore, some pubs such as the Finnesko in Norwich went to extreme lengths 'by turfing the pub and installing stadium seating arrangements'. Such examples illustrate what Bryman (2004: 15) would describe as processes of 'theming', used here, to provide a veneer of meaning and symbolism in order to distinguish from the 'standard' pub in an attempt to increase custom. Whilst not all pubs can afford to remodel to this extent, the effort spent on redesigning pubs for the practical use of sports fans appears to be a sensible investment with some participants in this sample indicating that football is the only reason that they go to the pub:

*Author: If you can watch at home, why go to the pub at all?*

Carl: Quite honestly, I go to the pub quite a lot, but only when there's football on. It sounds sad, but I don't want to be left out of the group. So it's a social thing really. If my friends are going, then I'm going. **[Darlington, aged 23]**

Consequently then, the production and reproduction of football fandom practice is affected by commercial culture in the sense that routine interactions in pubs (a stable space for football fandom culture, historically speaking) has grown to incorporate the live televised experience. Thus, in a manner that Bale (1994) predicted when discussing the futurescape of sports culture, the virtual consumption of sport has grown to become a part of practice, with fans using the pub and mediated technological advancements in place of or in tandem with



the traditional mode of attending the match in the live arena. It has become acceptable and desirable to consume football virtually in the pub.

### **Shifts In Perceptions of Authentic Practice**

Participants suggest that the demand to consume live football in the pub can be partially explained by a desire to experience the live performance in the company of peers. Indeed, David and Millward (2012: 361) add to this point to emphasise that weakened forms of social control in pubs are an attractive alternative to live match attending experiences. Consequently, the pub, as a routine, historical space linked with football culture, has combined with technological and commercial opportunities to showcase live football and satisfy demand for control free communal viewing. From the perspective of the football fan, Weed (2007: 404) explains that the pub is also linked to the desire to practice and then later recall the experience of spectating in a particular venue as a meaningful occasion:

*Author: What makes you want to continue watching football in the pub?*

Ruth: I suppose for those big matches, like Boro's Cup Finals over the past ten year, I can tell you exactly where I was and who I was with... So it's saying *I was there...* [Middlesbrough, aged 42]

Being there, it should be noted, has conventionally been associated with the experiences of those attending the stadium and moreover this narrative has carried with it a rich source of cultural capital for any given fan (Weed, 2008). However, evidence suggests that this trend appears to be altering within the minds of some that rarely set foot in the stadium and get their fix of live football in the pub:

*Author: But real fans go to the match don't they?*

Tina: Not any more. Not for my generation anyway. The pub is the place to be! It's more inclusive to all of your mates and you can all enjoy the match together and meet others in there. It's much more social than going to the game and standing beside strangers. That's what the pub can bring to the table and you can still say that you seen the match and supported the lads. [Middlesbrough, aged 19]

In addition to providing support for those arguing that contemporary stadiums are becoming sanitized spaces (Sandvoss, 2003), the fact that Tina and her youthful peer group can place

the pub above the stadium (as a naturalised site to practice football fandom) has implications for previous understandings of the concept 'being there'. For example, the geographical position of the pub can be many miles away from the live performance, and so, for the participant (above) 'being there' need not necessarily entail a physical journey to the location of the live game.

Weed (2006: 407) attempts to explain similar observations by using Boden and Molotch's (1994) theoretical apparatus 'the compulsion of proximity'. He explains that perhaps, physical proximity to other likeminded souls (e.g. friends and fans of the same team, rather than physical proximity to the live performance) could be equally, if not more important to football fans when searching for desirable and memorable spaces to consume live football. Hence, with a growing plethora of modes through which to consume football; the concept of being there, it seems, has evolved to mean more than simply attending the football stadium and has morphed to embrace the pub as an alternative site. In essence and overtime, the service offered by the public house has evolved in line with the values of corporate television, and in turn, this has stimulated a desire for communal viewing that has become synonymous with football culture and sociability for many groups of people. For those fans, including Bill (below) the communal experience is key to his desire for continued consumption:

Bill: Any Sunderland match that is televised I can't watch at home. I have to go to The Percy (pub) to meet the lads...It feels similar to going to the match in some respects, you know, you've got the build up and the anticipation, the craic with your mates and the enjoyment of the live match. And of course post match reactions. **[Sunderland, aged 34]**

As a case in point, the compelling desire to consume football at 'the Percy' provides an instance of routine where it was not uncommon amongst participants to favour one particular venue in which to consume live football. However, in certain instances the desire to favour a

specific space can extend beyond routine and into ritual given that fans can associate elements of luck and superstition with specific venues:

Jeff: Even though I live about ten miles away I get the bus into town for Newcastle games. We always go to 'The Volt', it's a lucky pub for us and the atmosphere is great...[Newcastle, aged 27]

Fans like Jeff, that will travel over ten mile to watch a televised match in a specific pub, often bypassing other pubs on the way, demonstrate elements of routine behaviour that extends beyond the pragmatic. Others, like Peter (below) illustrate that once ingrained within ones lifestyle, such routines are often maintained where possible despite inconvenience and economic cost:

Peter: In about 2005 I moved house to Newcastle for work reasons, so for most televised matches I've got to drive down to my mates and go to the pub in Boro.

*Author: Why travel to Middlesbrough?*

Peter: Well, it wouldn't be the same if I watched it by myself in a pub in Newcastle. I always try to watch Middlesbrough games with Middlesbrough supporters. [Middlesbrough, aged 32]

Like Peter (above), Weed (2007: 408) has also illustrated that the concept of 'shared communal experience' is pivotal to explaining the pub as a sport spectator venue. He makes clear that over time, certain venues have become known as 'football pubs' (i.e. amongst specific peer groups) and this further reinforces their unofficial credentials as sporting places. However, whilst an emotional connection between fan and pub can help to form routine bonds, it is worthy of note that those emotional connections can also alter over time. In the case of my participants this was most frequently evidenced through a change in personal circumstances and an abundance of consumer choice.

### **The Pub and Consumer Choice**

The public house industry is a competitive market place, partially as a result of a more liberal approach of licence justices dating back to the late 1950s and picking up momentum in the 1990s (coinciding with the initiation of the Premier League) by the relaxation of the judgement on ‘need’ in the grant of new licences (Jennings, 2007). Consequently, it is not uncommon for new establishments to be introduced to the marketplace, and this is a position that football fans can take advantage of. As such, the creation of fresh pubs and bars threatens the custom of existing establishments. They can present new alluring opportunities to consume in ways that surpass the facilities or conditions offered by competitors. The result can be, as in the case of participant Louise (below), a shift in the preferred space for live football consumption:

Louise:                   A new *sports bar* opened a while back which is better so we go there now.  
                                  **[Liverpool, aged 20]**

Here, the effect of marketing on football culture is revealed, given that the *sports bar*, to which Louise refers, is in fact a themed pub that provides the allusion of a more exciting and culturally appropriate venue for football fandom (Bryman, 2004; Author, 2013a). Thus, peer groups can be seduced by the marketing of alternative consumption spaces that offer potential conditions to become a new but regular component in the life of a football fan. Consequently, fans exercise consumer choice between a vast array and variety of public houses that compete with one another for the custom of fans:

Wanda:                   When there is a group of pubs close to each other they advertise like mad! ‘Come into this pub and its happy hour’, or ‘over here it’s two for one on bottles’ (bottles of alcohol). We just choose the best pubs with the best offers. **[Darlington, aged 21]**

Despite holding preference for certain establishments over others, evidence suggests that fans can be practical when choosing to watch live football in the pub. It was not unusual then, for participants in the current sample to have two or three possible choices of public house destination that were called upon to suit particular circumstances. For instance, from each pub fans were looking, not only for cheap alcohol, but for particular characteristics to

optimize the atmosphere for communal viewing with ‘different’ groups of friends; a reality that has been missed by the extant literature. For instance, taking into consideration the work of Weed (2006; 2007; 2008) we could be forgiven for thinking that all pubs are loud, boisterous, testosterone filled spaces reminiscent of old style terraces. Gibbons and Lusted (2007) provide a typical instance of this when they write about activities within a Cumbrian pub during the 2006 World Cup Finals. They recall:

Rooney was sent off. One man shouted (after punching a wall!) ‘Fuck off you Stretford<sup>11</sup> cunt! I’ll batter ya!’

This, it must be clear, is not a typical reflection of fandom practice in all public houses across Britain. It is worth pointing out that whilst most participants enjoyed atmospheric pubs, others did not; or on occasion and when the situation dictated, they would sooner find a quiet pub to take in the match, perhaps over a Sunday roast, a singular pint or a pot of coffee:

Richie: I’ve started taking the wife out for some food to coincide with the match...It’s got to the point where I say ‘fancy going for some food’? And she’ll say ‘who are Liverpool playing like’?... It’s still good to be out and amongst people if you know what I mean, but I can’t take wor lass to some of the other places I go to with, with the lads from work...When I go out with her I look for something with like a mild atmosphere. **[Liverpool, aged 32]**

Accordingly, the preferred space chosen to consume live football is carefully considered and ultimately dependent on the specific social company that participants hold at any given time. For instance, having a meal with a friend or family member whilst watching the game is a far different consumer experience than the stereotypical portrayal described in the extant literature. This demonstrates once more, that variety and choice exist for contemporary fans, and more specifically, it reveals the adaptability of the pub to the sensibilities of different fan factions. Hence participants, like Paul (below) spoke about his current match-day pub with reference to a choice between those offering different consumer experiences:

Paul: Just me and my mate Marty go to watch the match in the pub. We’ve stopped going into town as much and we just stay local...It’s good when the pub has got atmosphere, but we like to be

able to hear ourselves talking about the match, so we don't go into any of the daft pubs and we choose a pub with the right atmosphere. [Middlesbrough, aged 53]

To reiterate, both participants (above) explain that social company will dictate the desired space and location for live football and this sentiment was shared throughout this sample of fans. In this sense, fans weigh up their options as consumers and chose from the vast array of public houses that can accommodate them.

## **Conclusion**

As football fandom cultures continue to transcend across time and space in accordance with the process of structuration, the public house has maintained its relationship with football fans. For instance, the fan has internalised the sport media revolution of the period and the pub has integrated those features seamlessly into the ambiance of the public house experience. In the same way that it had done in centuries past, the pub was quick to embrace this meaningful change in order to consolidate and further improve its relationship with football fans, and of course, to maximise commercial opportunities. For the football fan, watching the match in the pub has become a routine pastime that is complimentary to other established social-historical links (between the pub and the fan) that have been passed down in an active and reciprocal manner between generations of fans.

As well as illustrating processes of structuration, the accounts offered by participants (associated with the underlying motives for the genesis of watching live football in the pub) have challenged common assumptions from the extant literature. Where this cultural movement was previously associated with the expense of private subscription to Sky Television and rising ticket prices at the stadium, participants have suggested an alternative explanation. Participant Graham, for example, highlights that a different set of personal circumstances were endured, and he makes specific reference to the initial cool reception (to

watching live football in pubs) within his peer group. He explains that gradually, and with coercion from publicans (in the form of tempting happy hour price structures for the duration of any given match) coupled with the success of the new TV format for football, the routines of many fans began to embrace the new offerings from the pub. In addition to this, international football tournaments were noted by participants as the catalyst for a desire to watch live football communally away from the stadium. Once publicans began to realize the lucrative possibilities for business generation (multiple times per week in coordination with Satellite Television schedules), internal spaces were redesigned and more large screen televisions were installed, hence adapting traditional design in order to meet the demands of contemporary living.

Thus, despite its connection with football, the pub continues to work hard to consolidate and develop this special bond. Technological advancement allows for new forms of collective gatherings that can share the live, real time experience of professional football and consequently, fans use the pub to add to narratives of being there. This is an important development in the evolution of football culture with new generations of fans, like Tina, growing up to practice fandom collectively away from the live venue as an authentic part of fandom culture. As such, the fluid nature of football cultures is revealed, and furthermore, findings have indicated that watching football in the pub is far from a homogenous activity. Not only do pubs compete for custom, but choice of venue, for the fan, can be based on superstition, shared company and desired ambience. Those loud boisterous spaces described in the extant literature hide the mundane reality that is practiced in everyday life. Indeed, the current sample demonstrate the crucial presence of choice from a wide variety of public house venues that have something different to offer. In close, public house venues remain sites for football fandom culture to flourish given that they are constantly reinvented to cater for the desires of the football audience. They are fluid and flexible and consequently, as

institutions they are relatively stable features of football fandom, establishing and sustaining new consumption routines via the structuration of practice.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> BSkyB is a public satellite broadcasting company operating in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Ontological Security refers to 'confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity'. See Giddens, *the Constitution of Society*: 375.

<sup>3</sup> Practical Consciousness refers to 'what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action'. See Giddens, *the Constitution of Society*: 375.

<sup>4</sup> [Darlington, aged 26]

<sup>5</sup> [Hartlepool, aged 21]

<sup>6</sup> [Hartlepool, aged 33]

<sup>7</sup> [Newcastle, aged 40]

<sup>8</sup> [Middlesbrough, aged 45]

<sup>9</sup> The dentist's chair refers to an infamous goal celebration that mimicked an incident (reported by the News of the World) involving the excessive drinking of alcohol by the England football team in the run up to the European Championships in 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Alan. R. 1998. *The Guardian*, June 7<sup>th</sup>, p.66.

<sup>11</sup> Stretford is a town in Greater Manchester. It is used in this instance to label football player Wayne Rooney as a representative of the people of this region. Before Old Trafford (the home of Manchester United) was an all seated stadium, 'The Stretford End' (now officially named the West Stand) was the main standing area of the ground, holding approximately 20,000 fans.

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