Sports Fandom

KEVIN DIXON

OVERVIEW

Trends in Fandom Research

The Practice and Development of Fandom

Gender and Fandom

Evolution of Sports Fandom and New Media

Sports fans infiltrate our inner social networks. It is likely that of our relatives, friends and work colleagues, many will be fans of sport. But whilst we use the term with abandon, what do we really know about sports fans and the role that they play in social and cultural processes that maintain this phenomenon? How can we explain variations of practice and the motivations, dispositions and principles that bind fans together for the duration of sport performances and even beyond? What do we understand about the lived experience, the genesis, maintenance and evolution of fandom cultures and those systems of power that can produce difference, exclusion and marginalisation within fan groups? This chapter seeks to investigate such questions by appraising sociological accounts of the sports fandom phenomenon as it has been explained across time and space in relation to continuity and change.

Thus, covering the genealogy of scholarly research, this chapter is divided into four main sections. First, it examines the early *conceptual* dichotomies and typologies of fandom types before advancing to cover more recent post-modern approaches to sports fandom. This is followed by an exploration of *empirical* investigations into the origins and maintenance of fandom cultures. The penultimate topic draws attention to the *marginalisation* experiences of female sports fans as they exist within masculine dominated sports. Finally, the work evaluates the fluid nature of fandom practice with particular reference to the integration of technology and the subtle evolution of 'tradition'.

THE GENEALOGY OF FANDOM RESEARCH: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Research into sports fandom has been dominated by what Crawford (2004: 34) has described as 'the relentless quest to uncover authentic and inauthentic practice'. This has been influenced in part, by shifting social trends across time and space in relation to, for example, advancing consumer culture and the ensuing struggle to make sense of this as it is subsumed within sport (Dixon, 2013a; Horne, 2006; Sandvoss, 2003). As a consequence, it is useful to examine the genealogy of research on sports fandom in relation to continuity and change in order to appreciate the fluid nature of ideas as they are carefully considered and then challenged through scholarly debate. With this in mind, the following section sets out to uncover this gradual challenge to theoretical ideas via an exploration, in chronological order, of sports fandom research.

Dichotomies of Sport Fandom

Early approaches to sport fans set out to segregate 'types' of fandom into two distinct categories in order to make the following point. Fans, it was thought, were affected by the commercial enlightenment that was occurring elsewhere as emerging neo-liberal political philosophy began to influence and infiltrate sport institutions and fandom cultures in the 1980s. Consequently scholars were keen to examine the effect of commercialisation on what was perceived to be the inevitable marginalisation of a particular category of sports fans that were often described as 'authentic', 'traditional' or 'loyal'. For instance, using a dualistic framework Clarke (1978) made a conceptual distinction between 'genuine fans' (for example, those who identify heavily with a sense of community and tradition) and 'other types' of supporter (for example, those primarily interested in sport as entertainment). Furthermore, this simple dichotomy has been repackaged by a number of academics since. For example, Boyle and Haynes (2000) distinguish between 'traditional' and 'modern' fans; Nash (2000) between 'core' and 'corporate' and Quick (2000) between 'irrational' and 'rational' fans. Although the terminology used differs between authors, the overriding message is similar. New fans and traditional fans are often perceived as distinct from one another in terms of the means, motives and underlying philosophies that they hold. As Mehus (2010: 897) writes, 'good supporters are often contrasted with bad consumers'.

'New fans' (that is, consumers) are commonly conceived of as 'flakey' in the sense that they are attracted towards teams based on: success, rather than as a consequence of personal heritage; celebrity, as opposed to character; and progress rather than the maintenance of tradition (Dixon 2012). More specifically, Rein et al. (2006) imply that sports fans have come to be 'elusive' in the sense that they have become a part of the extended consumer market. Because they buy fandom

experiences within an aggressively marketed sports arena, it is thought that conventional loyalty can no longer be assumed. Contrary to this position, 'traditional fans' are described as those with strong emotional connections, bonded together by group loyalties. As a consequence, they are portrayed as irrational and yet predictable beings in the sense that they blindly follow group conventions and, as such, it is thought that they have the potential to be manipulated by corporate bodies.

When taken together these views assume a dichotomy between two distinct fractions of proposed fandom types and yet, such accounts are in danger of presuming rigid distinctions (for example, between those perceived groups noted above) which mask the reality subsumed within the lived experience. Crawford (2004) for one concurs with this when he points out that much contemporary work seeks to establish the belief that – through rampant commercialisation - sport is losing its inherently traditional qualities that were characteristic of a so-called past 'golden age'. He notes however, that observations relating to 'the golden age' are anecdotal at best, and at worst fabricated on a wave of nostalgia.

Typologies of Sport Fandom

Typologies of the sport fan phenomena serve to draw attention to the multiple ways in which fandom is practiced and consequently they extend powers of explanation beyond the dichotomous form. Consider the work of social psychologists Wann et al. (2001) as a typical example. The authors provide a narrative of authenticity based on the familiar idea of perceived 'traditional' type behaviours and those perceived to be associated with 'sports consumers'. They then extend this argument (creating a typology) by sub-dividing sports consumers into two groups: *'Direct,'* where sports

consumption involves personal attendance at a sporting event; and *'Indirect'* where consumption involves watching sport through the mass media or consuming sport via the Internet. The authors consider fans as either 'Highly' or 'Lowly' identified with their object of fandom due to the 'types' of consumption activities that they engage with or perform. Some, such as attending sports events in person, wearing team colours and actively yelling (to support), were viewed by the researchers as more authentic, and thus those activities were thought to signify a greater affiliation with sports teams or clubs than other activities or performances might (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010). Yet again (like those dichotomies of fandom, noted in the previous section), perceived authenticity is attributed to a romanticised vision of 'traditional' which is reportedly under attack from processes of globalisation, post-modernity and consumer culture more generally.

Anthony King (1997; 1998) was perhaps the first scholar to actively seek empirical evidence for such assumptions when he paid specific attention to a group of fans (considered to be 'traditional') and monitored their thoughts and behaviours in light of the transformations of football in England epitomised by the rise of the FA Premier League. King was ultimately interested in the discovery of how traditional fans position themselves in relation to both

1. the commodification of football, and

2. in light of what he conceives to be an emerging affluent or consumer audience.

Using a Gramsci-inspired theoretical framework, he argues that intervention from above (that is, the neo-liberal endorsement of privatisation espoused by the 1980s Conservative Government) had impacted severely on traditional aspects of fandom culture, causing some elements of practice to change indefinitely. The results of

King's ethnographic research uncovered a partial form of resistance by traditional fans (to the commodification of football) in the sense that they were shown to display discontent with changes to the game and yet they simultaneously displayed elements of acceptance. For example, the studied group was unhappy with changes to ticket pricing and yet they were willing to pay these escalating fees. Concomitantly, while they were vocal about the demise of standing spaces which were central to their solidarity, they were proud of their modernised stadium. In conclusion King noted that the behaviours, conflicts, thoughts and aspirations of those within his sample could not be explained using a one dimensional argument of resistance to the bourgeoisification of football and he therefore challenged scholars to develop alternative theoretical positions.

Two of the most cited explanations of sports fandom include Redhead's (1993) view of fans as either 'Participatory' or 'Passive' and Giulianotti's (2002) ideal-type taxonomy of sports fans. Both approaches focus attention on football fans as a predominant example, though wider implications are inferred. First, Redhead highlights the conflicting nature of 'participatory' and 'passive' forms of fandom. He suggests that one outcome derived from the rise of the service sector in England (and the expansion of white collar workers) was the emergence of a new type of 'active' supporter. The active supporter (for Redhead) is typified by, and can be evidenced through, the development and popularity of fanzines and supporter organisations. Conversely, and perceived as an adversary to the active fan, Redhead argues that 'passive' supporters have also been growing in stature over the same period (1980–1990s). This, he notes, has occurred in response to the increasing number of consumer products (including television coverage) relating to sport and the allure of consumption for consumption sake. Thus, whilst scholars (for

example Cleland, 2010) are right to point out that Redhead does not categorise fans within a simplistic dichotomy as such, the work remains focused on the segmentation of perceived groups of fans.

Offering what seems like a more comprehensive conceptual model, Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities in football attempts to categorise various types of fans into distinct areas depending on the manner via which fandom is performed and consumed. He claims that certain characteristics of fan types can be identified along a horizontal axis between the 'Traditional' to the 'Consumer'. He then adds to this familiar dichotomy by placing a vertical axis mid-way between these points, running between Hot to Cool forms of fandom. He therefore proposes four quadrants into which spectators may be classified from more to less authentic: 1. supporter; 2. fan; 3. follower; 4. flaneur. Those quadrants are based on the relationships with and proximity to, football spaces (e.g. club stadia and the local community); the means of consuming football (e.g. 'in person' versus 'via the media'); interactions with other fans (e.g. 'face-to-face' versus using 'new media communications'); and other aspects that are thought to depict levels of solidarity and identity around a football club.

Box 18.1 about here

This typology is insightful enough to point out the vast and varied means via which fans can engage with practice, but ranking authenticity via the perceived importance of consumption type can cause practical problems for transference into real situations. For instance, Giulianotti (2002: 38) makes a general assumption

about the ways in which sports fans use the Internet. Through classifying this mode of consumption with less interactive forms of media, like television, Giulianotti suggests that the Internet is merely a virtual and passive form of communication that inauthentic flâneurs use to experience sport in a detached manner - instead of engaging in more 'real' and 'authentic' forms of fandom (e.g. attending matches in person and interacting face-to-face with other fans). Indeed, Giulianotti (2002: 39) argues that: 'the cool/consumer seeks relatively thin forms of social solidarity with other fellow fans', thus ignoring the vast amount of what might be considered authentic sports fans - who as well as attending games in person, also contribute to online discussion forums, blogs, email loops and message boards and use the Internet as just one form of communication. Crawford (2004: 33) makes similar criticisms towards current theories of fandom when he writes,

> While it is possible to identify different levels of commitment and dedication to a sport and different patterns of behaviour of fans, it is important that we do not celebrate the activities of certain supporters and ignore (or even downgrade) the activities and interests of others … Rather than privileging the activities of certain fans over others, it is important, if we are to understand the contemporary nature of fan cultures, that we consider the full range of patterns of behaviour of all fans, including those who do not conform to 'traditional' patterns or images of fan activities.

To summarise, whilst many dichotomies and typologies of fandom have sought to explain fan behaviour in an all-encompassing manner, they spend too much time attempting to segregate and compartmentalise fandom types into idealistic but ultimately unrealistic components. Many models romanticise what are

considered to be traditional forms of fandom and dismiss, downplay, or diminish the importance of evolving fandom activities. This has led current academic writings to explore post-modern explanations of contemporary fandom practice.

Fandom and Post-modernity

In a growing segment of the current literature discussions of the 'post-fan' (a term first used by Redhead, 1997) have begun to appear in opposition to typologies of fandom. For instance, Crabbe (2008) contends that scholars must take into account the changing nature of social life – with the blurring of traditional forms of stratification, advancements of communications technology, new levels of consumption and ever more possibilities for individual choice. Rather than acknowledging disparate fractions of fandom types, Crabbe describes the emergence of post-modern fan communities which differ radically from the traditional form that has so often featured at the center of theoretical models. He asserts that fan communities in the post-modern mould are less likely to be bound by colloquial closeness and are more likely to form what Blackshaw (2008) terms 'deterritorised groupings' in the sense that they are: short term; temporary and less intimate; organised by intense emotional involvement; gather infrequently; and disperse rapidly. Concomitantly, from this perspective sport fans are said to 'perform' as opposed to 'live' group connections. Thus, individualism resides at the heart of such commentaries with fandom perceived as the performance of a self-gratifying function. Crabbe, in particularly, captures the professed sense of individuality in his anecdotal description of football fandom beyond the final whistle when he writes: 'individuals make their way home like disturbed rats scuttling for cover, eager to be ahead, separate from the crowd in a rush to get home' (Crabbe, 2008: 435). In a

similar manner, Blackshaw (2008) uses Bauman's (2000; 2001; 2005) concept of 'liquid-modern' to suggest that solid structures of modernity have lost shape somewhat and have become 'liquefied' and engulfed within consumer society. Thus, both Blackshaw and Bauman make clear the contemporary importance of consumption as an individualistic pursuit. For instance, Bauman writes:

> No lasting bonds emerge in the activity of consumption. Those bonds that manage to be tied in the act of consumption may, but may not, outlast the act; they may hold swarms together for the duration of their flight but they are admittedly occasion bound. (Bauman, 2007: 78)

Proponents of Bauman's work within sport sociology use similar analogies to suggest that swarms of sports fans gather in a multitude of places and spaces to consume sport via the increasing proliferation of technological mediums. Kraszewski (2008) is one such scholar who refers to the liquid-modern conditions of relocation and displacement in association with sports fandom. He argues that the increasingly mobile US population use sport, and in particular American sports bars, to collect temporarily and connect with other fans who also find themselves displaced from their place of origin (that is, place of birth). Moreover, he asserts that through the consumption of sport, people turn to the idea of culture and community for a sense of comfort and self-gratifying assurance. In this case, commercial American sports bars are thought to fulfill an important role by providing places where displaced fans can meet for comfort, watch television, interact, offer temporary reassurance; in other words, consume the false notion of community before returning to an individual existence. Blackshaw (2008: 334) concurs with this use of the term 'community' in the sense that agents use it sparingly to suit individual circumstances. He writes: 'The modern fan only wants community the way that they want community, and that

is individually wrapped and ready for consumption'. He contends that while liquid-moderns may like the sentiment of traditional community, they would be unwilling to make the sacrifices to personal freedom that would see them give up their individuality for the cause. Moreover and adding support for such speculation, Boyle and Haynes (2004) suggest that new sport communities are now mediated by accelerated commodification which has sought to personalise fandom experiences. They assert that blogs, pod-casts and other social networking tools are growing in popularity and thus choice and consumerism are key ingredients of contemporary sport fandom.

New Directions

More recently, academics have begun to question previous research in an attempt to rethink sports fandom in the context of continuity and change. John Williams (2007) for example is critical of much of the literature in this domain. He criticises macro theories and simplistic dichotomies/typologies of fandom for romanticizing the 'traditional' and failing to position fans in the new social contexts of contemporary life. Authors have, of course, addressed the latter using post-modern social critiques (Blackshaw, 2008; Crabbe, 2008; Sandvoss, 2003), however, they have been criticised by Williams for exaggerating the decline of traditional ties. Williams (2007: 142) suggests that there is 'a tendency for authors to oversimplify fandom' at either end of this theoretical continuum, based on normative speculation regarding new media-driven consumption patterns. He asserts that post-modern claims to practice may hold some validity but he is also mindful that they require a combination of theory and rigorous empirical research to substantiate this position. Further, he argues that the search for explanations of rapid change often negate and

underestimate the importance of continuity, place and community in sport fandom. Perhaps then, as Dixon (2013a) suggests, theoretical approaches that share a desire to understand how individual action is organised at the level of practice, whilst simultaneously recognising that structural features are reproduced through individual action, have much to offer the study of sport fandom. Examples of such approaches can be observed through studies relating to the origins of fandom and the development of fandom careers.

ORIGINS OF PRACTICE AND THE DEVELOPMEN OF FANDOM CAREERS

Drawing on research with British based ice hockey fans, Crawford (2003; 2004) sets out to discuss the routes that individuals can take through various stages of sports fandom. Reflecting on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1971), and borrowing from Goffman (1968) and Becker (1963), he argues that the concept of 'career' may lend itself to explaining pathways of practice within fandom cultures. Thus, where Goffman investigates the career of the mental patient and Becker examines careers of marijuana users, Crawford uses a similar process to follow the development of sports fandom through progressive life stages. In doing so, he is careful to express the effects of both structure and agency to the potential fluid and temporal dimensions of sport fan careers.

The term 'career' (as used by Crawford) differs from previous sub-cultural applications in the sporting setting (for example, Marsh's (1978) analysis of the career of British football hooligans) that caricature patterns of behaviour and force individuals into often ill-defined and rigid 'types' of supporters. Instead, Crawford allows for a more flexible understanding of the potential negotiation and renegotiation of structured pathways to explain how individual position and

involvement can change and develop. In this fluid system of career development Crawford acknowledges that time and space can alter the type and intensity of fandom through stages that may or may not be negotiated through the life span of a fan. For example, he suggests that fans have the potential to move through the following loosely defined stages: 'general public' – 'interested' - 'enthusiastic supporters' (fairly dedicated) - 'devoted supporters' (with a strong background knowledge of history, rules and key events) – and 'professional supporters' (well-educated and are likely to make at least a partial amount of their income from their involvement in sport fandom).Yet despite the potential fluidity of career paths (identified within this model) at the beginning, Crawford (2004: 46) insists that fans are likely to replicate 'the norms of a particular habitus'.

Here Crawford uses terminology derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990) to explain the potential derivatives of fan behaviour. As Bourdieu uses the term, 'habitus' explains how seemingly spontaneous individual actions actually meet wider social expectations (Wacquant 2008). Consequently habitus can express the ways in which agents become 'themselves' by developing attitudes and dispositions that are influenced by history, traditions and cultures operating within and between specific fields (Bourdieu 1990:54). Thus, habitus is dependent on a slow process of cultural diffusion relating to the transmission of durable dispositions, without in any way being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1977: 72). This is not to suggest that habitus will determine fixed responses in practice but, rather, that it limits the options that individuals have by providing cultural norms and historical precedents which in turn determine strategies of action.

Indirect evidence to support the presence of habitus in the lives of sports fans is apparent in the work of Holt (1995: 12) when he explains how, in the realm of US baseball, competent spectators act as mentors for those deemed to be less so. Of course, the role of mentors (for example, teaching the values and dispositions of any given field) can take many forms, though as Wheeler and Green (2012) suggest, the most significant instigating factor for participation in sport cultures are 'family' mentors. Thus, mentors of all descriptions uncover the recursive nature of practice where students inevitably become teachers, the mentored become mentors and consequently tradition is continued across time and space. Indeed, when discussing the myths and realities of Millwall FC fandom (an English football team), Robson (2000: 169) uses this argument (derived from Bourdieu) to explain that practical mastery (e.g. of fandom sub-cultures) becomes embedded in the perceptions and dispositions of fans (via teachings) to such an extent that actions are simply known in practice as 'the way things are done'.

Whilst Dixon (2012) agrees that there is evidence to support the contention that the unconscious acquisition of childhood fandom can be later 'consciously' or 'semi-consciously' passed to future generations in an active and reciprocal manner (providing evidence for the cultural continuation of habitus), he acknowledges that late-modern society offers no guarantees that coercion of this type will gain the desired effect or that 'tradition' will roll over to the next generation in such a predictable manner. Here Dixon acknowledges the point that whilst agents are certainly influenced by habitus, they are not imprisoned by it. Agents can opt in or out of practice despite the acquisition of childhood habitus (See Box 18.2)

Box 18.2 about here

Thus, during the course of everyday life, agents are presented with various options to reproduce social action, or else to change behaviour. And whilst they are influenced by core knowledge gathered through childhood habitus they are also capable of consuming new knowledge of distant or estranged practices via interaction with others. Perhaps then, it is reasonable to suggest that where Bourdieu's habitus depends on relatively stable social conditions or a simpler, organised form of modernity; contemporary fandom exists outside of these parameters. Advancing this point, Craib (1992) insists that changes to the contemporary environment have summoned conditions via which a 'reflexive habitus' has become increasingly common. Sweetman (2003) and Adkins (2003) concur with this sentiment and further suggest that uncertainty and change are paradoxically becoming a familiar occurrence in most fields with agents possessing a greater tolerance of and taste for diversity. Thus, according to this logic, contemporary agents have been described as 'cultural omnivores' in the sense that they are tolerant of and have a taste for many different leisure activities that are not bound by strict conceptions of habitus in the sense that Bourdieu uses this term (Peterson, 2005). Yet despite the potential for reflexivity in contemporary lifestyles, and acknowledging the importance of this for understanding fan cultures, it seems that some 'traditional' barriers to inclusion remain.

FEMALE SPORTS FANS

Regardless of an increasing capacity for reflexivity within the practice of sport fandom (acknowledged above), Giddens (1991) reminds us that contemporary life and its evolving constitution continues to produce difference, exclusion and

marginalisation in various forms. In support of this, Crawford (2001) has revealed that despite the presence of a high proportion of female audience members at live ice hockey matches, women are often excluded from the highest echelons of this fan community with assertions of inauthenticity cast upon them. Similar findings have been expressed by Collins (2009) and Caudwell (2011) in relation to rugby and football respectively and yet despite an acceptance that inequalities exist in sport fan communities, there have been few research programmes dedicated to its study. In fact, Pope (2013: 4) writes that as well as being marginalised in fandom communities, female sports fans have largely been marginalised in academic research.

She explains that even when female fans are cited in scholarly research, they are often compared unfavourably against the image of dominant, uncontrollable masculine passion that is unleashed in response to sports victory or defeat. Females by contrast, are depicted as sobbing, screaming, individuals motivated by the chance to see or touch a male idol. This position is supported by the tendency for academics to focus on female sports fans as synthetic, media dependent, consumer fans. In King's (1998) research on football fandom, for instance, he contrasts 'new fans' (e.g. placing emphasis on the growing number of female fans as part of this process) as consumers, against 'traditional fans', or, as he labels them for the purposes of his study, 'the lads'. In keeping with this, much of the literature has driven cumbersomely over the life experiences of female fans and thus, rather than investigating what fandom means to this under-represented group, studies have been content to explain away the presence of female fans as a side-effect of the 'bourgeoisification' of contemporary sport (Jones and Lawrence, 2000). Yet, by stigmatising minority groups of fans (in this instance, women) as inauthentic or less important, sports

fandom research arguably maintains a 'malestream' approach, leaving the exploration and understanding of female sports fandom underdeveloped (Scratton and Flintoff, 2002).

In relation to the perception of female fans in the sport of ice hockey, Crawford and Gosling (2004) reveal the presence of oppressive ideologies that are deeply embedded within the culture of fandom itself. They were able to delve further into gendered discussions of fandom by unveiling a derogatory concept that has been used to describe female fans, 'puck-bunnies'. The term has been coined to generalise and trivialise the status of female fans whose alleged primary interest is in the sexual attractiveness of male athletes. One male participant explained:

> A puck-bunny is someone who hangs around the players, always on the lookout to get that chance autograph, photograph, quick pint, quick knee trembler around the back of the arena from the player … heck, let's face it even the water carrier is in with a chance here (cited in Crawford and Gosling, 2004: 468).

Whilst interviews revealed that men too were equally keen to collect autographs, chat to players and emphasise an appreciation of the closeness between fans and players (similar to those characteristics associated with puck-bunnies), this was not negatively perceived (by participants in this study) as a sign of inauthentic practice. Further, Crawford and Gosling concluded that findings do not support the assumption that females are less dedicated in practice, nor is there any evidence to suggest that female fans are less knowledgeable than their male counterparts. Instead, the authors imply that it is simply the overt visible differences from the

dominant male membership (i.e. belonging to a gender group) that may see certain individuals excluded from full participation and acceptance.

On this point Dixon (2014) agrees and makes subsequent reference to the mode via which perceptions of authenticity (e.g. in relation to group inclusion and exclusion criteria) are formed and applied in practice. As well as detailing the historical location of gender inequality within associated institutions more generally, Dixon suggests that power relations are maintained in practice via mechanisms of lateral participatory surveillance, otherwise understood as peer-to-peer monitoring (Andrejevic, 2004). It is through surveillance of this type, he suggests, that fans begin to monitor the behaviour of significant others and consequently replicate or reject forms of observed practice as authentic or inauthentic. Consequently female fans may experience what Muggleton (2000: 153) describes as the effects of core membership, inevitably invoking a masculine criterion that privileges men over women. It is worth noting however, that whilst female fans show solidarity in voicing concerns about the trivialisation of female fans, coherence is short lived. As an example, Dixon (2014: 434) reveals that female fans are fragmented too with some surveilling and casting blame on others for negative stereotypes associated with female fans:

> Rachel: I do think that some female fans do us no favours. Some of them tend to go in groups to ogle at the blokes and others stand there in sexy clothes with their tits out. That's how we get a bad press. [Sunderland AFC fan aged 28]

For fans like Rachel (above) such behaviour was condemned as inauthentic via processes of lateral participatory surveillance. Actions of the type described above,

she explains, will fail to gain the acceptance of the male core membership and consequently she too perpetuates negative beliefs about this form of female fandom.

THE EVOLUTION OF SPORT FANDOM CULTURES

Whilst some scholars emphasise the importance of 'tradition' for explaining the generality of social conduct within fandom cultures (e.g. in relation to upholding habitus or conceptions of authenticity and consequent exclusion), others propose that tradition is not, in any sense, a tangible reality. After all, it has different meanings for successive generations and there are even discrepancies as to its form within some generations of fans. To explain, Nash (2000) and Stone (2007) argue that sport cultures do not stagnate long enough for tradition to have ever really existed in the manner perceived by some. As a supportive example of this, Dixon (2011) draws on the theoretical work of Giddens (1984) to explain that structures and consequently notions of tradition are negotiated and renegotiated through social interaction across generations of fans. It is proposed, therefore, that traditions and the routines on which 'ideas of tradition' are formed tend to be used by agents as a 'symbolic' form of security in an ever-changing environment. As Giddens (1984: 60) writes:

> An examination of routinisation … provides us with a master key to explicating the characteristic forms of relations between the basic security system on the one hand, and the reflexively constituted processes inherent in the episodic character encounters on the other.

From this position, 'tradition' can only ever offer a façade of continuity given that over time agents will interact with diverse groups of people across institutions that are also involved in organic processes of change. As a specific example of this process Dixon (2013b) draws attention to the enduring relationship between fandom and the pub. He demonstrates how (on the surface, at least) 'tradition' lives on in the minds of sports fans; and yet the relationship between pub and fan endures, not solely due to tradition, but because of the response of the institution (the pub) to the evolving needs of its customers (sports fans).

Others have made this point too. Holt (1990: 63), for instance, explains that 'the staying power of the alehouse' (in terms of longevity and institutional success) 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 sport fan (Holt, 1990; Weed, 2007). Furthermore, according to Huggins (2004), once spectator sport had gained in popularity throughout the nineteenth century, sports 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. And as Colins 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 sport, with the consumption of beer and sandwiches and the meeting of friends an essential part of the match-day experience.

In contemporary sport, those 'traditions' (noted above) have altered shape somewhat to meet the demands of the discerning consumer and, consequently, the historical holy trinity of: 1. male company, 2. beer, and 3. sport (as acknowledged by Weed, 2006) has transformed to include females, families, coffee, food, quiz and

gambling activities, and television. On the latter point, Weed (2007) suggests that the demand to watch live sport in the pub (or its themed equivalent, the 'sports bar') can be partially explained as a consequence of the bourgeoisification of professional sport, the rise in match attendance fees and a desire to experience the live performance in the company of close group peers. David and Millward (2012: 361) add to this point when they emphasise that weakened forms of social control in pubs are an attractive alternative to the somewhat controlled, corporate nature of contemporary live match attending experiences.

Consequently, the pub, as a routine historical space linked with sport culture, has combined with technological and commercial opportunities to showcase live sport and satisfy demand for control-free communal viewing. Weed (2007; 2008) explains that the pub has evolved into a desirable site for sports fans to view live sport and then later recall the experience of spectating in a particular venue as a meaningful occasion, guided by a compulsion for proximity. The compulsion for proximity that Weed discusses is not proximity to the event, but rather to others sharing the experiences of watching the event (Jones, Brown, and Richards 2012). Thus, examples like those above highlight the slow processes of cultural change as institutions and agents interact to transform practice. It is worth noting however, that there are occasional moments in history when circumstances arise to radically alter forms of practice. The digital revolution is one such moment that has had a significant impact on fandom cultures (Pearson, 2010).

Sports Fandom and New Media

Perhaps the most obvious signs of change within sport fandom cultures have occurred in relation to the embrace of new media and the digital revolution. Leonard (2009: 2) writes:

> Each day fans visit various sports websites, participate in fantasy sports, celebrate and criticise teams, players and sporting cultures on blogs, on discussion groups, and on list serves and gain joyful pleasure from playing sport video games. Each of these media, to varying degrees, embody what has become known as new media, a catch all phrase that includes everything from the internet and ecommerce to the blogosphere, video games, virtual reality and other examples in which the media technologies are defined by increasing accessibility, fluidity and interactivity.

The literature relating to sport and new media is in its infancy as scholars seek to understand its implications. The research covers various manifestations such as the social significance of:

- sport computer gaming (Conway, 2009; Crawford, 2006; Crawford and Gosling, 2005; Plymire, 2009);

- fandom blogs towards advancing feminist perspectives on sport (Hardin, 2011);

- online interactions used to highlight debates on anti-Englishness (Johnes, 2007);

- the use of message boards to highlight the emergence of European identity in relation to football fans (Levermore and Millward, 2007); and

- discussions of social micro blogging site 'twitter' in the context of the shifting sports media landscape (Coche, 2013; Highfield et al., 2013; Hutchins, 2010; Norman, 2012; Sanderson and Kassing, 2011; Smith, 2011).

Whatever the context, it is clear that new media (accessed in various guises with each 'new mode' more accessible and convenient than the last) has changed sites of knowledge transfer or processes of information acquisition and dissemination for many sports fans. For much of their history fans have been passive acceptors of information, happy to receive any scraps that were fed down by official institutions. But by embracing technological advancements in communication, fans now have the capacity to be more active than they have ever been (Cleland, 2010; Dart, 2009; Millward, 2010). They are the producers of information as well as consumers of it. And whilst the extent to which new media can offer a mode for genuine resistance to hegemonic dominance remains unproven, it is safe to say that new media have revolutionised previously static forms of information generation to embrace the views of fans in the moment, via online polls, and social network communications such as 'twitter', 'facebook' and possibly a number of alternatives by the time this book is in print. Newspapers too have added online versions in order to modernise in line with consumers. The relationship is mutually beneficial. Sports fans can search for sport related stories at the click of a button, and those stories, in turn, are legitimised by fan communities - as journalists ask readers to comment on the issue under discussion.

It seems then, that the internet (and other forms of new media) is particularly suited to a contemporary world that bypasses time and space, providing the context for fans of sport to support athletes and teams from the far flung corners of the earth with consummate ease (Willis, 2000). Where the internet was once thought of as a fad not worth exploring in fandom cultures, scholars now recognise its revolutionary impact. For example, Gibbons and Dixon (2010) have called for researchers to take online interactions between fans more seriously. They observe that sports blogs

often retain most of their common offline discourse but in an online format and furthermore they have brought into question the apparent disjunction between online and offline practice. For instance, when Rheingold (1993: 3) states that 'people in virtual communities do everything that people do in real life, but leave their body behind', Gibbons and Dixon (2010) insist that virtual and real life practice have become almost indistinguishable from one another.

Text Box 18.3 about here

The extent of internet technology use for fans is, of course, influenced by previous experiences – with younger generations more open to newer forms of communication. Dixon (2013a) points out that whilst conceptions of 'tradition' are important to fan practice (in the sense that it ensures that all remember history and previous cultural landmarks), 'evolution' is essential to the success and continuation of any given culture or sub-culture. In order for this to happen, the resistance inevitably felt towards the inclusion of new technological forms (often by aging generations within sub-cultures), calls for the action of role reversal in the teachings of new practice. Whilst it is true that the 'knowledgability' required for cultures to flourish is passed from one generation to the next, Dixon explains that this process is not always uni-directional. New forms of technology driven practice are often embraced (at first) by a larger proportion of youths that are still forming fandom routines. It follows then, that younger members too have a role to play by inevitably teaching older generations how to cope with and embrace change. Take the following as an example:

Jimmy: I have only really started to use it but have found it really useful. My son got it in for me [installed the internet at home] and showed me the best sites for football. I use it every day but it still takes me a while to click on the right things … It's definitely a part of fandom, but not a part that I could have imagined thirty years ago. [Newcastle United FC Fan, aged 55] (cited in Dixon 2013: 122)

Whilst technological change has the potential to disrupt feelings of practice security for fans like Jimmy, gentle introductions to new technologies derived through interactions with others can soften the blow. Concomitantly, new routines are formed on the back of new knowledge, and so the practice gradually evolves.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the genealogy of sports fandom research as scholars attempt to explain fandom practice in relation to continuity and change. Much of the work operates at extreme ends of a theoretical dichotomy where fans are situated as either the product of macro level structures (for example, in the form of tradition) or micro level self-determining agents of post-modernity (for example, motivated by individual desire). As a challenge to the former perspectives, a new wave of fandom studies has begun to investigate the theoretical space between those accounts (at the meso level) by sharing a desire to understand how individual action is organised at the level of practice whilst simultaneously recognising that structural features are reproduced through individual action. In doing so, they have been able to demonstrate the fluidity of fandom cultures and the subtle evolution of tradition.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Conceptual dichotomies and typologies of sports fandom have been used to categorise fan 'types' into idealistic, but ultimately unrealistic components.

- Solid ideas of 'traditional' versus 'new' have been challenged by post-modern approaches to sports fandom in the quest to explain the fluidity of practice.

- Post-modern writers have been criticised too for underestimating the importance of continuity, place and community in contemporary sport in relation, amongst other things, to gender relations.

- New theoretical approaches that acknowledge the importance of both continuity and change provide a useful alternative for explaining the contemporary position of sports fandom.

FURTHER READING

Millward (2011) explores the transnational networks and social movements for football fans in the new media age. In addition, Gibbons (2014) uses an online ethnographic approach to draw attention to the issue of English national identity though football fandom communications and Dixon (2013a) examines the social, emotional, economic and technological implications of consumption on late-modern fandom. Beyond football, Crawford (2004) researches ice hockey fans to theorise more widely in relation to the career of sport fans. Outside of the realm of sport fandom, Hills (2002) outlines the way that fans have been conceptualised in cultural theory and challenges established paradigms. Duffett (2013) extends those

arguments by drawing on a range of debates from media studies, cultural studies and psychology. For an appreciation of how fans use new media technology, see Booth (2010).

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Box 18.1 Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities

Giulionotti (2002: 33-40) classifies four ideal types of spectators relative to the identification that each exhibits towards any given sport club. The characteristics of these are described below:

- *The Supporter*: Harvests a strong sense of 'hot traditional' identification. This is underpinned by a topophilic relationship towards the clubs core space. Staple values are cultivated via direct induction from previous generation 'supporters' and this is thought to enhance 'thick solidarity' with likeminded peers. Attending home fixtures is a routine that structures the supporter's free time.

- *The Fan*: Develops affection for the club or its specific players, but experiences the club via a market centred set of relationships. Consuming merchandise, sport television subscription, buying shares and contributing to fundraising initiatives are activities associated with fans. Solidarity is often expressed through visual displays of consumption.

- *The Follower*: Keeps abreast of the fortunes of clubs (plural) and of 'sport people' in which he/she has an interest. Interest is often derived via logical and historical links to geographical locations, traditions, and the heritage of the associated spectators. Followers distinguish themselves from fans in a deliberate attempt to denounce consumer principles.

- *The Flaneur*: is associated with a postmodern spectator identity and a depersonalised set of market dominated virtual relationships, particularly interactions with the cool media of television and the internet. They are depicted as inauthentic because they lack solidarity.

Box 18.2 Habitus and Sports Fandom

While many people are socialised into fandom by member of their family or other significant others, we should not assume that this is the only route into fandom. As expressed in the following fandom accounts, individuals can become sports fans despite a childhood habitus that is indifferent to sports (Carol), or rebel against a 'traditional' family of sports enthusiasts (Dave):

Interviewer: *How did you get into football?*

Carol: My ex hubby was a big football fan so it was always on in the house. I used to hate the game but learned to love it. Once I knew the rules, appreciated the skills and tactics and experienced the atmosphere, I was hooked. [Hartlepool FC fan, aged 43] (cited in Dixon 2012: 343)

Interviewer: *Is your son a football fan?*

Dave: I've tried, I've tried! Maybe it's for the best after all of the torture it's brought me over the years. No, he's got other interests. He goes paintballing, does things like climbing…, but he couldn't care less about Newcastle. [Newcastle FC fan, aged 40] (cited in Dixon 2012: 339)

Text Box 18.3 The Grog Squad

Palmer and Thompson's (2007) ethnographic study of a group of Australian Rules Football fans, named 'the Grog Squad', provides an explicit example of the fluidity between the virtual and the physical worlds and the mutual importance of internet communications and real life interactions for this fan base. The researchers explained that for 'the groggies' the internet provided a crucial mechanism through which fans maintained their particular cultural identity and, moreover, it was noted as a site for the organisation of real time, physical meetings. Consequently, the authors add support to the contention that the hypothesised and stereotypical portrayal of internet users as inauthentic fans (i.e. chat room nerds that are lacking the capacity for meaningful, social interactions in the real world) is false. Rather, evidence suggests that 'the fact that the groggies also have on-going, real time contact sits in opposition to other studies of fans in which the internet is the principle form of communication' (Palmer and Thompson (2007: 197).