A 'Third Way' for football fandom research: Anthony Giddens and Structuration Theory.

While football fans actively discuss all of the 'big players' within their practice, the same can not be said for sociologists of sport. Anthony Giddens is a world renowned intellectual and author of some of the most predominant sociological texts of the last millennium[1]. He is the most frequently cited contemporary sociologist spanning all aspects of the social sciences and yet his work is seldom referred to or used within the sociology of sport[2]. In response to this and in reaction to calls from authors such as Williams[3] to re-think football fandom, this paper aims to explore the potential of Giddens 'Structuration Theory' (ST) for moving the sociology of sport closer towards meeting this end. The paper draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with thirty football fans. The findings of these and their implications are discussed in relation to the 'everyday' processes of fandom.

Introduction.

Much of the recent work dedicated to the sociology of football[4] fandom operates at extreme ends of a theoretical dichotomy where fans are situated as either the product of macro level structures (e.g. homo sociologicus), or conversely, micro level, self determining agents of post-modernity (e.g. homo oeconomicus). This paper aims to move beyond such dichotomies to consider the potential of Giddens 'Structuration Theory' (ST)[5] for unpacking and exploring the relationship between individual 'agency' and wider 'social structures' as determinants of fan practice. Whilst Giddens has been largely ignored in the sociology of sport[6], I argue that his work (ST) is particularly enlightening given recent calls for researchers to study the everyday lived experience of football fandom[7]. As a theory that emphasises the routine and habitual processes related to 'practice', ST is particularly relevant in this respect. Concomitantly the aims of this paper are twofold: (1) To map out the current conditions of the related literature, outlining the need for an 'alternative theoretical approach'; and (2) To provide support for the use of ST when interpreting the everyday lived experience of football fandom.

Making the case for 'Structuration Theory' and football fandom

Over the last thirty years academics have grappled with the complex nature of football fandom as it has developed and transformed in line with wider social changes[8]. This period has witnessed an epochal shift from manufacturing to service based economies and the unconstrained growth of consumer society, with the latter contributing significantly to what has been termed 'the endless quest for authenticity' in relation to academic interpretations of football fandom practice[9]. Moreover, academics have begun to question previous research in an attempt to 'rethink' football fandom. John Williams, for instance, is critical of much of the existing work in this field[10]. He criticises the use of macro theories and simplistic dichotomies of fandom for romanticising 'the traditional' and failing to position fans in the new social contexts of late modernity[11]. Conversely when authors have attempted to do this by adopting post-modern arguments[12] they have been criticised for over-exaggerating the decline of traditional ties, or in other words, over-exaggerating 'meanings' within concomitant arguments. Williams[13] suggests that there is a tendency for authors to oversimplify fandom at either end of this continuum, based on new media-driven consumption patterns, and whilst post-modern claims to practice may hold some validity, they require rigorous empiricism to substantiate this position[14]. Further, he argues that the continual search for explanations of rapid change often negate and underestimate the importance of continuity, place, and community in English sport, especially football[15].

Gibbons and Dixon concur[16]. They suggest that the social and communal elements of football fandom have not disappeared in the manner that some have projected. In fact, rather than dissolving community, they argue that new lines of

fandom practice (e.g. new media communications) actually help to maintain this, albeit by non traditional means[17]. Additionally, the authors note that academic studies of football and 'everyday life' have per-se, remained secondary to studies featuring exceptional cases including 'hooligans', 'racists' and 'obsessive fans[18]. Unless such palpable factors are addressed this is likely to have implications for the accurate study of football fandom as a whole. In a broader sense the study of 'everyday' life is often discussed in the context of popular culture, yet few scholars have applied this to sport, and even fewer have applied it empirically to football. For instance, whilst authors such as Bennett explore this topic from important cultural genres including music, fashion and tourism, sport is omitted[19]. Theoretically speaking, Bennett is useful within the current context as he traces the development of academic thought from mass cultural theorists, to radical postmodernism and argues that a 'third way' is needed in order to more fully explore the everyday lived experience.

Given that criticisms are cast on either side of the macro (structure) or micro (agency) spectrum, it is proposed that the *meso* (middle ground) approach would likely offer solutions to current theoretical problems identified by Williams. For example, while macro considerations suggest that social structures compel agents to engage in social manoeuvres; and micro paradigms tend to assume that individuality is the root of all action; the meso level can provide a link between the two[20]. Giddens work becomes valuable here, placing as it does emphasis on the duality of structure, and more specifically the routine and habitual processes of everyday life. He suggests that actions should not be explained simplistically at either end of the 'structure' - 'agency' continuum, and therefore 'practice' should be understood as a recursive and continuous process of interaction and knowledge generation that can be revealed under empirical scrutiny. Such an approach is ideally suited to further understand

football fandom in the context everyday practice. After all, it is in everyday life that football is primarily perpetuated, expressed and experienced[21]. Hence, the following aims to explore the more mundane experiences of football fans, drawing on Giddens' ST to explain how social structures determine everyday practice in the context of football fandom. This is achieved through analysis of original data from a range of interviews with football fans. Before this data is presented, key components of the theory are outlined below.

Structuration Theory

Structuration theory contends that neither structure nor action/agency can exist independently. They are intimately related and hence, neither one should be championed at the expense of the other. Generally speaking, ST departs from the objectivism of classic theories, and the subjectivism of the post modern:

> 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.[22]

Giddens uses the term 'institution' to refer to social practices that have a broad spatial and temporal extension. In other words 'practices' exist across time and space because they are followed and acknowledged by the majority of the members within a society[23]. Consequently, for those reasons they retain a central place in Giddens account of structuration and more specifically the everyday performance of practice will determine the extent to which 'structures' are reproduced or altered.

'Structure' is best conceptualised or composed by the virtual existence of two main elements; 'rules' and 'resources'[24]. These exist virtually in the sense that they can be reinforced or altered in the continuity of daily social life. With reference to

rules, Giddens suggests that the codified form (or written expressions) are not rules in of themselves but can only take such credence once they are implicitly practiced. He asserts that codified laws are often taken for granted as the most influential in the structuring of social activity but this is not necessarily so. Moreover, it is anticipated that trivial procedures followed in daily life have a more profound influence upon the generality of social conduct[25] and thus an exploration of everyday activities (e.g. such as football fandom) could be crucial to our understanding of social life more generally.

Furthermore, rules can take many forms. They can be intensive or shallow, tacit or discursive, informal or formalised, weakly or strongly sanctioned and yet all the while they contribute to the maintenance of social practices. In other words, they become 'generalisable procedures' which actors understand and use in various circumstances[26]. Thus, rules often share characteristics which see them reproduced over time and space. In turn they become 'the norm' in public discourse and in the daily routine of social actors. Concomitantly they are informal but understood as 'core knowledge', commonly used and reaffirmed through interpersonal interaction[27], yet over time and with use, actors can potentially transform rules into new combinations[28]. This is a particularly pertinent point for the sociology of football fandom given that researchers continuously attempt to explain new trends and authenticities as they emerge across time and space.

Whilst rules provide the formula to action they do not always provide the means to act. In order to bring them to life 'resources' are used and concomitantly make up the second component of structure. Giddens refers specifically to two types of resources: 'allocative' and 'authorative'. The first refers to the use of raw materials and goods which control patterns of interaction. Only once material goods are 'put to work'

through human actions do they truly become known as resources[29]. Moreover, within the realm of football fandom research it is interesting to note that Cornel Sandvoss partially defines football fandom as a form of 'consumption', and yet little is known about how material resources are put to use within the practice in a manner that Giddens would describe [30]. Second, 'authoritative resources' refer to a capacity to control and generate command over persons or actors[31]. In other words they are non material resources (e.g. such as 'position' within a practice) which are used by actors to apply their authority on others.

Giddens also introduces an unconscious element to the theory of structuration. He explains that a fundamental feature of the human condition is the ontological need for security and as such it is one of the driving forces behind action[32]. Furthermore he argues that ontological security is maintained through the routinisation of social interactions, the continuity of practices and the stability of 'practical knowledge'. Thus routines are critical for social actors at the most basic levels of existence and therefore practices which allow for routinisation (e.g. such as football fandom) are potentially important sites for instilling feelings of social belonging, stability and security[33].

Overall it is theorised that both rules and resources (structure) work simultaneously to create the 'social system'. Rules ultimately guide actors through an interpretation of 'core knowledge' which provide the means for everyday communication and action. Second, resources (allocative and authorative) feed into this, but also generate power that enables some actors to control others. All of this, when combined with normative rules (e.g. highlighting specific rights and duties) make up what Giddens terms 'practical consciousness', that is, tacit modes of knowing how to behave in the context of social life[34]. The 'social system' more

generally is a pattern of social relations which is evidently in flux and yet continuous over time and space. The process is as Giddens notes, fundamentally recursive, where 'structure is both the medium and the outcome of the practices it recursively organises'[35]. Structuration therefore illuminates the dual processes in which rules and resources are used to organise interaction across time and space and by virtue of this, to reproduce or transform these rules and resources[36].

The key contention of this discussion is that whilst sociologists of sport have previously used an eclectic array of theoretical perspectives to explain the complex modern condition of the contemporary sports fan, Giddens' ST has been overlooked. ST is valuable for the present discussion as it challenges dominant discourses of sport fandom at either end of the macro/ micro scale. Like Bale, Hills too is surprised that work on fan cultures has paid little attention to ST in the attempt to analyse fandom as a late modern project[37]. Hence, by using structuration as a 'theory of football fandom practice' it is possible to account for the complexities of post-modern living without succumbing to its absolute relativism or relinquishing analytical ambition[38]. In the following discussion I adopt this position and combine theory with rigorous empiricism in order to explore the lived experience of football fans.

Methods

Recruitment Strategy

A purposive sample of participants was selected for this study from a pool of football fans (geographically situated in the North East of England) that responded to a media call for volunteers in 2008. Participants were selected to increase the likelihood that the findings converged on an 'accurate' representation of the phenomena under study[39]. This was addressed by using data triangulation, e.g. taking into account

narratives from fans of a range of teams (i.e. from the English Premier League and lower Divisions) and furthermore, selected participants were both season ticket and non season ticket holders.

The decision to select an eclectic sample was based on the following considerations: (a) Malcolm, Jones and Waddington draw attention to the fact that easily identifiable sample groups i.e. 'season ticket holders' are almost by definition distinctly unrepresentative of fans as a whole[40]. Thus, it seemed appropriate that a greater range of fans should be selected for inclusion in the current sample and this was particularly salient given the aim of this paper, to disclose 'typical' or 'everyday' fandom behaviour from a wide range of experiences; (b) Drawing further on the arguments of Gibbons and Dixon and Crawford (cited earlier in this paper), one ought not to privilege any set of fandom experiences (e.g. those of 'season ticket holders') over others (e.g. those that follow football via the media), and additionally those experiences ought not to be analysed separately, grounded with naive assumptions of difference. After all, as the aforementioned authors have asserted, such activities are not mutually exclusive and thus, idealistic categorisations of football fandom typologies do not exist for the late modern fan in the manner that some have prophesised[41]; (c) Selecting fans of multiple teams (e.g. at different levels within the English game) was deemed an important strategy to ensure that the experiences of fans of top flight (e.g. successful teams) were not privileged over others. This has been a common characteristic within recent academic research where authors such as King and (additionally), Sandvoss have studied fans of a handful of 'super clubs' and consequently they have ignored the more common examples that I argue, most typify everyday fandom[42]; (d) The inclusion of transcripts from an eclectic sample is

warranted in order to ascertain the potential usefulness, flexibility and power afforded by ST. Thus, a purposive if not homogenous sample was chosen.

Participants:

The data for this study consists of verbatim transcriptions of in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 football fans (15 male and 15 female [mean age = 36, SD = 11.80, range = 20-55]). Of those interviewed, 16 were current season ticket holders. The remaining 14 participants were not current holders of season tickets although they did watch, or listen to live football multiple times per week via the media. Therefore, for the purposes of transparency within the transcript extracts, they were identified as (1) Season Ticket Holders (STH); (2) Media Fans (MF) to reflect their primary mode of 'live' football consumption at the time of the interview.

Additionally, 20 participants were fans of one of the following English Premier League Clubs: Newcastle United FC; Middleborough FC; Sunderland AFC; Liverpool FC and West Ham United FC. It is worth pointing out that (without reference to Liverpool FC) those clubs represented here are not 'highly successful' Premier League Clubs. In fact in the season 2008-09 (e.g. the same season as data collection), both Newcastle United and Middlesbrough were relegated to 'The Championship'. Of the remaining participants, 10 were supporters of one of the following teams: Hartlepool United FC; Darlington FC

Table 1: Key characteristics of the sample

Key Characteristics of the Sample	Frequency	Percentage
Male	15	50%
Female	15	50%

Season Ticket Holders (STH)	16	53%
Media Fans (MF)	14	47%
Premier League Fans	20	67%
Lower Division Fans	10	33%

Data Collection Technique:

Qualitative interviews were chosen for three main reasons. First, this approach is well suited to elicit a deeper understanding of the phenomena under discussion[43]. Second, interviewees are awarded space to present issues that they regard as important within their fandom experiences, and concomitantly qualitative methods allow for an in depth exploration of interviewee responses. Finally, and in accordance with the aims of this study, in depth interview transcripts were used to support or refute the relevance of ST to the study of football fandom practice.

Congruent with the recommendations of Hoffmann, open-ended interviews were loosely structured in order to investigate the everyday 'lived' experience of the participants in their own terms and understandings[44]. A number of broad issues were used (e.g. in the form of an interview schedule) to offer a sense of continuity within and between interviews, but rather than serving as an oral survey, these initial probes were augmented throughout the interviews with follow up questions based on each interviewees particular responses. By permitting the informant to expand on any question or even to move beyond other topics altogether, the interviewer can increase the amount of data collected that impacts positively on validity[45].

The interviewer made reference to three broad issues in order to ascertain how participant responses might rest with ST. First the researcher was interested in exploring the genesis of football fandom for the participants. This offers a central reference point from which fandom behaviour has developed. Moreover, the genesis of fandom is an under researched area. Even the most fluid concepts of sports fandom (e.g. such as Crawford's application of 'career') do not fully investigate the initiation processes underpinning the genesis of fandom:

> *'little is known about early career positions...many participants at Manchester Storm suggested that they were interested in ice hockey before they attended there fist game.'*[46]

The second broad issue was related to the consumption, appropriation and use of material resources that exist within the practice. It is important to note that whilst Sandvoss has previously identified consumption as a stable aspect of football fandom, little is known about how 'allocative' or 'material' resources (using Giddens terminology) are used within fandom practice. Third, given that a key aim of this paper was to explore and explain the everyday 'lived' experiences of football fandom, routinised elements of fandom practice were discussed with all participants as part of the interview schedule.

The duration of interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes and were audio recorded for transcription verbatim.

Data Analysis:

The verbatim transcripts of the interviews served as the raw data to be analysed using a framework of thematic analysis as described by Miles and Huberman[47]. Each transcript was read a number of times to gain a thorough understanding of the participants accounts. The transcripts were then re-read in full and emergent themes

were recorded on each transcript. The emergent themes were summarised and organised to establish any inter-relationships between them to form major themes. This process was repeated on each transcript. A combined list of themes was then produced and new themes were tested against earlier transcripts in a cyclical fashion. The aim of this analytical process was to produce a thorough and accurate description of the range of opinions, experiences and reactions expressed by participants.

Furthermore, respondent validation was used to enhance credibility of the themes identified by the researcher. Five participants were asked to comment on themes identified and were invited to feedback on both the preliminary list of themes and interpretations made by the researcher. Therefore the categories presented are grounded in the participants words and the interpretation verified as accurate by a sample of the participants.

Findings:

The themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were: (1) 'The genesis of football support', e.g. how fandom began for the participants; (2) 'Material resources and fandom', e.g. reflections on possession and use of allocative and material resources; and (3) 'Routinisation of football fandom', e.g. everyday lived experiences as they are integrated within football fandom practice. The first theme 'Genesis of Football Support' represents the various means through which fandom is learned adopted and consequently practiced.

Theme 1: Genesis of Football Support

Central to Giddens ST are the concepts of rules and resources. Both are implicit within and contribute to a 'core knowledge base' that social actors draw upon to make

sense of the world and various practices. Within the practice of 'football fandom' interviewees from this sample made reference to their initial involvement, or genesis of support in similar terms, explicitly annotating the passing on or 'acquisition of knowledge' via various means:

> School was just football, football, football. PE and football practice was the only lessons we all looked forward to… Learning the craft was just a major part of the school experience [(MF) Male, aged 34: Sunderland AFC]

> I think it was just your peers. Your mates. Football was the main diet...
> I used to go up 'the bob end'[48] at Ayresome Park… that's basically how I started to go to the ground. [(STH) Male, aged 53: Middlesbrough FC]

> I've always been a football fan since I was younger coz my dad always supported Liverpool so I didn't have a choice in the matter because it's always surrounded me. My whole family are Liverpool fans, even my nan. [(MF) Female, Aged 20: Liverpool FC]

The examples cited above help us to visualise the various means though which social actors (in this case children) are introduced to the practice of football. As cited in the first extract, early recollections were often situated within institutions such as the schooling system, youth sports clubs and organisations such as 'the cubs' and 'scouts' where young children first begin to socialise with one another. Indeed all participants recalled early experiences of football in this type of environment where they claim to learn the constitutive rules of the game.

Whilst knowledge of the constitutive rules were developed through 'adult organised' games and competitions, an interest in attending professional sport was reportedly peer inspired to a significant extent. Watching professional football was understood as a shared experience, described by some as contagious.

> Coz like your mates. Everybody else was going at the time. My best mates were all football mad and I suppose it rubs off. [(MF) Male aged 45. Middlesbrough FC]

Thus peers can and do influence one another through constant interactions, and yet a more predominant was reason offered by participants for the genesis of uni-directional passionate support for 'one particular team'. The most commonly sited and

forcefully argued explanation was the influence of a family member, predominately, but not always 'Dad'. As a direct influence on the future behaviour of children, family members were observed in this sense to exert 'authoritative resources'. In other words, relationships between parents (or family members) and children were based on what Giddens might term 'mutual positioning'[49].This means that in the course of everyday interactions with significant others, the authoritative positioning of the parent can be used to heavily influence momentary and future actions of children. For example when the following participant was asked to explain 'how she became a Darlington fan', she responded with the following:

> Through my dad. My dad's a big Darlo fan, just kind of got forced into being amongst the crowd, gathering the experience. It's a family tradition…I guess I was born into it. [(STH) Female, aged 20: Darlington FC].

In support of claims made by reminiscent adults who were long since 'children', a number of participants now have children of their own and were able to draw on their experience as parents within this recursive process. For instance they spoke reflexively and ultimately with pride about the ways in which they 'consciously' attempt to pass on 'knowledge', 'tradition' and 'love' for football like their parents had done before them. For example:

> I got our Richard into it, 120%... Kitted him out in all the gear you know, made him feel part of it all. He was a mascot for Teesside Polly when he was six. He picked this up and became a Boro fan. Now he goes to away games, but he picked this up from his dad. [(MF) Male aged 54: Middlesbrough FC]

Whilst the diffusion of knowledgability (passed down through generations) is clearly an important and common process it should not be overemphasised. There are vast and various 'other roots' through which football support occurs and this is only one. As Giddens maintains, agents have the capacity to change their position, e.g. to refute parental advances, or where no family interest in football resides, they have the capacity to break the mould.

At any stage of life, social actors can become football fans or alternatively opt out of the practice altogether. In other words, they are 'reflexive thinkers' that are presented with various options to reproduce social action, or else change behaviour. And while they are influenced by 'core knowledge' gathered through early aspects of socialisation, they are also capable of picking up 'new knowledge' of distant or estranged practices via interaction with others. As Giddens visualises, all actions are the result of social interactions and can thus be altered by these interactions[50]. Several subjects were demonstrative of this very point:

> My ex hubby was a big 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. [(STH) Female, aged 43: Hartlepool United]

> Ian Rush. I used to worship him when I was little, so I used to support whatever team he played for type of thing… Watched him on TV banging in the goals and followed him from their [(MF) Male aged 32: Liverpool FC]

The first example (presented above) is a more typical representation of those social interactions which have the capacity to change wants and desires (e.g. the influence of a spouse). Furthermore this particular instance illustrates the fact that agents can dramatically alter their philosophy and consequent attitude toward practice as they begin to intrgrate with agents from outside of their traditional social networks. The dramatic change of attitude from 'hating the game' through to the acquisition of a 'season ticket' is symbolic of the capacity for change, further demonstrating the fluidity of human action. The second quotation (highlighted above) is illustrative of an additional but no less important point. Through the use of 'allocative resources' such as television (e.g. a resource which infiltrates any number of practices) para-social interactions with celebrity athletes (in this instance ex Liverpool football player Ian Rush) can also inspire social agents to alter behaviour[51]. Such examples provide

evidence of Giddens' 'double hermeneutic principle' where individuals reflect on their position in the light of new knowledge, understanding and appreciation.

Theme 2: Material Resources and Football Fandom

Thus far I have argued that being a fan requires the acquisition of 'core knowledge' relating to the practice. Furthermore I have presented evidence to suggest that fans are introduced to football in varying ways and therefore 'core knowledge' and consequent 'practice' are dependent on factors such as 'past experience' and 'future interactions' with others. Generally speaking however, there are certain elements of fandom that transcend specificity and offer a stable and generic platform for practice. Here I refer to the consistent use of 'material resources'. For instance, all interviewees owned items of football merchandise ranging from scarves, coats and hats to coffee mugs, curtains and pillow cases and in turn described the possession of such items as part of the fandom process. Even those who initially refute the tag of 'merchandise owners' eventually succumb to this conclusion:

> No. It's just not me. I mean I've got the accessories, but they last for years. You know? The scarf, the hat, the gloves and the coat. I get the top[52] every other year. You've got to have those things as a fan, but you don't buy them all the time. On reflection though, that's quite a lot isn't it? [(MF) Male aged 55: Middlesbrough]

The findings as described here are comparable with those of Willis whose investigation of youth culture in Britain draws briefly on the football fan[53]. In the same way that Willis makes reference to the necessary collection of paraphernalia for Wolverhampton Wanderers fans and the associated meanings cast upon such objects; a similar practice was noted through the participants in the current sample. For instance, the subjects within this study infused symbolic meaning onto material items and put those resources to use as tools via the construction and display of identity:

> It's a case of putting your colours on. Nailing your colours to the mast. It's taking pride in your identity you know? Saying this is who we are. [(STH) Male aged 29: Newcastle United]

Furthermore, as well as formulating a sense of collective identity for the owner, the replica shirt is used by others to practice expressions of imagined communities regardless of prior knowledge of one another (i.e. the wider support base)[54]. As Giddens suggests raw materials and goods (e.g. in this instance, the football shirt) can control patterns of interaction and in some cases they can stimulate interaction in the most unusual or unexpected spaces:

> No matter where you go you always meet someone in a boro top. We were in London one time having a pint. Full of business types. I looked over the bar and there was a bloke with a boro top on. I shouted over at him and we started chatting and that. You always seem to have something in common. Its part of your identity isn't it? [(STH) Male aged 27: Middlesbrough FC]

Raw materials of this type (e.g. the replica shirt) clearly carry meaning beyond physical utility or economic value. Thus, material possessions emblazoned with the club badge were used as identifiers of belonging at three main levels: (1) to the practice of football fandom as a whole, (2) to the subgroup of the practice (actual supported team) and (3) (often, but not always) locality.

> I've got collections of premier league sticker books dating back to '92' and before that I used to collect those ESSO coins for all the teams. I just take an interest in football really. I'm just part of that scene. [(MF) Female aged 38: Sunderland]

> …the shirt and for that matter, the badge does mean a lot to me. I've got the badge on the car so wherever I go people know who I support. [(MF) Male aged 45 years: West Ham United]

> My pride and joy is a signed picture of Shearer... He's… the perfect representation of what the city is all about…That's what we're all about. It's not just the football, its pride in the city. [(STH) Male aged 30:Newcastle United FC]

The first two levels of identification indicate that the appropriation of goods are not acts of individual desire per-se. In fact as Warde reminds us, consumption behaviour within any practice can be predictable to an extent. He explains that it is the 'practice' rather than 'individual desires' that create 'wants'[55]. In other words being a football

fan ultimately means possessing certain significant items above and beyond personal taste.

> ...I've never liked the colour red. Red just never suits me. You wont find anything red in my wardrobe other than the Boro shirt. For that I make an exception. [(MF) Male aged 35: Middlesbrough]

With reference to the final point (e.g. locality) it was important to many participants that others understood the pride that they have invested in locality; and material items helped our participants to signify this. Iconic geographical resources such as football stadiums (which are predominate features of sporting landscapes) were often used by participants to signify a common bond:

> I don't get their much but St. James Park is like the centre of a community. Like a cathedral or something…the football club is a place that most people can associate with and meet others…It's a centre, a nucleus if you like where people go to gather. [(MF) Male aged 55: Newcastle United]

'The football club', in the words of this participant can be likened to the hub of a community or a central reference point for the practice of football fandom. Fans do not necessarily need to view live football at this location, knowledgability of its existence and perceived function is enough. This can be related to Tuan's concept 'topophilia', used to explain the deep affection that people have towards particular social spaces. Furthermore Bale has previously used this concept to explain the affective dimensions of sports grounds[56]. Other authors such as Sandvoss have contested this in light of the contemporary advances to football culture in Europe[57]. He suggests that football grounds are becoming placeless institutions, devoid of any unique characteristics and as such are less likely to evoke mass feelings of tophopillia, community or belonging beyond projections of self. In the context of this paper participants wholly represented the former position, holding specific affection towards their stadium.

It doesn't get full but we love it. [(STH) Female aged 20: Darlington FC]

When you see the ground you get goose pimples. That's when you know your going to the match. It's a special place [STH] Female aged 20. Hartlepool United]

Perhaps as much as any other practice in contemporary society, professional football and football fandom offers people a sense of 'sameness' through the mobilization of resources and collective support. The club and the support from its fans remain solid, reliable features or landmarks of society, as one participant reiterates:

It is Newcastle! You just couldn't imagine Newcastle without Newcastle United. When the club are riding high the city is buoyant...It is the bedrock of our city, it's a constant in our lives… [(MF) Male aged 28: Newcastle United].

This is only one of many examples that can be used to explain what Giddens visualises as a major driving force behind action. Here, he refers to 'ontological security' meaning an unconscious desire to feel connected, constant and stable in a society that is always in flux. This can be achieved through routinised interactions in all aspects of life, including football. Whether it is the routinised purchasing of merchandise or the imagined communion of like-minded peers, social actors (e.g. football fans) contribute to the satisfaction of ontological security.

Historically speaking, since professional football was established in the late 19th century, British society has changed in many ways. Whilst the practice of football and football fandom has also altered shape (dramatically some would argue) most football clubs have remained a stable part of social life throughout this period[58] and furthermore, material items relating to the club are symbolic of stability and community. As one subject puts it 'The shirt, the badge, and the team are a major part of my life. They will go with me to the grave' [(STH) Male aged 33: Sunderland AFC]

Theme 3: Routinisation of Football Fandom

It was argued in the previous section that material and allocative 'resources' are often put to work through various routines relating to football fandom. Routines are played out on a regular basis and involve integration with other activities such as work, family life and socialising. In the following section some of the more typical aspects provided by the participants are presented and are representative of the mundane aspects of fandom that were alluded to earlier in this paper.

For those who regularly attend live football an element of logic defying compulsion was noted. For instance, many of those represented here were fans of unsuccessful teams (relatively speaking[59]). Concomitantly participants struggled to explain why they 'regularly pay' an over inflated price for their leisure time, despite lack of success:

> Even when they're playing crap I still come back. I still pay my money every season... The first game I missed at the Riverside it was a surreal feeling. I should have been their...I always end up going back. [(STH) Male aged 27. Middlesbrough]

> The first time I wasn't at the match on a Saturday afternoon when I should have been...the overriding emotion was, fuckin hell, I felt lost. I just felt anxious. I know it sounds stupid but that's what I felt. [(STH) Male aged 30: Newcastle United].

Here, respondents highlight feelings of uneasiness when long standing routines are broken. Like our participants, Giddens too places much emphasis on routine. It is though routine that he connects the basic proponents of ST (e.g. rules and resources) to unconscious motives, and in the case of our match-day attendees, routine ensures that ontological security is not breached.

Whilst 'the match' is of course the focal point for fans there is a lived experience that extends far beyond this. Within the current sample the routine use of 'new media' was interesting in this respect as all interviewees made use of this

resource as part of 'fan activities'. Some were more advanced than others but all participated in order to further their knowledge of current events within the practice:

> I've got my favourites[60] set up on all different football sites. Every morning I go through all the sites and get as much Information as I can really. [(MF) Female aged 42: Middlesbrough]

Moreover, all participants were aware of the potential for online fan interactions. Nineteen interviewees admitted to making posts and interacting with other fans online, via various message boards. Additionally, twenty five of our subjects were members of online football communities mediated through the 'Face book' website, adding support to the contention that season ticket holders are also involved in activities that have been termed 'less authentic' forms of fandom practice. Moreover, participants provided evidence to demonstrate how routine online interactions can extend beyond the virtual and into real life encounters and or relationships:

> I joined a Facebook group called the league 2 group which is people who support different teams in the league. So if I go to an away game I meet them in the bar. It's actually a really good way to meet people and talk league 2 football. [(STH) Female aged 20: Darlington FC]

> We got chatting on the Facebook group and met up a few times socially. Four of us now share a car to go to the games. We live quite close but had never really met before. It saves us all some money. [(STH) Female aged 33: Hartlepool]

Rheingold notes, 'people in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but leave their bodies behind'[61]. Whilst this statement is convincing, in the sense that virtual communities are versatile, and comparable to everyday life, the respondents, in this instance, were able to take this notion a step further. Here, 'virtual' and 'real life' are almost indistinguishable from one another, where physical bodies and virtual entities became part of the same practice.

Furthermore, the use of new forms of communication technology or 'new media' draw attention to the ways in which practices slowly evolve to create 'new routines' and 'new traditions' for immersed practitioners. Within the current sample younger

participants had embraced and integrated elements of 'new media' into the practice of fandom to a greater extent. Older participants had been self admittedly more resistive of the internet in previous years and therefore the familiarity with and use of this resource was less well established:

> I've only really just started to use it but have found it to be really useful. My son got it in for me [installed it 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… I'm getting there but I'm not as fast as the young ones…It is definitely part of fandom but it's a part that I could not have imagined 30 year ago. [emphasis added] [(MF) Male aged 55: Newcastle United]

This demonstrates the point that knowledgability passed from one generation to the next can be reversed with younger generations inevitably teaching older generations how to cope with and embrace change to practice. While change has the potential to disrupt ontological security, our participants were able to illustrate that gentle introductions to new technologies such as the internet (through interactions with others) often helps to soften the blow. Concomitantly 'new routines' are formed on the back of 'new knowledge' and so the practice gradually evolves.

Perhaps the most important and far reaching aspect of routine (in terms of football fandom) relates to everyday discursive interactions between agents. Among those interviewed all fans acknowledge that they talk about football with others multiple times per day (at work at home and at leisure):

> Coming into work with the boss being a scouser, me and Richie being boro fans and Matt being a Leeds fan it's the first bit of banter we have. [(STH) Male aged 53: Middlesbrough FC]

Furthermore all fans acknowledge the potential of football as a socialising tool. It was noted as a safe, stable, discursive topic which helps agents to integrate socially. Notwithstanding its capacity for inclusion, 'football talk' was noted by males as a sign of 'normality' and as a measure of masculinity.

> It's a tool init. It's a tool to get involved in conversations. If someone can't talk about football in a group then that person basically gets sidelined. What you'll then find is that

he doesn't drink beer…It's a generalization on a massive scale but I do find that, lads that don't like football [pause]. There's something odd about them. [(STH) Male aged 27: Middlesbrough FC]

Concurrently female fans also found it strange when people did not share their passion for football but it was they who tended to be marginalised by female peers:

I have to try and completely avoid the subject! Especially if I'm with the girls, I mention it and they're just like 'shut the fuck up Holly'. I know those who I can talk with and those I can't. [(MF) Female aged 22: Hartlepool United]

As evidenced here, there appears to be gender difference in relation to everyday discursive practice. One on hand, and only in relation to males, the routine everyday conversation can be used to root out those of 'questionable character' where football knowledgability becomes the equivalent to social acceptance. On the other hand, while female fans routinely discuss football they are more consciously aware of when to apply knowledgability in conversation. They do not appear to have the ease of conversation of their male counterparts and in fact female fans in this instance often referred to the difficulty of portraying 'authenticity.'

People see me with a shirt on and think 'oh yeah'. Its only when they talk to you that they realize that you know what you're talking about, rather than just being a girl in a shirt [(STH) Female aged 21: Darlington].

Overall, routinisation is vital to our understanding of the everyday lived experience of football fandom. Routines are vast and various and inevitably depend on prior knowledge and social interaction groups. The evidence presented here, draws light upon the integrative potential of football practice within the everyday lives of the participants and also illuminates the multiple social functions that football support can engender. For instance routinised actions were shown to establish and reaffirm relationships; act as markers of masculinity; increase knowledgability; reaffirm authenticity; and finally, contribute to the ontological security of the football fan.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to begin an exploration of the potential of the work of Giddens for theorising the everyday lived experience of football fandom. Giddens offers 'ST' which emphasises the importance of structure in both the reproduction and subtle transformation of social practice[62]. He presents an explanation for human action based on the self reflexive agency seeking 'homo oeconomicus' and the security driven, routine emphasising 'homo sociologicus'. These discussions are pertinent to the experiences of the interviewees who portray themselves (e.g. football fans) as self reflexive agents with deeply entrenched passions, acted out through routinised behaviour. Thus the 'practical consciousness' that subjects in the current study communicated so well was learned, diffused and altered in multiple ways through social interactions. First, with reference to 'the genesis of fandom' participants described a process of 'learning' or 'knowledge generation' that occurs through interactions with peers and/or adopting the persuasive position of family members (or significant others). Second, consumption of material goods laced with symbolic meaning was inevitably noted as a major aspect of the practice. Material objects and experiential spaces were infused with notions of communal identity and feelings of belonging in relation to football. Finally, this practice was bound together through the unassuming and under researched area of the routinised integration of fandom into daily existence, motivated by the endless quest to further knowledge and display practical competence.

In contrast to existing work, the discussion presented here does not position football fans as victims or dupes of society[63] nor elusive individuals of post modernity[64]. Moreover it does not seek to render previous empirical evidence as untrustworthy but simply implies that ST should be considered as a viable, theoretical

explanation to interpret data in light of calls to study the 'everyday' fan experience. Furthermore, where recent research has tended to negate or underestimate the importance of continuity, place and community in English football, ST can help to emphasise those points.

By selecting an in-depth qualitative approach, this study has informed a phenomenological contribution to the literature by presenting a detailed exploration of the lived experiences of thirty football fans. The sample selection was particularly important, offering as it did detailed responses from fans across multiple clubs, ages and gender groups. This allowed the researcher to illustrate the consistent elements, thoughts and experiences of a wide range of football fans, capturing the complexities involved in football fandom practice as it is experienced at the 'everyday' level of practice. Furthermore, empirical evidence is offered where 'little' currently exists[65].

The presentation of those experiences was aimed at facilitating discussion among sociologists of sport in relation to current theorising on the subject of football fandom. Based on the findings of the current study there is a clear need for future research to further explore the potential role that ST could play across genres of fandom[66], and for detractors of this theory, the stage is set for counter criticism.

Finally, this data set highlighted two interesting strands of findings that would benefit from future development. First, new interaction patterns (particularly relating to the use of the internet) were unveiled by the participants. Further research is required here to ensure that the diversity of football fandom practices are more fully considered by academics. Finally, subtle differences were highlighted between genders in relation to football fandom practice. On this basis there are grounds for undertaking an in-depth research project to tease out some of the more cavernous issues that underpin football fandom in relation to gender.

Notes

[1] See both Cohen, *Structuration Theory: Anthony Giddens and the constitution of social life;* Stones, *Structuration Theory* for further discussion.

[2] Horne and Jarry, *Anthony Giddens Structuration Theory and Sport and Leisure,* 129

[3] Williams, *Rethinking Sports Fandom.*

[4] The term 'football' is used throughout this paper to refer to the sport of Association Football, often abbreviated to 'Soccer'.

[5] See both Giddens *Profiles and critiques in social theory*; *The Constitution of Society.*

[6] See Bale 1995, *Review of Jarvie and Maguire* and Horne and Jarry, *Structuration theory, and sport and Leisure.*

[7] Such calls have been recently made by Gibbons and Dixon, *Surfs Up!* and Stone, *The role of football in everyday life.*

[8] See Horne, *Sport in Consumer Culture*, 30-36

[9] See Crawford, *Consuming Sport;* and Gibbons and Dixon, *Surfs Up!*

[10] Williams, *Rethinking Sports Fandom*

[11] For the type of dichotomies that Williams is critical of see Clarke, *Football and Working Class Fans;* Boyle and Haynes, *Sport the Media and Popular Culture;* Nash, *The Sociology of English Football in the 1990s* and Quick, *Contemporary Sports Consumers.*

[12] See Crawford, *Consuming Sport,* Giulianotti, *Supporters, followers, Fans and Flaneurs*, Sandvoss, *A game of two halves.*

[13] Williams, *Rethinking Sport Fandom* , 142.

[14] For discussions on football and post-modernity, see Backshaw, *Politics, theory and practice.* Crabbe, *Postmodern community and future directions*, Giulinotti, *Supporters, followers, Fans and Flaneurs*, Redhead, *Post-fandom and the Millennial Blues.* .

[15] See Bale, *Sport, space and the city*; Tuan, *Topophilia*

[16] Gibbons and Dixon, *Surfs up!*

[17] For further discussions on virtual communities see Auty, *Football fan power and the internet*; Bell *Cyberculture*; and Rheingold, *The Virtual Community.*

[18] Typical examples include Gibbons *et al, The Way it was: An account of soccer violence in the 1980s;* Back *et al, The changing face of football;* Wann and Dolan, *Attributions of highly identified sports spectators.*

[19] Bennett, *Culture and everyday life.*

[20] See Kirchberg, *Cultural Consumption Analysis*, 123-24

[21] See Stone, *The role of football in everyday life*, 170

[22] Giddens, *Profiles and critiques in social theory*, 8.

[23] Ibid., 9

[24] Ibid.

[25] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society,* 22.

[26] Ibid., 21.

[27] Ibid., 22.

[28] Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory,* 493.

[29] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* , 258-62.

[30] Sandvoss, *A game of two halves,*

[31] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society,* 33.

[32] Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory,* 498

[33] Walseth, *Sport and Belonging,* 447

[34] Giddens, *Profiles and critiques in social theory*, 9

[35] Ibid.,10

[36] Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory,* 494.

[37] See Bale, *Sport, space and the city;* Hills, 'Fans and Fan Culture'

[38] See Reckwitz, 'Towards a theory of social practices'; Warde, 'Consumption and theories of practice.

[39] Denzin, *The Research Act.*

[40] See the following articles: Waddington, Dunning and Murphy, *Research note: Surveying the composition of football crowds*, 131; Malcolm, Jones and Waddington, *The Peoples Game;* Nash, *Concept and method in researching the football crowd.*

[41] See earlier discussion of authenticity, pages 2 and 3 of this paper.

[42] King, in *The End of the Terraces,* interviews Manchester United Fans, whilst Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves* interviews fans of the following teams Chelsea and Bayer Leverkusen.

[43] Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research.*

44 Hoffmann, *Open-Ended Interviews,* 330. Also see Flick, *An introduction to qualitative research,* and, Giorgi and Giorgi, Phenomenology, in Smith (ed.) *Qualitative Psychology.*

45 Denzin and Lincoln *Handbook of Qualitative Research.*

46 Crawford, *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture,* 230.

47 Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook.*

48 The 'bob end' is a name given to a particular space within the Ayresome Park Stadium (Previous home of Middlesbrough FC 1903-1995) where children would stand.

49 See Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 84-92.

50 Also see Kirchberg, 'Cultural Consumption Analysis', for fuller reflections on Giddens's work. 119

51 For further discussion of this phenomenon see Dixon and Flynn, 'Consuming Celebrated Athletes', and Turner *Understanding Celebrity.*

52 'The Top' is a form of vernacular used to describe the replica football shirt.

53. Willis, *Common Culture*, 112-14.

54 Anderson, *Imagined Communities.* For further discussions of this concept in relation to sport see Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel *Understanding Sport,* 179; and Maguire and Poulton, *European Identity Politics in Euro 96.*

55 Warde, 'Consumption and Theories of Practice'.

56 Bale, *Sport, space and the city;* Tuan, *Topophilia.*

57 Sandvoss, *A Game of Two Halves.*

58 See Holt, *Sport and the British,* and Vamplew, *Pay up and play the game: Professional sport in Britain 1875-1914.*

59 For example, the majority clubs represented in the current sample were competing in the English Premier League, but were not likely to challenge for major trophies or gain access to European competition. In fact, both Newcastle United and Middlesbrough FC were relegated from the Premier League in the same season. Additionally representatives of fans from lower league teams were also present within this sample.

60 The reference to 'favourites' refers to a short cut system for personal computers allowing direct access to specifically chosen internet websites.

61. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier,* 3.

62 Giddens, *Profiles and critiques in social;* Giddens, *The Constitution of Society.*

63. See King, *The End of the Terraces: Transformations of English Football in the 1990s,* and King, *The Lads: Masculinities and the new consumption of football.*

64. See Crabbe, 'Postmodern community and future directions'.

65. Stone, 'The role of football in everyday life', also emphasises this point.

66. See Hills, 'Fans and Fan Culture'.

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