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In Search of Solidarity: Identification Participation in Virtual Fan Communities

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In Search of Solidarity: Identification Participation in Virtual Fan Communities

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Abstract

This study questions the way sports fans create (a sense of) community through online conversations. Here, 'community' and 'internet' are seen as invitational terms that suggest an authentic social interaction. By examining the language used by fans to sustain a sense of solidarity in the virtual realm, this study questions the ways in which rhetoric frames the situation. Participation in the virtual space relies on practices of identification derived from physical engagements. By using a rhetorical approach, this study illuminates the way individual participants operationalize a rhetoric in virtual conversations that spiritualize the fan's experience at the base of a sporting hierarchy.

This study centralizes identification as key to participation and the formation of community identity. The same language practices that work to shape the group also reinforce a sports ideology that spiritualizes fan participation. What emerges as a dominant substance is loyalty as key to identification/participation in the virtual community. This value-based substance offers the fan the ability to re-purpose their role as a profit source in the capitalist sporting structure. Therefore, the individuals focus on loyalty is rhetorical due to the internet space as capitalized communication. This study speaks to the way communication fosters virtual organizations, and points to how our cultured understandings conceal the rhetoric in everyday interactions.

Chapter One: Introduction

"When you start supporting a football club, you don't support it because of the trophies, or a player, or history, you support it because you found yourself somewhere there; found a place where you completely belong."-Denis Bergkamp

It is 8:30 a.m. My phone buzzes. I ignore it for a second, but it buzzes again, and again. It is a Tuesday and I do not plan to leave my apartment. I know I have not set an alarm and I do not associate with people who rise before 9:00 a.m. I awake without any chance of going back to bed. As I roll over to see what all the fuss was about, I remember the date. The ring was likely mu community calling me to action from across the pond. It is September 1, 2015, which means it is the last day of the summer-football-transfer window, and the city of Manchester, England must be frantic. When I look at the phone, I see four alerts related to the Manchester United football team (Man U or United) I am a fan of. Upon opening the messages, I am reminded that I should download sports mobile, an app dedicated to giving sports "updates to football fans across the globe," I am a fan.

It is important to remain current with one's information when entering the fray of football transfer discussions. Days like this one tend to feature conversations filled with friction because United fans tend to get emotional about the buying and trading of players. We are more or less pretentious about the players we rate as United quality.

In today's connected world, it is rather easy to stay current with a conversation that is happening far away, literally across space and time. Eyes still foggy from my sleep, I register the alert: "United and Real complete deal for Manchester goalie David De Gea" (Bleacher Report). This does not come as a jolt since the deal has been in the works since May, and I have conversed with several other fans around the chances of replacing him.

My suspicions are supported; the Manchester footballing community is humming. I delete the alert and move to the next update, which fully awakens me from my foggy slumber. The built in Stub-hub (a site where fans trade tickets) sponsored video ad reminds me "Where fans can purchase and sell tickets." I consider the ad and move to the alert: "Red devils close in on French forward Anthony Martial for a fee close to $60 million (Bleacher Report). He is not Manchester United quality, "what the hell?" It is cracking news, which means the Redcafe must be burning up with talk, I need to go into the affray.

Holding out in Tampa, Florida it is not common to encounter people who possess any idea what September 1 symbolizes, much less worry about what is being discussed in Manchester. Even thus, I know exactly where to start to feed my appetite for conversation and to express my support or vexation at this point; a quaint, small community located off in the distance along the inter-web called Redcafe.net. It is where Manchester United fans go to discuss the pressing matters of the day. Fans unite around a shared love for the team with the largest international fan-base in the world, in any sport.

International fans are starting to find new ways to identify with a United base community located in rural England. Discovering the Redcafe was like finding a comfy little island that had been thriving without me, tucked between the keys and motherboard, ready to embrace me like a new born. A broad cast of characters waiting for my arrival behind a secret door filled with

myriad tropes suited to conform to my fan identity; it is a unique place for collaboration. Given that the physical scene of Manchester sits thousands of miles away in a blue collar, industrial city, this site allows fans to bridge their sentimental gap to the base group. Having been a member of this community for over eight months, today is the kind of day that makes it all worth it, as the tension-riddled conversations that make community so fruitful are plentiful.

It is now 1:40 p.m. in Manchester, which means the conversations have been waking up for some time now, even though time is not a restriction at the Redcafe. Once I log on, I feel the chill in the ambience, the forums updating by the second. Before I take a chance to investigate the threads that are hot with talk, I fill out my line-up prediction card for the coming match against a historic rival, Liverpool. The poll is located right next to the scrolling forum of conversations. The meeting places (the forums) are like small group encounters, where members can weigh their views on recent changes to the squad. Anyone who enters the site can read any of the threads that a forum offers, but in order to comment and truly participate an individual needs to become a community member. One has to identify as a part of the group before they gain the powers to influence its identity. When a fan decides to become a member, they are granted "newbie" status, which allows them to post in newbie forums only.

The newbie has the opportunity to gain full membership once he or she gains ten likes on posts they have made. The site moderators are responsible for distributing these likes. While this process allows newbies to become full members, there is no indication as to how one moves from full member to moderator. Yet, this structure allows for a fostering of continued participation on the part of the newbie who hopes to attain full membership status. Never-the-less anyone, United fan or otherwise, can engage in some kind of participation on Redcafe, or 'the Caf' as participants tend to call it. However, in order to see oneself as a member of this

community certain situational responses must emerge in the way talk unfolds. This begins once the individual fan decides to introduces themselves and starts participating in the sites' ongoing culture.

Purpose of Study

The days are gone when one had to wait until Monday's lunch break to engage in a discussion of how the referees could have missed that call to end the big game. Watching reruns of Sportscenter were the only relief offered to soothe the frustration of an emotional team loss. Today, one can achieve the benefits of solidarity by getting in touch with other onlookers virtually. This study focuses on the idea of community as a co-constitutive communication event, where fans rely on a traditional discourse to achieve the meaning-making process necessary for group life. Where the construction of community in the virtual space utilizes a discourse that borrows from the physical setting where meaning has been situated by a historic context. This symbolic borrowing is important to the framing of the virtual engagement as an authentic community experience. Yet, symbolic transference also carries with it the trappings of the physical world, where a lack of bodily representation creates room for a deceptive order. The principles of hierarchy that is common in physical group life becomes forceful in the virtual setting. Ultimately, a communication based approach asks how the virtual space is constructed along with and through internet resources. Resources that are part of a commercial enterprise designed to gather audiences and to market goods or services for them to purchase.

The use of the internet by the sports world seems to conform to a mold of engagement that has been traditionally built on weak ties. "Weak ties" refer to the limited nature of commonalities that individuals share within the group, where the team is the only real connection needed for the relationships to sustain itself (Granovetter,1973) . The discourse used within fans

fans internalize these symbolic ideas to shape their own identity, and ultimately start to redefine the qualities that symbolically represent community life. It is important to note the implicit capitalist baggage that accompanies group life staged in the virtual setting.

RedCafe And The Manchester United Football Community

Manchester is one of four cities that house at least two English Premier League soccer teams (this figure is subject to change due to the regulation system employed). With a population just north of two million, it is the third most populous area in England. "Its metropolitan economy is the third largest in the United Kingdom with an estimated PPP GDP of US$92 billion as of 2014" (The Guardian, 2014). The two teams located in the city are two of the most profitable football clubs in the world – Manchester United and Manchester City. The City of Manchester Stadium was initially built as the main athletics stadium for the 2002 Commonwealth Games and was subsequently reconfigured into a football stadium before Manchester City's arrival. Manchester United play at Old Trafford, in the neighboring Greater Manchester borough of Trafford, the largest club football ground in the United Kingdom (The Guardian, 2014). In relative terms, a small blue-collar town that grew out of the industrial revolution in England has two different teams with an enormous international fan base. The United side has grown from a team valued at ten million pounds in 1984 to one that now is worth over two billion pounds (Martin, 2014). This all amounts to a gigantic fan base that just would not fit in the city limits of Manchester. It is here that the virtual space appeals to the needs of a passion driven audience.

This investigation looks at the football fan site Redcafe.net, an online forum devoted to fans of Manchester United. Although Redcafe is the self-proclaimed leader and a thriving community, there are quite a few United forums out on the internet.

"Redcafe has several thousand members that encompass a wide range of United fans across generations and across geographical locations and is currently the most popular United web forum in terms of both members and 'guests' (the even larger number of people who view the discussions and debates amongst members without joining themselves)" (Martin,2014, p.3).

Redcafé is a community built around the ideals, values and essence of the physical Manchester United community. Virtually, the interactions should be multifaceted as it is shared by cultures and communities from all over the world, yet the discourse fans use to identify themselves as a member of the United footballing community is suggestive of blue-collar close-knit community narratives.

Upon entering the web site, a message scrolls across the banner up top "Welcome to Redcafe, a thriving community." Right away, a sense of belonging beckons for anyone who identifies as a Manchester United fan. It is the first symbolic interaction a fan gets upon entering the site. From here, the site offers a multitude of engagement possibilities to those who become members, and even more to its fully accepted members, while outsiders are free to sit and observe. "Redcafe tends to cover a wide range of opinions regarding the controversial ownership situation of the club" (Martin, 2014, p.2). Members engage in direct message exchanges with each other, participate in weekly polls to share their take on recent Man U happenings and to gauge the mood of the group and by extension the well-being of the football club. With each variation in communication comes an ad that fits neatly into the web sites design. Additionally, there is a live twitter tracker built into the site. Tweets related to the red-devils can be read, retweeted, liked, and shared with just a click, which further extends the means by which fans can reinforce a collective identity. This offers further motive for entering and participating in the Redcafe community. The tweets themselves work as an extension of the discourse that upholds the values of this community in the extended virtual world.

The site is rather easy to navigate for the modern tech user. It features a simple design that is quite clean and organized in its layout. It draws on the traditional red and black Manchester United squad colors as the dominant tones with splashes of white in the background. These colors work to construct a symbolic boundary that indicates a tie to the club upon viewing. Similarly, the background of the site's logo has slightly faded numbers that represent each year the team has won the premier league trophy. A record 20 titles to date. These symbolic elements situate a border within the Redcafe space, which implies that this is a community for these kinds of people. On the top left in white with a red background, just below the logo, are the Home, Forums, Match day, and Members buttons that work as the main navigation tools. To the right of those are the buttons one gains once they sign up for membership: My account (my site username the Redmamba), Inbox and Alerts. There is no direct link for the introduction thread, one receives the link to introduce himself once he registers and can watch it moving forward. Additionally, the symbolic elements employed to frame the site as community works to create a familiar rhetorical situation for fans to act in accord with the collective that one assumes to be present.

Additionally, the Match day page offers some general statistics relating to how fans interpret the team's performance from match to match. Here, fans can see who the group rated as the best player in the previous match, highest rated players thus far in the season, and a table showing the leaders of the prediction game (a weekly poll where members can guess the result of the upcoming match). This is somewhat similar to the Members page that lists each member of the site in order of the total amount of messages they have posted. Here is another indicator of value placed on participation in the virtual exchange. Currently, 'Pogue Mahone' sits in first place with 78 thousand messages posted. This page frames the importance of being a loyal

supporter. To the right of that list are two different tables detailing members' birthdays and a list of the newest members to join the site. Right above the tables is a search feature that allows you to find individual members.

These elements function to situate a sense of unity for those who of identify with the symbolic make up of Man United. They reinforce the loyalty purpose behind this type of interaction, which is an important factor in fostering further participation. Burke argues that identification is an "acting together" that grows from the desire to share a symbolic substance (Burke, 1945, p.213). In this way, loyalty operates as the substance Burke speaks to, and the language surrounding football the fuel for acting-together.

What we experience are the ingredients of a language that constitute a substance that functions in the same fashion as it would in the physical space of a local football community. It works because the core of this community is ideologically based, making it so that the user becomes responsible for fitting the bits of discourse together. Once fans do the job of assembling the pieces through verbal acts, the individual can subsequently locate himself somewhere within the ongoing order of this fandom; thus reinforcing the structure. Ultimately, the shape of the sporting world is one that sees fandoms as a profit source. This becomes riddled with problems when thinking about the influence that can be had over these sources of profit by offering direction for what gets talked about, in what manner, when the body is absent from the interaction.

Frame For Analysis

From a critical viewpoint these two types of engagements (physical and virtual) are distinctively different, but symbolically they work towards the same purpose of participation via

identification. In the virtual world, identification shapes the way actions unfold for participants, where the symbolic elements derived from the physical community work to frame the web as offering the same appeal. The Redcafe language offers the individual fan the codes needed to situate himself with the group as a loyal participant. The overall structure offers cues as to what should be valued if one wants to truly be an authentic member; where the individual gets to draw on his own experiences surrounding football as the source of personal transformation. As lovers, we simply have to keep showing up, virtually, to sustain the order of operations. Redcafe offers a diluted variant of community that relies completely on discourse that can and does get misused and abused.

This investigation asks how the identification that occurs when fans participate in virtual engagements leads to continued participation. In other words, how does a discourse that operates with ultimate purpose work to keep identification in a loop and by extension create room for a rhetorical situation that asks fans to keep coming back? To do this, previous philosophical conversations relating to community as a social phenomenon will be implemented to frame the notion of community. It also draws on conversations that ask critical questions relating to football as a business, and the romantic attachments fans tend to have with a team. The use of symbols and rituals in the formation of community as a co-constitutive accomplishment are used to navigate the tensions between the physical space of fan communities and the virtual engagements. I examine the rhetoric that emerges when fans use discourse that communicates sports as a spiritual fusion of individual actors.

Further, this project asks how rhetorical strategies become useful for those who are at the peak of a sports hierarchy that sees the fan as the "bottom feeder." What is to be gained by organized powers if members of a given virtual community see this type of an interaction as

embedded in a capitalist setting? Do fans understand the virtual community as possible based on the profits that can be had from creating this space? What can we learn about hierarchy's implicit force by studying the language used by online groups to sustain through continuous digital interaction? How does community become problematic due to identification practices that are derived from the physical setting?

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Methods

Literature Review

Globalization via the media, and virtualization via the internet have condensed time and space in such a way to permit the creation of virtual communities that transverse international and cultural borders. In so doing, these technologies have shortened or by-passed many ideological and economic boundaries that have traditionally shaped communities. Technology has permitted an evolved kind of verbal interaction where the imagination is hard at work to keep the conversation going. An environment has emerged where a virtual discourse is capable of sustaining identification and participation practices that are at the heart of ritualization, which is a pillar of community life. The international soccer community has been one to embrace this new environment for virtual relationship building. A communal and commercial complex such as international football has used this setting to grow its fan base in unimaginable ways. The goal here is to investigate this virtual gathering as a communicative phenomenon that has created an unforeseen rhetorical situation. In general, this thesis seeks to question the online rhetoric that emerges when dealing with communities built largely on identification/participation that utilizes a common historic discourse. As such, how does a spiritualize discourse work to position online users in a hierarchy by means of how one participates?

This project approaches the virtual engagement with a rhetorical perspective in mind, one where rhetoric operates as a part of the everyday, and is embedded in a discourse used to shape

social settings. This investigation requires literature derived from different fields of study, which includes Communication, Anthropology, and Sociology. The mashing of epistemological approaches becomes beneficial when describing an event as complex as community, where by pointing out the biases that operates alongside community as symbol.

A Sociological Take

Mary Chayko's '*Portable Communities'*, situates this research in an ongoing sociological conversation as it relates to the impact of digital connectedness on an ever evolving social order. In this piece, Chayko explores the effects of a society that has the ability to access millions of other people at any given time. She examines what effects emerge from mediated interactions that bleed into the larger, physically based society. She challenges the implications surrounding virtual/social interactions that offer a degree of control in terms of leverage against power structures, while offering more room to be controlled than ever before. The study concludes by making a claim that portable communities offer the opportunity for a shift in the social landscape and could offer the possibilities for change as it relates to the hierarchical structuring of the social and political world.

However, while the virtual space as a site for collaboration fundamentally changes the way fans converse, it in turn reinforces a traditional hegemonic structure (Chayko, 2008). This project incorporates her focus on the virtual to include the sporting world. Fandoms operate with a new dimension when thinking about the internet as a place for relationship building. My work seeks to expand on her ideas relating to the carry-over from the physical to the virtual in the ways social structures shape self and other. It is important to note the unique nature of a space where individuals approach it as a kind of fantasy, which Chayko describes as, "virtual becoming a universal descriptor for online phenomenon…" where "virtual implies that whatever it

describes is almost, but not quite, real" (2008, p.12). Members are described as operating from two very different standpoints when engaging in a virtual experience. This oversight can become quite dangerous when considering the ways virtual engagements are expanding the physical social world.

An Anthropological Perspective

An anthropological perspective illuminates the importance of symbols and rituals in community life. Anthony Cohen's '*Symbolic Construction of Community'* is a comprehensive study exploring the symbolic operations in "communities of practice." This text opposes the idea of community as a concrete location, while challenging the notion of a fixed group identity. Instead, Cohen argues that identity is a function of repeated symbolic engagement, where an interconnected dualistic relationship is involved in the way the group, and the individual's identity are constructed through an ongoing negotiation of symbolic purpose. According to Cohen, "a community uses symbols not to convey meaning but to evoke an idea to the individual of what that symbol might represent to an agent intrinsically" (1985, p.10). He speaks to the way traditions and meaning within a community become a product of the way individuals internalize their relationship with symbols.

Cohen claims that humans inherit a sense that symbols are important at an early age. Yet, it is repeated interactions with symbols that shape meaning for the individual (participation shapes symbolic meaning). This questions who owns the powers to define symbolic use in a hierarchy, and how does the collective go about changing symbolic purpose for self and other? This thesis extends Cohen's claims as it relates to community being an organic response to situational changes, where the symbolic boundaries that shape a community work to fix group

identity via group discourse. By extension, it offers cues for participation that asks the individual to identify with the discourse he understands.

Additionally, a participant- observer approach is used to illustrate how talk functions relationally in virtual community life. By drawing on Donald Carbaugh's (1996) '*Situating Selves the Communication of Social Identities in American Scenes*' a classical account of how relational identities unfold in defined social spaces; it is used to help comb through the ideas related to identity as a social accomplishment. A deconstruction of community as a fixed event also helps to destabilize the idea of identity as a fixed product of the individual. As such, Donald Carbaugh's notion of identity as an ongoing relational accomplishment becomes useful in supporting these claims.

Carbaugh shows how various communicative acts are responsible for molding the way fans perform identity within defined cultural scenes. Carbaugh shows how intertwined communicative practices and identity are. He looked at how fans perform fandom in unison at college basketball games and he determined that both the symbols that frame the setting and the other bodies performing in the space were responsible for how the individual responded to the situation as a fan. He questioned how the social actor is responsible for generating a cultural setting while at the same time operating as a product of a scene that was already there. He details how ritualized interactions with familiar forms of communication work to define cultural spaces, and subsequently helps to disclose individual identity performances as co-dependent on the setting. His work essentially saw the scene as offering series of cues that eventually begins to influence the fan's performance as he becomes more familiar with the setting.

This work juxtaposes identity as a product of the individual who operates in a still physical space, versus identity as a negotiation of the individual's sense of self in relation to the

collective. He understood identity as a constant negation of self and other. The work offers insights as to the way group identity and the individual's performance of identity work to co-create the cultural view that both are running in. This participant observation was one of the first to shed light on how language works to create and recreate different versions of a given social order through a process of identification.

Additionally, because of the newness of the virtual world, a sense of how to do virtual observations is required. A label is also required in order to make a distinction between the community of old and the one that operates virtually. Howard Rheingold's '*The Virtual Community*' helps situate the conversation in a larger context of online engagements. By incorporating Etienne Wenger's '*A Constellation of Communities of Practice' and 'Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation'*, the two situates the notion of communities of practice as another effective label for the virtual engagement. Wenger identifies four dualities that exist in communities of practice, participation-reification, designed-emergent, identification-negotiability and local-global. In this context, a community of practice is a group of individuals participating in communal activity for a specific purpose, and experiencing/continuously creating their shared identity through engagement and ritualizes interactions with each other. Using Rheingold's virtual community as an extension of Wegner's communities of practice allows for a synthesis of the two concepts, showing how fans rally around their sense of a shared identity. In an imagined and real way, a virtual community is and should be viewed as a community of practice because of the specific practices that bring the members together, virtually.

Lastly, "Overheating" by Dr. Keri Martin investigates a complex relationship between football as a business versus the sport as community accomplishment. One managed by profit-oriented owners that rely on fans to construct a collective identity around a product developed

for business, versus one where the team is seen as an extension of the community in which it is based. Martin's work focuses on the same Manchester United fan site, Redcafe.net, an online fan forum for devotees of the English premier league team. His investigation details the tensions that arise between club owners and fans on the site when the club goes through a transition from one owner to the next. Yet, the tension that works to shape group identity only exist between fans, as owners go about business as usually as long as fans are still consuming the product. Ironically, tension driven conversations are a key element in the facilitation of participation.

Specifically, he details the friction that emerged when American owners the Glaziers purchased the team back in 2005. A move that fans saw as an encroachment on the team and fan bases' identity. Fans associated the takeover by an American capitalist as a sharp change that would move the club away from the traditional English values the team was founded on, values which include listening to the supporters, the community, fair financial play, and a commitment to developing English born players. What emerged for Martin is an exposure of the split that exist in the fan base in terms of how fans view football, either from a business stance or with a sentimental attachment to the product.

He notes this fragmenting among members as an overheating tension that arises due to different motives assigned to footballs 'role' in the community. Ultimately, both parties see football as an important element that is responsible for shaping community identity in towns across Europe. We start to see the spiritual elements of a discourse emerging by way of a relationship that places football on a pedestal. As such, his work provides insights and questions regarding the way fans and owners alike use each other to sustain their given identity along a football hierarchy.

A Virtual Rhetorical Criticism

A critical analysis will draw on a type of criticism to make judgments regarding the way individuals ago about identifying with the group. By making these judgements, the study seeks to understand the persuasive force implicit in the everyday discourse. To this extent, sports communities fall into the realm of the spiritual by the way of a spiritual language that moves bodies by a rhetoric of unification via identification.

In order to investigate the complex of symbols operating within the virtual space, this work treats "language as a strategic response to a particular situation" (Burke, 1945). Kenneth Burke's approach to doing criticism approaches language as a drama, where the rules of a motivational grammar forces talk to unfold in the way a drama does. What his research shows is that rhetoric emerges in particular situations based on the individual's expectations for that situation to be friendly, or unfriendly. As such, community as a symbol implies that the virtual situation is friendly; meaning identification must happen for the individual to fit the ongoing order.

Burke's "*A Grammar of Motives*" introduces the pentad as a tool for investigating how individuals use language to apply motives to verbal acts, this tool situates human situates within the terminology of a drama, which then assigns attitudes to actors in regards to the nature of the situation. Situations are dramatic based on how actors attend to the expectations, as in how a situation should play out, and which words to fit the situation as it relates to one's expectations for that engagement. The rhetoric is implicit in talk because the individual is not actively aware of his attempts to construct verbal acts to fit the pieces together by drawing on previous encounters with a similar drama. The dialectics involved with the structure our language offers a way to ask how social actors implicitly accept and/or reject a particular human order by means of

this identification practice. The way symbols functions places individual in an ongoing drama of acceptance or rejection of situations that the actor determines to be beneficial to his own sense of self as it relates to the group.

Burke introduces the term 'recalcitrance' to explain the way symbol-using creatures re-organize the world so they can effectively participate situations. Meaning humans look for the reality in symbols more so than the objects they represent. The dissonance involved with such practice in-turn creates a mystery as to the way a hierarchy functions, as humans tend to misrepresent their own location along a power order. By way of situating discourse individual actors lose sight of their position within an ongoing social order, as the verbiage and narratives that surround a group's identity tend to re-purpose the way the order flows. In turn Burke's '*A Rhetoric of Motives*' he investigates how individual actors use a identification to fit a social situation, which then does the job of upholding the imbalance of a social order. What he also shows is the way a mystified discourse works to help those at the lower end of a social spectrum find the means to identify and participate with the group at its base. The spiritualization that is involved with identification at the lower end of a hierarchy in turn creates room for those higher up to generate various rhetorical situations.

How do individuals on Redcafé identify with the United community while acting in a way that actively constructs a sense of material community? Burke uses identification to ask how social actors go about the process of unity in a group setting. "Identification, the tool that is applied directly to verbal symbols for the purpose of uncovering relationships among these symbols is a critic's key to the speaker's attitudes and dramatisic process" (Burke, 1950, p.319). Essentially, the discourse operates rhetorically and dialectally upon members of a group to promote social cohesion by creating a shared sense of the expectation for the situation. Burke

sees the identification process as a means of reinforcing hegemonic structures by situating the actor's actions using the discourse of his peers. In essence, how does identification help re-purpose the social order, which in turn supports the top-down order of the sports world when members purchase a spiritualized purpose?

What Burke's argument offers is the means for investigating how fans work to co-construct a collective sense of purpose. What should be noticed in the structuring of this community is the interchange between a spiritual discourse with unity at the core, and the repetition involved with its use by way of situating oneself within borders of the group. The pentad as a tool, and identification as a rhetorical concept highlights the force behind a discourse used by fans to create shared meaning for fans within a social structure. These two notions point to the way language functions in society as a means for situating motive in human action as part of an ongoing drama.

Burke explains the pentad as a five-point system of analysis. As a tool, it shows the dialectics involved with the assigning of human motives, where the five terms are key to pointing out how "statements assigning motives arise out of them and terminate in them" (Burke, 1945, p.240). He uses the central terms of dramatism, as a way to ask, "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" In essence, this tool asks what is involved when we say people are doing community, and the motives behind their doing of community. What he shows with this tool is the formulaic nature of most social interaction where the ability to persuade another becomes a function of paying attention to the way situations are organized. He explains that the five terms are always represented in some way (by specific words) when humans act in a social setting. According to Burke:

"We shall use five terms as generating principle of our investigation. They are Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed) and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person(agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose." (1945, p.xv)

The pentad lays out motives in five questions; what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). He understands scene and act as ratios that are typically responsible for labeling human motives in defines social settings. This project extends on these ideas by looking at the act and scene as the dominant ratios in the virtual world. Where the scene of Manchester United community is almost directional in the way it influences the actions of actors. By looking at how members approach the scene of community, and introduce themselves to it, we can start to see the extent of a mystified purpose operating in this set of relationships. This leads to a question of how virtual fan communities' discourse works to shift focus away from a monetary motive at the core of the virtual interaction, to spiritualize participation framed in an act of unity. By taking this approach to doing criticism an attempt is made to tease out the essence of community as an inherit "good" and as a spiritualized event. From here, we can problematize how identification occurs in the football world, and how it can be seen as a source of capital in settings where the body is absent.

Methods

One of the philosophical ideas this project is concerned with is the notion of hierarchy. Burke understands hierarchy as a ladder of relationships that operates in most societies and communities. The ladder represents the division in society based on economic and political powers. Overall, they are power structures that are resistant to change or a balancing of the

structures flow of power. In this manner, those at the height of the ladder are endowed with agency over those at the lower terminal. "Authority, in turn, establishes definite relationships among people, reflecting the degree to which they possess power" (Scott and Brock, 1972, p.316). As such, this system of ranking is the means by which individuals accept their status in particular social order with a mystified sense of purpose. "Language enables man to accept or reject his hierarchical position or even the hierarchy" (Scott and Brock, 1972, p.317). Language that allows one to accept or reject his position along a structure is learned from engaging in social practices with a given social order (Identification). Linguistic practices of this nature then become trapped in the dialect that sees "acceptance result in satisfaction and order, and rejection results in alienation and disorder" (Scott and Brock, 1972, p.317). In essence, the structure reinforced due to each levels willingness to accept the need for it and one's position along its lower or higher end.

To this point, Burke understands the separation between those with superior authority and those with inferior powers as always creating mystery in the order in the order of relationships to sustain the top down flow of the structure. This happens for Burke because inferiors are always expecting to move up the structure and change its nature, while those at the top are unaware of the effort to supersede their authority. Burke expands on the formation of this ordering, "The hierarchic principle is not complete in the social realm, for instance, in the mere arrangement whereby each rank is overlord to its underlings and underling to its overlord. It is complete only when each rank accepts the principle of gradation itself, and thus in "universalizing" the principle, makes a spiritual reversal of ranks just as meaning as their actual material arrangement" (Burke,1950, p.319). He speaks to the way power structures maintain there form based on each level of the hierarchy accepting their location along the structure using language.

Acceptance that becomes rather easy based on the way each level tends to spiritualize the nature of their ranks to be endowed with renewed purpose, thus making the social role a mystical one.

Scene

Taken from a subjective, biased Manchester United football fan perspective, the Caf has the feel of community life all over. The Redcafé feels right, "like a proper community" as the English would say, safe in its own unique way. The sites design structure makes it easy to access and exhibit the shared values that makes a fan feel connected and purposeful. The frame of community allows the entire exchange to feel somewhat safe to embrace and partake in. The conversations are always plentiful, making for a lively atmosphere for group discussions.

With each click of the home button, eyes temporally shift focus to a different site sponsor operating between the scrolling banner and the forums themselves. Neatly camouflaged by the red and black United team colors that act as the color scheme for the environment. With over 30 thousand members not including 'guests' (who just observe the discussions), there are a lot of eyes looking at the constantly evolving environment. Flashy and pointed ads work to capture a user's gaze like bright house cable [number one cable provider in Tampa], (Adidas' version of the club's jersey and a promotion of a private university in Tampa). The frequency and placement of ads suggest that there might be something more than community happening here. Which begs the question of what kinds of baggage are being hidden under the vial of the computer screen and the frame of community as an abstracted term. If Redcafe is a community built of words, then two questions must be asked: What are the qualities and expectations that fans believe make community possible? How can fans recognize if those qualities and expectations are displayed in a manner to shape attitudes, in the virtual space, if there are no bodies present to be held accountable?

This sort of staging brings the slightest hint of control and influencing. Incorporating these staging practices alongside interactional activates like daily polls, weekly lineup predictions, and a guessing game offers ritualize interactions for participants to engage with each other, which is important for sustaining virtual participation. This staging of the setting bleeds into the user who relies on the sites design to help situate an identity, where the usernames individuals choose to represent their United self, Redronaldo, Redtiger, Redzombie and Redmamba are suggestive of how fans buy into the notion of group identity when becoming a member. In turn, names like Redmamba work to reinforce the overall ideals of the group, offering cues as to the central identity of this group. Though usernames tend to range, a large amount of the names incorporate symbols related to the Manchester united football club, whose mascot is known as the Red-devil. One can start to see how the framing of the site helps frame the individuals who participate on it. Redcafe then works as a kind of symbolic invitation. A meeting place of names that is similar to the kind one might find at a local sports bar in Manchester, England.

Sporting fandoms can be local and operate at a distance at the same time. "Disparate communities can present a united front through their support for a particular sporting event or team, and sport can reinforce the sense of belonging and unity" (Gary James, 1997). It is hard to call the United fan base disparate at this point, but due to the diasporic nature of the fan base it works in a similar manner. Because most football fans engage in some practicing of the activity, actually playing at some point in their lives, it evokes a unique collaboration of passions as opposed to strictly audio-visual entertainment. "When we watch it, passions are invoked that go beyond most other experiences" (Rowe,p.2). That kind of passion transfers to the virtual space, as the noise gets to be as pronounced as a packed stadium. In England, football is as much a part

of a community as the people themselves, it draws boundaries and defines group identities just the same. Keri Martin explains the connection, "For those for whom the club's identity is an important source of concern, it is the idea that the club is at the heart of some kind of community that in part makes supporting it worthwhile" (2014, p.3). It is tradition rooted in history, rituals, rivalries, and stories. Football splits major cities into gang-like rivalries: red on one side, blue on the other with no compromising in-between. The tension works on the Redcafe site, as group identity and the tensions it brings are effective means for actualizing the passions that fans carry when they communicate about football.

By focusing on football fan communities, specifically an English one, it points to the mystical nature of sporting discourse that suggest a team is designed with a particular community as its inspiration. "As for soccer, it has been suggested that the game was more potent in creating a strong sense of geographical and cultural identity than individual sports. This has been reinforced by research exploring the development of regional identities, which has added not only to a broader understanding of how the game has developed but also to its significance at a local level" (James, 2015, p.1). Martin extends the point as to the complexities of the Redcafe participants' discourse, "It is a community that is made up of a large number of different relationships and transactions whose nature and meaning are bitterly contested." (2014, p.3) Here, Martin and James see the dissonance that traditionally would be situated as misunderstandings among members exposing the mysteries involved when communities like the Caf are called into being virtually. Where the symbolic borrowing of the Manchester community language trumps the various cultural systems of thought that should be brought into this engagement. Members engage in an identification process that allows them to situate their football identity somewhere in the English mid-lands.

The website then offers the cures, instructions, and opportunities to perform the identity of a passionate and engaged English soccer fan. It supplies and instructs the special words of such an identity and the possibility of receiving validation via interaction with others. Moreover, it supplies the virtual location or site for such interaction, as though you were hanging out at the corner sports bar in Manchester chatting up your local mates.

Here is an attempt to stress that virtual participation is in a great way a rhetorical accomplishment when it is labeled community. This is to say that it is only accomplishable because the system of relationships called a community is seen as favorable. If this was labeled a cult, the expectations and attitudes towards the engagement would be drastically different. The existence of the community itself depends on a way of talking about self, other, place and purpose: sharing, embodying, and performing the identities of English football fans- what Kenneth Burke calls rhetorical identification. Moreover, the potential for making this happen is rhetorical. Why? Because to be a part of this identity construction one has to negotiate the structure of the site, a structure that can only exist based on commercial advertisers wiliness to imbed themselves in the setting. In turn, the fans who participate and embrace the sites' content also by extinction embraces the advertisements that are in a sense parasitic on this community's identity. Yet, the mystified discourse that fans engage with makes this an ignorable fact. One where any group identity is constructed with a commercial purpose already attached.

Tools

By taking a critical turn to infiltrate a rhetoric operating at the core of the Caf discourse offers suggestive direction as to how this space can be seen as a source for profit. By turning to Kenneth Burke's approach to criticism, using his notion of identification it shows the means for persuading a mass by way of talk that reinforces communicative practices rooted in an

identifiable history and traditions. This points to the way identification accompanies the discourse that situates identify performance in similar ways for each new member. "Identification is the major tool used to discover the attitudes and the dramatisic process: The pentad provides a model for their description" (Scott and Brock, 1972, p.318). Meaning, how do members use verbal acts to mystify the engagement in order to achieve a sense of solidarity? Doing this kind of rhetorical criticism points to the unconscious effect words can have on human agents. It also speaks to the active and implicit nature of rhetoric in shaping our social world. How do members buy into a language that reduces the scope of the interaction from one that places the fan as a source for profit, to one where the team functions as a mean for bringing people together?

There has always been a sort of tension built into the relationship between team owners and their supporters. Martin details the complex nature of the relationship:

"The club's identity is a problem for those who identify with an idea that the club should not be a business, or at least should be more than 'just a business', with the irrelevance of ideas of 'identity' being more strongly pushed by those who also strongly push the idea that the club is at heart just a business and that others should lose their sentimental attachment to the idea of it being somehow different"(2014, p.4).

The sentimentality that Martin refers to is what this study looks to speak to as it relates to the discourse used by Man U fans to build this community, virtually. It is interesting to note how the pawn sees himself as a knight when surrounded by other pawns. Burke's approach dissects the drama that is the foundation of this community, which uses the introduction thread as the first means of the individual's attempt of identification with the group. We assume that the introduction thread is the first real attempt fans make to identify with the group. The process of identification occurs between the individual using the collective as his mirror, and the community's ongoing conversations influence on the individual's willingness to act in accord

with the collective identity, which creates a gargoyle effect for the Redcafe member. The newbie has to find the words by which to draw on to bridge the gap between what he understands as his base identity versus his fan identity. In some cases, they are seen as one in the same. Without explicit acknowledgment, fans do the job of symbolically transforming their acts to fit the role of the fan's prescribed community identity, which tends to mystify the entire engagement.

Implementing the Tools

The first step to doing this type of study involves gathering information via the messages posted on the introduction thread. This way an attempt is made to locate clusters in the discourse that is spiritual in its suggestion of unity via loyalty. The first post of the introduction thread states that the original message board was deleted after site reconstruction, so, posts start from June 2007. This includes over 390 pages of posts that amount to over 15 thousand individual posts. Many of the posts include banter between members (usually people from the same country reaching out), but it offers additional moments where we can see elements of identification and mystification manifesting in the discourse. Keeping Burke's scene-act ratio in mind as a subset of the pentad illustrates the way members create a drama with purpose through the act of community engagement. The scene-act ratio operates as a dramatic metaphor for showing how both the agent and the scene sustain itself in a process that Burke points to as a function of the rhetoric doing the job of division and merger.

Lastly, implementing the pentad aids the criticism by pointing out the traps of the hierarchy, asking how dramatic language works to expose the scene and act as interchangeable keys that give life to the rhetoric. This type of criticism problematizes the general acceptance of community as an ethical, spiritualized event. Thus, this analysis questions the way human motives arise and fade within the discourse through the general acceptance of a social order.

Further pointing out the dialectics that operate within a grammar that is overlooked in everyday exchanges. Burke understands a scene dominated discourse as pointing to elements of realism while a purpose dominated rhetoric points to a mystified engagement. While the act that fits into said container is the agent's identification with the scene and doing of the community as he introduces himself.

This new way of connecting and relationship building for sports fans operates as a primary motive above that of the capitalist "substance" (Burke, 1950). It is important to question the means of identification operating within the discourse that work to sustain the sense of togetherness that makes a community feels so important. An identification practice that asks the fan to accept his placement within a hierarchy, subsequently forces him to the bottom by means of a unifying rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism is used to point out the dilemmas that arise because of the discourse that allows for a cohabitation between community, sports, and the industries that have the ability to profit off this system of belief. In other words, how do fans transform the purpose of their role in the hierarchy by the use of a spiritualize discourse?

How does the introduction thread on Redcafe.net expose a clustering of talk that shows a mystified language of identification that works to accomplish the community environment? What are the attitudes being promoted by this kind of talk that give a mystical quality to the fan's involvement? How does the Caf community discussions help to materialize a sense of purpose for the individual's emotional attachment to Manchester United and the game of football in general? Rhetorical criticism will be helpful for tracking down the constellation of identification talk that operates on Redcafe.net. By detailing the way motives are derived from this process of identification talk, this study paints a picture of how mystification arises in footballing discourse. All this amounts to a deconstruction of the sports hierarchy that is sustained by communities like

Redcafe by way of the discoursed used by individual actors that lead to a mystified sense of the

top and bottom of the sporting structure.

Chapter Three: The Materiality of Redcafe

Before doing this research project, I failed to ask critical questions as to why I get to sit

on the sofa and watch ten hours of football on Sundays. However, in every real way, I knew the

answer was to make the NFL money by viewing the commercials. Whether I actually sit there

and watch the ads is irrelevant. As long as the television is on that station, the NFL makes

money. This is very similar to how the online engagement becomes a source of profit for

capitalist powers. Once I found the values that allow me to identify with a particular team, a

relationship is established that creates the means for a rhetorical situation where my participation

is required if I want to keep watching football on Sundays. This rhetoric functions to keep

economic systems producing and consuming, as roles become an important aspect of identifying

within a hierarchy. My role being to be loyally participate as much as possible, which is now

available 24 hours a day.

In this way, sports spectatorship can be regarded as one of the most commodified

products in a capitalist economy. In today's cultural industry, this way of viewing becomes

profitable when it is packaged as more than just spectatorship. As Marx stated, "the ultimate

shape of output is the replication of the conditions of production"(1844), which is surely true

when thinking about the sports industries and the way they are able to reproduce the conditions

that keep fans coming back. In large part, this occurs because of the individual fans willingness

to play the part ascribed to him, where his individual participation is seen as key to upholding the

sports structure. Essentially, we as fans have to keep coming back in order to keep the production

going. The only way to do this is to create a system of communication that allows groups of fans to achieve shared meanings of an elevated purpose situated by the discourse.

As an avid sports fan, it becomes quite easy to forget that the games take place in a realm of fantasy, situated as play. The kind of talk we engage in as fans suggest that the games are played explicitly for us. By extension, when engaged in sports dialogue, virtually or otherwise, the fact that it is all fantasy remains hidden in the sermon. This is because sports as a financial institution supplies the rhetoric that pinches the gap between the fantasy, and a reality that fans can access when they go outside and kick a ball. In a way, a bodily materialization occurs due to the individual's ability to imagine himself as participating in an act of production (playing the game). This becomes apparent in the way fans refer to the team they support, which typically is represented as "we missed" or "we won," as if we were actually the ones out on the pitch.

This sort of talk constantly brings football to the physical, where the imaginary of the communication allows me to view myself as an annex of the play happening in the arena. In this way mystification and materialization becomes indistinguishable for the fan. Fan communities operate with a kind of circular direction, where the individual makes sense of the fantasy by tying it back to their own body, which in turn reinforces the fantasy derived from reality. We can start to see why sites like Redcafe become so important to the evolution of the fan experience, and the organizations that profit off fan participation. It works in a standardized way, whereby the dialogues, conversations, and discussions that frames the community allow the fan to uphold his system of beliefs by locating an identity within this community's discourse. "The reader's task is not simply to accept, but to assemble for himself that which is to be accepted" (Warnick, 2011, p.32). This is the only way to accomplish the feeling of unification that brings one back to these engagements, identification.

Linguistically, the site works to uphold a sense of an authentic community values built on loyalty. It gives purpose to the fan experience because, as I know all too well, without the power to speak and join around the product its starts to lose its romantic appeal. What I refer to here is the importance of the relationships to the overall fan identity. Sharing and connecting attitudes are critical for the reinforcement of the beliefs that fans hold regarding sports as a unifying event; similar to the way the Christians engage in a ritualized gathering at the church on Sundays. "The manner in which he assembles it is dictated by the continual switching of perspectives during the time flow of his reading, and this, in turn, provides a theme and horizon structure which enables him gradually to take over the authors' unfamiliar view of the world on terms laid by the author"(Warnick,2011,p.32). To put it simply, fans who engage in talk on Red cafe help each other spiritualize the nature of the social hierarchy that allows their experience to be more than just paying to spectatorship.

My deep-rooted passion for football/soccer stems from my ability to discuss all facets of the game. This love is a manifestation of years of identification with the sport, from playing four years in high school, to later coaching at that same tier for five more. Likewise, this material attachment has allowed me to talk about the games I watch in practical ways, using real world connections. Applying my own experiences, as a player, creates grounds for purchasing a discourse that constitutes the game as an extension of my identity performance. In turn, this application of purpose also does the job of reshaping the memories I draw on to discuss the game, where the dramatized retelling of a championship lose has shaped who I have become today as an fan of Manchester United. I might not have felt that way then, but with each retelling for a new context the value and importance of that lost gains deeper sentimental meanings.

If the traditional idea of doing community can be experienced as a soccer game filled with tensions and organic obstacles, then the portable/ virtual community must be occupied as the practice drill session that kind of feels like the game by simply offering the same benefits. What I refer to here is how the lack of bodily representation online allows the individual fan to buy into an identification discourse that serves the group to act-in concert.

"Where explicit user reaction is not available, critics nonetheless can consider the ways in which the website text pre-structures user response through placement of internal and external hyperlinks, intertextual allusions, opportunities to interact with on-site content, and use of recognizable cultural contexts and inter-texts that shape the reader's interpretation"(Warnick,2011,p.32).

This speaks to the way online communities create a broad enough scope for fans to identify with a common interest, which motivates the individual to find a way to fit the shared collective identity. Burke understands identification as the aligning of symbols that serve to invite one to a collective order. Much like the coach who aligns the practice drills so that each person has a guidebook for how to move as a squad.

I have embraced Manchester United fan discourse since I started watching professional football back in 1999. This was the year the team had its historic tremble-winning season. Though the team's success played a part in why I pledged my lifelong commitment to this club, the star player at the time (David Beckham) also had me hooked. I was fascinated by his ability to score the ball, and have it move right to left with quite an aesthetic charm. Over the years as I started to find out about the club's history and its rise to prominence I began to feel attached to the central narrative, taking it as part of my own. From the history of the types of players that played for the team, the crafty inspiring legend that had been the manager since 86 (Sir Alex Ferguson), to the mystical 'Theatre of Dream' where the crowd's energy could will the team to victory in the direst of moments. I feverishly fell in love. It was, as if, this club represented all

the things I wanted to be as a person, more so as a young footballer. The community embodied everything I sought to be as a fan. The discourse effectively started redefining me as a fan because of the way I started to identify with the historic events. The buying of discourse surrounding the team meant I could start to fit myself into an ongoing picture of being a Red-Devil.

I have become more in tuned with my role as a fan since I started this project. I have even made a few purchases while involved in conversations on Redcafe.net. The products that are advertised on the site seem pointed to my footballing self, not only as a United fan, but also as a physically active male living in Tampa, Florida. Within the first week on the site, I felt compelled to purchase the new Manchester United home kit, a cool $65. I was completely captivated by the Adidas pure running shoes that were featured for a couple of weeks on the site, which I now own for another $50. Even though the jersey and the shoes were the only two purchases I made by directly clicking on an ad while at the Redcafe; ads like the one promoting the University of Tampa seem to expand the reach of the virtual space. I am almost embarrassed to say that I bought the jersey because I was messaging a fellow fan who lives in Brandon, Florida (about 20 minutes from Tampa) and thought if we ever met up to watch a game I would need to look current. This all occurred before I wrote this section. As such, it is safe to say I have a clear image in mind when I think of Jaime the Man United football fan, and the ads that are placed on the site seem to have a similar image of that same fan identity performance. Yet, I rationalized these purchases as just an act of being a fan. Viewing ads seem to be a natural part of interacting as a member on the Redcafe. Sometimes clicking on an ad becomes unavoidable, as some they get embedded in the comments made by users.

Typically, I log on to the every Saturday morning or Sunday morning before the game kicks off to see what people are saying about the upcoming opponent. I enjoy playing the prediction game before the match to test my 'skills'. For the most part, I am an observer on the site, I rarely engage in participating in the discussions, mostly because I am restricted to the newbie forums. I am too authentic of a fan to be conversing with the newbies. Over the eight-month period, I have created a few threads in the newbie forum that went over well in terms of other members interacting with my topic. I had over 50 post related to my topic, "Chris Smalling," asking how people felt about the young United defender being the anchor for the defense. I felt purposeful, as I was able to spark a nice conversation around a player I felt supportive of during the times when he struggled. The conversation was very interactive for about a week and a half, in which time I bought my new home kit. This could be viewed as the peak of my feelings of belonging, when I saw my participation as purposeful and influential. The other two threads I created did not go over that well, maybe because one was related to the Women's World Cup poor playing surface (which is suggestive of a masculine dominated discourse, but that is for another paper). It only received three member engagements. Point being, topics related to Manchester United football usually get more action than a post concerning football in general.

What I am trying to arrive at is that my participation in the Redcafe community stems from the practices of identification that begun at an early age. That moment of transformation occurred when I chose to support one team over another. Ways of speaking that saw me unify by means of pitting my fan identity against those of another fans who supported different teams. Words, gestures, and phrases that I learned at an early age and grew into, as I got older became my access code. This is part of a communicative process symbol using creates learn in order to

play the role as fans looking to coordinate their support. The internal spiritualization then helps the individual narrativize a sense of purpose for how to participate in the ongoing social order.

To simplify, one has to learn to talk the talk before they can walk the walk. This all amounts to a series of shared attitudes and values (reflected in linguistic practices) among members of the Redcafe that allows me to feel like a purposeful member of the group. As such, Red cafe becomes a material reality when I see myself as being an authentic section of the group. A fan who serves a purpose that is elevated above the purchasing of a product. The conversations with strangers online conjure up memories of being at an actual football game and chatting up the stranger next to me. It might not be the same type of interaction, but it employs the same kind of speech acts that makes it difficult to distinguish, and fun to participate in.

As a community, Redcafe helps me as a United fan and a critic to make sense of my attachment to the squad and the game. This way I can continue to buy into an attitude that sees my fan experience as a romantic endeavor. I have the words to help me embrace the community in those seconds when my participation seems to be so strong that it dominates my way of remembering and talking. Participating on Redcafe not only helps me communicate my ideas in a space built for it, but also helps make sense of my emotional response to something I have no control over. As per my fellow Caf members, they help me to soothe my emotional turmoil in an ongoing drama that probably does not make any sense to the non-football fan. In this way, virtual fan communities creates and utilize an everyday rhetoric that works to maintain the individual's sense of self by assigning grander purpose to his lower position in a sporting hierarchy. This all helps maintain the form of the structure that leaves influence in the hands of those who already possessed it.

The Materialization of The Virtual Community

The evolution of sporting fan communities over the past two decades has seen an increasing turn towards the internet as a site for engagement. The shift to the virtual space has been readily accepted, and should come as no surprise, as the move falls in line with how communities have evolved with the advance of communication technology throughout history. Twenty years ago before the internet was a mainstay in our day-to-day lives, fan engagements relied heavily on individuals showing up to interact in physical locations in order to build and sustain solidarity. Interactions were largely interpersonal, where places like local bars, stadiums, and someone's home were the common temporary meeting locations for fan communities to take shape. The limitations associated with communicating across geographical distances, and time restrictions influenced the way fans maintained a sense of community; mostly remaining secluded, distant, and limited in how often they interacted as a group. Since fans were limited to interacting with those within a restricted geographical distance, the possibilities for cross-cultural interactions were limited. This made it easier for groups to establish and maintain a common understanding, as relationally, they were typically interacting with people who shared much of the same ideals as it relates to group life.

With the increase participation in virtual football conversations, fandoms still rely on physical interactions to promote solidarity and establish a sense of unity. "Research suggests that the use of online and mobile technologies tends to encourage, rather than hinder, face to face meetings" (Chayko, 2008, p.11). Proximity usually takes on a role in the development of communities built around a physically located artifact, as is the case with footballing communities. The fan's ability to attend a game and feel like an important part of the crowd helps to materialize the ideological elements used in cross fan communication. Ironically, as the

move to accommodate the online space as a place for conversation grows, it implicitly influences the way fans participate while engaged in physical interactions. For instance, it has become commonplace for individual fans to live tweet while at a sporting event. Not only are fans engaging with the bodies that surround them, conversing with the people close in proximity, they are also engaging in an external conversation with fellow fans virtually. It is fairly captivating to be spilling the beans at a game with somebody else, yet having no idea where he/she might be settled in relation to you. This shows how the virtual world has begun to encroach on the way fans act-together in the physical setting. It is no longer a need for the fan to seek out community only when in close proximity to other fans, as the individual now has the means by which to constantly converse fan communities into existence, virtually.

The subtle shift in the way fans identify around the product of football due to the insertion of mediated forms of communication has been met with little resistance, especially from the perspective of a fan who constantly seeks out sports related discussions. Similarly, the way fans organize as a collective has evolved to where the sporting event is merely an extension of the fan's reality, and not the central locus for how a community goes about identifying as a group. This has all influenced a change in the way sporting organizations package and present the game, as the digital age has reshaped the way fans go about their interactions. Have you looked at a scoreboard at a sporting event lately? They are littered with messages that promote virtual interactions. For example, the Miami Dolphins now offer iPads to its high-end season ticket holders to use during football games. This way a fan can watch multiple games, chat with others across the stadium, and even connect to social media platforms while at the game. It would be quite an image to see sixty thousand fans on their digital devices watching and communicating about the game in silence. Moreover, NBC sports now offers what they call

"Matchmaker", which is an app that allows English football fans to find local watch parties to join and support their teams during match day. The app works by tracking your location, and based on the team you support (ex: Manchester United) it finds other individuals or venues where fans of Manchester United are collectively watching the game. This sort of transmutation has been in large part due to the accessibility afforded by digital communication and the subtle push for fans to embrace it by a capitalist market place. We are starting to see a shift where the physical encounter is becoming the extension of the virtual, and not the other way around. In a manner of speaking, it is easier to maintain a relationship with a group virtually than in the physical realm.

The Internet as a Contested Place

In a western-based society, the idea of privilege is adapted to fit one's particular orientation. Where and when one was raised plays an influential role in defining how an individual might perceive his or her own position as being privileged in relation to some other. The internet usually does a respectable job of masking these distinctions due to the lack of bodily representation, where the same amount of time and money will yield the same online privileges. However, it is the nature of the relationships within which one interacts that determines what is regarded as privileged. The problem manifests itself because the relationships that are constructed virtually are usually done with a frame that suggests this is more fantasy than reality.

In this shell, the ability to access the internet is an advantage that is readily overlooked because of the idea that this fantasy operates at a distance. Further, an English speaker will be offered far more access when using the web, versus those who do not primarily speak English, as the net is largely coded using the English terminology. Here is an object lesson of how this privileging works: When thinking as a black graduate student surrounded by largely white

bodies, the black body makes a determination (by a historical accounting) that the white bodies are privileged compared to his. By the same margin being a graduate student places him on a pedestal compared to those, white or otherwise, who are merely undergraduates, or facility employees who work for the university. The idea here is that most western users of the internet fail to recognize the privilege they are afforded because of the geographical placement in which they were raised. The multiple hierarchies we constantly operate in as social creatures make it so that we tend to ignore the possibility of being lower or higher on a divided spectrum. As such, a kind of online rhetoric emerges that frames the web as an advantage for those with knowledge of how this space is constructed. This occurs because of the way the language constantly asks individual actor to identify themselves in relation to the other actor. Yet, in the virtual space, one has to assume an audience that is present and authentic in the communication process. These features promote an abstracted notion of the internet as a space where individual actors operate on equal terms, revealing the subtle ways the framing of the internet as a neutral space masks its partiality.

We are left with a hierarchy that operates due to the mystery involved with the breakdown of power. The split nature of the internet space and the narratives of openness and equality foster the mystique of the virtual space. In this, one can recognize the discursive problem that emerges when a spiritual idea such as "community" starts taking shape in the contested space of the internet. As symbols, "community and internet," carry a 'pure' sense of purpose in-terms of how identities converge around these types of situations. People who engage in internet-based discussions use a kind of talk to position the space as an invisible background to their interactions. This linguistic practice hides the reality that the internet space offers privileges to those with the means to construct a particular virtual setting. This equals the users'

willingness to admit and/or dismiss his role in an ongoing online social order due to an ideology that suggests that this space is equal for all and based in fantasy.

The way individuals interact while on the web reinforces the dissonance in the terminology used to uphold the internet's explicit capitalist power structure. This, then works to abstract the way various capitalist powers operate even in these leisure based settings. This begs the question as to what expectations fans bring to the internet as a free and open space that is suggestive based on our western ideologies. By the same account, we also have to question the transcendence the internet discourse proclaims, one that supposedly bridges the gap between different classes of people in a global hierarchy, or in this instance a sporting hierarchy. The rhetorical force behind the symbol 'internet' operates with an essence of purity, much like the word community. Which begs us to examine the types of power structures we implicitly accept as users of the web.

This conversation of power drags on as it relates to the internet, as some see a connected globe as those with power, money, and influence spreading their interest and beliefs to those without such resources. Others argue that globalization via the web has been a process of evolution and has empowered cultures that normally operate at the bottom of the social order. By any account, the World Wide Web is now at the center of the compressing of the globe. The dichotomy that emerges when speaking of online/virtual interactions see some fans viewing the ability to join in large numbers as offering leverage over the product(the sporting organization), while others see it as the product (team owners) now having the means to influence the ideals fans see as key to group identity. "Web texts are produced through corporate authorship, constantly revised, often borrowed, and frequently parasitic on the other texts to which they are linked" (Warwick, 2011, p.29). Redcafe is a community built on words. As such, the structure

and foundation of this community starts with corporate authorship that borrows from a systematic way of structuring a website of this nature to produce the most traffic possible. Rowe belabors this point, "The impulse that animated thousands of sociologists to displace 'pomo' (post-modern) with 'Globo' (globalization) in a summary Quebec derived from contemporary debates around the guidance and penetration of transnational capital and its substantial value. Sports appear to an obvious representative of this" (2001, p.5). The internet offers the possibility for both extremes in the debate of advantage due to the liquidity afforded by the terms symbolic function. However, as the Redcafe site shows us, the space is only as effective at bringing users back to the engagement as the symbolic elements used to situate a familiar interaction.

Virtual communities are staring down the barrel of the same ideologically dominated gun. Members tacitly negotiate the virtual fan gathering as a leveraging of power by participating in a manner that reinforces the nature of the structure they look to unravel. The hegemonic rhetoric is implicitly layered in the way fans communicate in an attempt to achieve shared meaning while motivating the collective towards a unified understanding. "The advent of coproduced sites, such as discussion forums, blogs and wikis, has caused the group authorship phenomenon to become even more pronounced" (Warwick, 2011, p.35). In order for fans to participate with the sense of community, virtually, they must have a sense of how the conversation would unfold in the traditional space. This can be learned from watching interactions on television, interpersonal interactions and even from previous engagements with other online groups of similar construct. This adds to accepting a structure that sees the fan as a consumer at the base, whose discourse suggests a spiritual unification of purpose. What results is a centralized discourse among a fan base that becomes the key element to staging the

engagement as authentic to its physical counterpart. Staging that becomes purposeful in the ways it offers the means for the individual to keep participating.

There has been a trend in the last five years of a growth in American support for English soccer teams, notably for the larger clubs. To this aim, Chevy became the first American company to sponsor a Premier League team (Manchester United), paying the highest sponsorship cost in the history of the league. The deal saw the American automotive giants offer a billion dollars to sponsor a sports team located thousands of miles away. Considering the fact that soccer is still the fifth most popular sport in America, from a critical point of view this would indicate that as a business General Motors sees this move as a way to expand its brand to the football fan in America and in England, and points to what Chevy must believe to be an American fan base that is starting to find ways to identify with a product played across the Atlantic. What we witness here are the effects of global capital, as the internet has provided the means by which companies like Chevy can recognize new emerging marketplaces.

Football and The Monetary Motive

Commercial enterprises, such as General Motors, have recognized the commercial possibilities afforded by the internet space. In previous conversation on Redcafe, it is said that the American owners (The Glazers) would bring the kind of capital that would improve the team and widen the fan base, while others regard this take-over as an impingement of American capitalism on a team that represents the spirit of English football. The internet has undoubtedly influenced how fans negotiate these moments of identity transformation. The growth of virtual fan groupings like the Redcafe opened a door for GM to recognize an untapped market of supporters. This transformation was aggressively met with opposition from fans situated locally early in the takeover period, as they saw the move as an infringement on a community that is

blue-collar in its geographical nature and footballing identity. The opposition towards this

ownership group has since cooled off, as fans globally have welcomed the moves the ownership

has made to create a wider global appeal for the brand. This is to say that if this move happened

in the early 90's or late 80's the resistance would have been sustained and the possibility of

collective protest would have been rooted in the voices of the locals.

In a way, the Glazers (the family that currently owns Manchester United) can see all the

members of Redcafe.net as a commodity of sorts that offers growth possibilities for their

business. "The synchronicity of internet-based communications and the variety of

communication devices also mean that one's audiences are not gathered in a space at a given

point in time to receive the messages directed to them. While organizations and web authors do

collect information about user behavior, attitudes, and demographics, the information is

imprecise" (Warnick, 2011, p.41). To the Glazers, Redcafe members are profitable fish in a

barrel that help to invite more fish to the barrel. On that point, there is little ground to believe

that football is more than a game played to make money for those who own the teams. Profits sit

as the central force that shapes the product on the field, and by extension the fan's experience.

From the price payed for tickets, to the sponsors who purchase the rights to name stadiums, the

mega corporations with their logos on players' jerseys, and the overpriced refreshments served at

a game all suggest elements of a business looking to generate profits. The money motive is at the

center of the football fan-team relationship. However, this fact is largely ignored in the way

community talk emerges, as is the case with the Redcafe community, where the discourse

surrounding the game/team indicates that it is less about the money and more about what football

has to offer each individual fan. This discourse reinforces the mystery surrounding football, and

the fandoms spiritualized attachment to the product, where the money being paid is regarded as a

minimal part to the experience. Which, to put it bluntly, is a peasant's way of thinking and talking.

The spiritualized rhetoric that operates around football and sports in general can be startling. Many individuals identify with the product to the point where their emotional well-being is tied to the performance of the squad. The degree of enthusiasm and support that fans bring to their material engagement becomes the means by which fans tend to over-identify with the game. As a football lover myself, this does not elude me as many Saturdays have been ruined by United's poor play, to which I end up feeling partially responsible because I did not sit in the same place I sat in last week when they brought home the win. It is the mysterious feelings of connection that sustains the imbalanced power relation between fans and individuals who make up the team organization. Yet, those feelings are nothing more than the materialization of repeated interaction with the event and the discourse that allows fans to feel a sense of belonging. A sense of unity that is deeply rooted in the way sports is conceived from little league on up, as a product of communities' unifying function that works to bring people towards a common understanding of support.

The emotional attachment by fans to their teams exposes "the failure to recognize and understand the discontinuous nature of an emergent form whose structures are in no means controlled by the lower class, and whose acceptance represents a paradoxical cultural insertion into the hegemony of capitalist life" (Gruneau, 1983, p. 147). This speaks to the abstraction involved in the way fans negotiate the mystery of sports as something more than people playing a game for money, a great heap of money. Where fan talk shows a sentiment that the collective has the means to influence and shape the direction of the club's identity. The symbolic action

involved in the sporting experience does the job of abstracting the reality of a situation that sees the fan as a bottom feeder who constructs narratives to arrive at a more desirable effect.

Groups that gather using computer-mediated technology are what Howard Rheingold labels a "virtual community" (1993), where individuals use the web to unite around a special artifact or practice, in this case, football. As with most social media groupings, the cost of connecting with other humans can become rather tricky. As Kenneth Burke pointed to, money can be an effective catalyst for spiritual transformation and can be a unifier for even religious ideologies. According to Burke, "Monetary symbolism is the "simple," the god-term, in terms of which all this great complexity attains a unity transcending distinctions of climate, class, state, ethnic customs (1950, p.110). He comments on the power of money to motivate action, which is forceful enough to break down traditional boundaries and bring people of different kinds together in unanticipated ways. The way fans participate in virtual discussions carries the essence of a monetary exchange, as having bought a ticket to attend a match at the local stadium. The difference is that in the virtual space that transaction happens via time spent in virtual participation. Essentially, each time a fan logs on to Red cafe he creates capital for the site owners. The traffic that comes through a particular site becomes the means by which a website generates value in terms of money marketers are willing to pay to advertise on that site. In this way, fan participation becomes more valuable in the virtual realm than in the physical.

Truly, a capital-centered motive operates side by side the football presentation in all aspects of the game, and fans cannot ignore the virtual space as included. "As a frequently cited 2002 study has shown, a substantial proportion of public Web sites failed to provide information about who was behind the site. More than one-third provided no address or phone number, and one quarter provided no information about who owned the site (Consumer International;

Warnick, 2011,p.34). Essentially, a critic needs to ask illuminating questions about who owns

and operates the virtual space where fans go to construct identities. There should also be

judgments as to the advantages that companies like General Motors could be afforded if they did

have a say in the operations of a fan site like Redcafe.

Why should fans believe that the virtual community space is omitted from the capitalist

venture that is football? Keri Martian elaborates on the issue,

"Football clubs have of course, always been businesses when viewed from one position. As
shortly as they commit money for admittance that is, a transaction that can be characterized as a business
transaction and they can be characterized as a business entity, even if they are supported-owned, or take
voice in community building exercises or prioritize on-field success over financial accumulation" (2014,
p.5).

To belabor Martin's point, as soon as a Redcafe member identifies as a part of the group

they engage in a transactional process using linguistic currency, no different from when one

purchases a ticket to support their favorite team. This suggests that there are multiple sources for

identification in the virtual exchange where fans can partake in an ongoing social order that

caters to their sense of belonging. "Discussion forums take the shape as registered users

contribute content by communicating with each other, and they are structured by their

moderators and software that automatically organize and archives topics and replies"(Warnick,

2011,p.34). Most football fans go about their online interactions in the same manner that they

approach supporting the team, full of warmth and enthusiasm with blind regard for the cost of

admission. As such, conversations relating to the possibility of the virtual being a capitalist

driven environment are none existent.

Physical limitations are no longer an issue when it comes to fans connecting across time

and space. This boundary reshaping due to the internet's ability to condense space and time, has

had its effect on the way fans create a collective identity around artifacts such as football. Keri Martin adequately points out: "business is as much as anything an idea that is used to justify or delegitimize certain kinds of relations (those based upon sentiment or sympathy, perhaps) and so appeals to business as an ethic of organizing social relations presuppose the building of communities of a certain kind or maybe a lack of care for the upkeep of other forms of community identity" (2014, p.1). This indicates a monetary stench lingering in the discourse of a transformation process that sees the internet as a means for bridging geographical and cultural gaps. Further, offering the possibility for unprecedented growth in profits and fan connections. In the same breath, community as a symbol then becomes a useful frame for the event to fit a sporting narrative that gives purpose to virtual fan participation.

The Physical Community of Manchester, England

Fan talk incorporates a rhetoric that suggests football offers the values of unity found in a collective identity, one that works to sustain the sense of purpose that comes with supporting one team over another. The easier it is for fans, who live outside of Manchester and England in general to identify with the Manchester United community by way loyalty that represents the team spirit, the more one absorbs the attitudes of a loyal supporter and the more one can feel that sense of belonging. As a city, Manchester is regarded as mecca in terms of international football regions, as both United and Manchester City are recognized as prominent clubs across Europe. According to James (2008), it was not until the 1904 English Football Association (FA) cup championship that the metropolis started to be regarded as a footballing community. He claims that prior to the successful campaign by the Manchester United club in 1904, the community was envisioned as a "footballing backwater" region. In some symbolic way, that community of footballing backwater still exists in the way fans represent their Man U identity. Even now as a

perennial powerhouse, Manchester United followers still identify with the narrative that this team started from the bottom and the values implies that.

James expands, "the 1904 FA Cup success provided increased visibility of Manchester's footballing community, encouraged widespread celebrations for all and led to the development of football participation across the city, all of which served to make a football identity in the way indicated by both Marschik and Russell" (2008, p. 211). For some, this is understood as one of the defining moments in the rise of the United fandom to international prominence. For James, it was merely a means by which the club and community started to adopt a collective identity and share a common language. In a way, the criticism associated with the team as a footballing backwater also bled into community that housed the team. He carries his point: "The 1904 success, and those that followed for United, were not seen as individual club triumphs in a contention for local control, but were thought to be Manchester's achievements, with reports of the 1904 and 1909 successes, and the subsequent homecomings, adding to a greater community spirit and social connection" (James, 2008, p. 211). Here, he paints a picture of the intersection between football and community, where the effects of one ties into the organization of the other at least based on verbal constructs. This is an indication as to the rhetorical ties of community and football that is imbedded in the discourse that promotes a Manchester United fan identity.

Additionally, Martin points to those moments of transformation that saw the football club emerge from being one of the most popular clubs in England in the early 1960s, to one of the most recognized sporting organizations in the world by the early 90s. Martin explains, "The formation of the Premier League that consolidated a concentration of farming income in the hands of the top clubs coincided with United regaining the league championship for the first time in over a fourth part of a century" (2013, p. 3). The Manchester footballing community began

identifying with the product on the field, as the expansion afforded due to the evolution of

television allowed for steady success, as well as an increase in fan support internationally, which

can be understood as interrelated.

"The increased support and revenue that came with the success at a time when English football grew in importance as a major arm of the TV entertainment industry, first domestically and then internationally, helped to contribute to United consolidating both sporting and financial success, as they moved on to overlook the next twenty years of English club football" (Martin, 2013, p. 4).
The relationship between the team and the residential area started to carry on a spirit of its own.

Which amounted to a blending of Manchester attitudes and values in the footballing discourse.

In some lots of Red café, locally based fans have vented their frustrations about the

growing American influence on an English game, played with English values. As the likes of

General Motors and the Glazer family seem to have bureaucratized, a product they consider a

symbol of English values. This is not a new debate for long time devotees of the club, as the

team has experienced a long chronicle of what Americans would label 'bandwagon' fans, those

who endorse the squad when they are performing well, usually, from a distance (another

indication of the spiritualized nature of fan engagements). The bandwagon fan tarnishes the

values associated with being an authentic fan. He does not possess or respect the key value of

fandoms, which is loyalty. In this way, bureaucratic systems are largely recognized as system

that value quantity over quality. I quote Martin at length as he details the shift in club supporters'

identity:

> "The fact that United had the biggest circle of patrons outside of their home catchment area had
> been considered as a source of pride in the 1970s for example, an indication of United's special
> status, even at a time when the team has been often second-rate. In addition, these fans were
> themselves often held up as the best and most loyal fans of all, sacrificing more than local fans in
> terms of the dedication that they had to demonstrate to follow the team. By the 1990s, whilst
> welcomed by the club's owners as an indispensable foundation of their financial success, these

supporters had become 'glory seekers' or 'plastic' or 'day-trippers' in the eyes of many supporters, both of opposition teams and indeed long term United fans, to whom they had become a necessary embarrassment. The identity of United's support base (true fans or glory seeking customers) and of United itself (club or business) became an increasingly fractious ongoing debate" (Martin, 2014, p.4).

It is of critical importance to ask if the way talk unfolds on sites like the Redcafe is merely an act of fantasy, or if it is truly a means by which fans can achieve a sense of belonging. The question remains as to whether virtual communities operate with an organic formation, or one derived from a systematic way of bringing people together. One could suggest that it is the dialectic of both functions that make the online engagement more appealing to a wider audience. According to Warnick, due to the high rate of turnover in conversations on the internet, fans "are constantly making micro-decisions about where to go and what to read/write next while they are reading or writing" (2011, p.30). In a way the user is constantly involved with shaping meaning in his environment, but only inasmuch as he frequents it. This then creates the drive for the individual to want to participate more, even while participating.

Each United fan wants to feel as if they were born and raised on the red side of Manchester, indoctrinated with United fandom at birth, an authentic spiritualization experience. As such, fans make great effort to construct an identity that achieves this spiritualization through a transformative process, one where locating the source of loyalty offers these possibilities. To put it simply, fans identify with the attitudes being communicated by other fan, which does the job of reinforcing the group's core values of loyalty with a unified purpose, and a motive for collective influence. One that allows fans to feel authentic in the way they identify as a part of the group. In short, no fan wants to be labeled a "bandwagon fan" or a "glory-seeker." These labels are a part of the means of division used to situate the collective fan identity.

Fans play a dangerous game due to the level of autonomy given to the artifacts that sustain the relationship. Paying eight dollars for a beer at a ball game that cost $80 to get into, seems like a fair price to pay for the phenomena of experiencing a bunch of grown men chase a ball. Fan discourse sees loyalty as the "substance" of the sporting world. In other words, what Manchester United owners recognize as a growth in profits, fans situate as a growth in loyal supporters who can influence the organization. As such, being a "glory-seeker" becomes the backdrop for how not to be a fan. Even though, ironically this type of attitude is actually what should be valued, as the fan is essentially paying for the highest quality of entertainment possible. Instead, it is the opposite and becomes a deterrence for those looking to speak outside of their circle of support. The spiritual nature of the fan discourse makes it so that the sports hierarchy sustains and grows: it keeps owners at the top of a social structure that sees the fan at bottom. Ultimately, fans at the bottom celebrate their place and the hierarchy through a rhetoric of loyalty and disloyalty.

Further, fans buy into a spiritualized kind of talk long before they start participating virtually. They materialize the sense of purpose when they attend sporting events and communicate using what is regarded as an authentic fan discourse. The mystery of the discourse occurs because of gap that exist between fan communities (like the cafe) and the product that brings them together (Manchester United organization). This situates a need for a spiritual purpose to make sense of the disconnect, as this type of talk adds value to the fan's participation. It further offers reasons to want to participate outside of watching. The discourse used to divvy up the sporting experience does the job of abstracting the reality of the monetary motive central to the artifact. This sort of relationship Burke claims to be a modification of purpose, "where mysticism and materialism become indistinguishable" (Burke, 1950, p.291). The way fan talk

unfolds in general suggests there is something spiritual about the connection between loyal

members who gather to show unwavering support under a collective identity. To this end, those

at the higher end of a sporting hierarchy (team owners) are free to operate as they see fit when

making moves that influence the organization's identity/bottom line. The flow of money can be

just as mysterious as the spiritual connection of the group, or in this case, it can materially

symbolize that spiritual connection.

Chapter 4: Identification Persuasion at The Redcafé

Community is a term that is used to help individuals coordinate and function as a collective. Oxford dictionary defines community as: "a social unit of any size that shares common values." What that actually means is anybody's guess. The statement defines community as everything, everywhere all the time; a prison gang by this definition is a thriving community. What it means is that by most accounts we are constantly operating with some sense of community around us. One can assume there is a set of relationships operating that functions around a common interests or set of values. Yet, when one asks how these units discover their shared values that definition becomes problematic. In the physical world, the way bodies perform and align can be quite visible in terms of their function in the overall formation of the relationship. As individuals accept and identify with their particular group position the need to articulate purpose becomes less salient. As such, community is a symbol that carries the ability to move and shape the bodies operating within its proximity, as communication is always pushing the individual towards action. In the virtual world, bodies are invisible, so community as a rhetorical term asks individuals to align themselves using only the discourse particular to the group. In essence, members are required to verbally perform community.

Virtual Identification

According to Burke's theories of symbolic action, humans are largely distinguished by their symbol using behavior. People have the ability to create, use and misuse the symbols that work to help us act in unison. Because humans use symbols to name things, situations and people they often abuse the way these symbols work to present reality. As such, he saw human behavior as operating on two levels, as action and as motion. Motions are the acts that we engage in that are not purposeful, similar to how animals go about their lives. While action is the purposeful voluntary behavior that is situated using symbols. Ultimately, the reality that people perceive is filtered through some kind of symbolic filter (terministic screen). Thus, both the virtual and physical world are filtered through symbols. As people search for the need to be social and coordinate their actions these symbolic pieces we call language become the means by which individual behavior get shaped.

Due to this structuring of communication, Burke understood language as constantly being interpreted and used to motivate. Language is used to influence action, which means that no word can be neutral as it was created to induce some kind of action in the symbol-using creature. As such, when humans use words they do so with an implicit showing of their attitudes, judgments and values that are particular to the situation they find themselves in. This then for Burke meant that language is always selective and is always reducing a particular reality to symbolic representation.

The reduction of reality to invoke social structures such as families, organizations, and communities means humans are required to use language to create rules and prescriptions to coordinate action in those situations. This ordering then becomes the means for what Burke sees as an ultimate term that induces action in humans, "guilt." The sense of guilt for the individual is

derived from the inconsistency that comes with following one rule while breaking another in these social settings. As we move from community to community in our day to day world these rules and prescriptions conflict, which in turn creates internal guilt for the individual. As such, we are constantly trapped in a cycle of judging situations as good or bad. This guilt is derived from the principles of hierarchy that we see operating in our day to day situations. Our search for order creates a ranking system among people using symbols particular to each situation. This in turn fosters competition and division among the classes of the hierarchy, which leaves the individual with a sense of guilt because we understand, but ignore the ethical implications of such systems of rank. It is the constant dividing among groups that creates the need for identification practices, which can be understood as the opposite of division.

In Burke's theory of persuasion via identification, humans are constantly divided by their symbolic representation of individuality, hierarchy, alienation, separation, class and all other modes of division. These conditions are created with the notion that symbols use themselves-or as Burke put it, "the state of Babel after the fall" (1950). Humans therefore ago about creating identities from these symbolic "substances," which are the things we uphold as key to being this way or that. To try and overcome these internal tensions- what Christianity labels "guilt"- becomes the means by which we proclaim variously to share symbolic substance or "consubstantiality" with others. Here, are the means by which individuals go about constructing and enacting a shared identity or identification. It is important to note that this is a key part to Burke's analysis, as he makes it clear that these are ways of "acting together." This then indicates that our ways of identification and consubstantiation are more than a sharing of labels, but instead are shared ways of *doing* by way of symbolic action. Our identities then are constantly in doubt, or at odds, until we are called upon to act on their behalf. Thus, for

identification to work participation is required: performance on behalf of the shared symbols; in a manner similar to what can be found at political rallies, parties and movements, working within a collective cause, projects for our clubs, wars, sports, football games… and *online soccer communities*.

Identification then is the means by which we learn to share identity with each other while attempting to act as a collective. As we feel guilt for our division within a hierarchy, we become motivated to increase communication to try and bridge the gap created. From here, the process of identification increases as the search for understanding becomes a sharing of meaning among individuals that works to improve understanding and cooperation among group members. This then leads to the effects of identification where persuasion becomes possible based on this sharing of meaning among the collective. This occurs becomes identification can be both conscious and unconscious. For the purpose of this study, I look at the virtual engagement as a moment when identification happens at the unconscious level due to the degree of mysticism that operates in fans' shared meaning.

The study concludes by looking at the three key stages of identification that traditionally happen in-group settings. It is interesting to note how these sort of identification practices transfer from the physical world to the virtual. It is also important to note that this means of organizing and sharing meaning becomes the pillar for sustaining community life in the physical world, and is the key communicative practice that allows for communities like the Redcafe to exist virtually. First, we look at how material identification occurs while communicating virtually, which traditionally consist of goods and possessions that individuals share in common. Second, an analysis of idealistic identification will shed light on the attitudes and values that group members hold in common. Lastly, a question of how community as a symbol of

organizing individuals creates a formal invitation for identification that then works as the glue that keeps individuals sharing these locus of motives.

Material Identification

In the previous section, the idea of identification was presented as an occasion of talk done by members on Redcafe as a way to sustain a sense of belonging. Here, both division and unity operate as a duet when the individual is asked to locate himself within the discourse of a particular group. Identification works because it allows the individual to remain unique as an autonomous agent where he can construct an identity around the shared group values. The buying of a community discourse then sees the individuals share "a locus of motives" with the group that becomes the pillar for his identity performance in that setting. "Since identification implies division, we found rhetoric involving us in matters of socialization and fiction." (Burke,1950, p. 45) The division Burke speaks of emerges when the individual starts to incorporate his own images and ideas relating to the borders of the group, such as Manchester United Football community, to convey identity in a manner that shows him as also divided against another collective. One of the first lessons a new United fan has to learn is the ranking of the enemy, with cross town rivals Manchester City leading the way followed closely by historic rivals Liverpool. As such, these clear lines of division as a devotee of the Manchester United football club as opposed to a fan of cross-town rivals Manchester City, conjoin Red café members.

Due to the highly public nature of the Manchester United brand, it becomes rather easy for the everyday football fan to recognize the subtle symbolic elements that distinguish this group of fans. It is the material means of identification that first brings the individual fan to Redcafe.net, the simple symbolic elements that can be quickly identified by any United fan. This

includes the name of the site "Redcafe.net," which works to promote the shared sense of belonging as a red versus being a blue. Because the United community identifies as the Red Devils, it becomes rather easy to see why the word "red" is important to the naming of the group. It offers the same kind of material identification for fans similar to the wearing of red clothing to go watch a football game at the bar. This is also evident in the use of the word "red" in many of the Café members' usernames, including my own. Names such as, Redmamba, RedRonaldo, Reddevilcanuck, holylandred are just a few symbolic ways members identify with the collective. Further, there are names that utilize symbols for material identification that draw on meanings that are unique to the group, where to understand the username is to have an understanding of the history of the community. These symbolic borrowings are quite useful in the online world as it facilities that sense of material identification that is unique only to this kind of community. Names like Davie Moyes, The ferg and RockinRobin communicate a sense of the users' personal affliction to various parts of the club's history, while reinforcing the similar taste in representing oneself as a Red-devil.

Another element of material identification that occurs virtually is the actual use of the colors red and black. These are the two main colors of the football team and are the prominent colors in the stands at a home match. Red and black are the banner colors used on the site, and the moment a fan sees these bordering colors a symbolic suggestion is made that this football community is particular to fans of Man United. As such, the use of these colors on the Redcafe are key to situating the community as specific to these groups of fans. The depth and tone of the red is quite particular to the United brand, where any other major football club has a different shade of red in their logo. Further, by taking Burke's notion of reducing the scope of the interaction to create greater understanding, we can start to see how the colors become the first

means of creating a symbolic division from other groups. This is vital for the fan who is new to the Redcafe site, as it creates an open invitation for him to see this as a community he might want to belong. In some ways, the colors help him understand that he already does belong to this group. In the same way these colors might help the individual fan determine which sports bar might be most welcoming to watch a game.

Idealistic Identification

Traditionally in the physical setting, it is material identification that is the dominate means by which groups of fans identify. The wearing of team colors and jerseys are the most common ways we identify as a fan base in the physical space, where that symbolic understanding occurs even before words are exchanged. Where I can visit a non-English speaking country like Germany and feel comfortable as a black man reaching out to a stranger who is wearing a Wayne Rooney jersey. This is still an important component of the virtual engagement, but my research shows that this kind of identification takes a back seat to a more idealistic means of identification. By this, I mean that fans on Redcafe rely on their shared sense of attitudes and values as fans of Manchester United to create this community in unison. As such, the message boards become the center for developing and sustaining community as a formal accomplishment.

What this analysis shows are two key components to this sort of identification by an idealistic route. Loyalty and unification are held as the highest valued attitudes surrounding this footballing community. They are the pillars of Manchester United fan identity, which can be understood as the same pillars that are the heart of the local Manchester community narrative. Where football and community are seen as intertwined events that make this a unique community of followers. What follows are a series of post pulled from the introduction thread of the Redcafe site that show how members attend to this cluster of values to help situate their

communication in a common ideological conversation. As such, the individual fans search for belonging becomes possible by his acceptance of the substance that makes this community thriving, which is loyalty. This loyalty fosters a unified purpose that ultimately generates the means for mystery in the overall engagement, but more on that later.

For the online user the group is largely unknown with an exception for the familiar symbolic cues that are derived from the physical engagement, usually the material means for identification. Burke details this complex relationship:

"As for relation between identification and persuasion: we might well keep in mind that the speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience." (1950, p.46)

What Burke details here is the unconscious force that operates when individuals engage in an act of building identity in a particular group. What he sees emerging is a set of positions and motives in the individual's discourse that stabilizes group values and beliefs through his attempt to fit in. This can be understood as a reinforcement of groupthink whereby the individual buys into the groups' rhetoric of placement within the pecking order, which becomes his calling for loyal participation.

When a member aims to find a location within the group to participate he begins to incorporate the attitudes reflected in the terminologies used to define that particular section of group identity. As such, football as a community moves upon its agents, rhetorically, offering cues in the discourse as to how one should respond to situations related to Manchester United fandom. That is if one wants to be viewed as a loyal supporter. In this shell, Red cafe as a

footballing community offers symbolic clues for how the individual fan should act, as a loyal member of a fan base, whether it is virtual or otherwise.

The Loyalty Substance

What is presented below is a post taken from the Redcafe's introduction thread. The introduction is where members write a brief posts introducing themselves to the community as a fan of Manchester United. What is worth point to is the rhetorical effects that are reinforced through everyday talk, which situates this act of community as inherently positive. What is worth noting here as it regards the mysticism involved in the discourse is the way the member elevates his experiences as a fan to where loyalty operates above all else. To the point where his fan identity is intertwined with how he makes sense of his day to day identity performances.

> "Hello hello
> Par here from Kent. Nearly 29, married with kids and work a dull career in Management Consulting. Otherwise, if I'm not drawing comicbooks, I'm watching Man Utd at the weekend. Been watching football since was real small kid due to my older brother (Liverpool fan) watching it on ITV. Though really fell in love with Man Utd around 1995. Saw Cantona do a Kung Fu Kick on the news and really got my attention. Then remember watching them and they had all the coolest players, Giggs, Schmeical, Cole. And maybe its just my experience, but growing up in the 90s with Man Utd on the Champions League was unreal. More so the next day at school as everyone would watch it. I'm a pretty respectful fan in that I always liked top players from other clubs. Even Fergie had his 3. I've never really cared about Player's off the pitch antics too much. Some of my favourite non-Man Utd players of all time inclue Tony Adams, Frank Lampard, Miroslav Klose and obviously the orginal phenom, Ronaldo. As a teenager, football took on new meaning for me. I began reading coaching books and studying Managers like Ferguson, Van Gaal and Bobby Robson. Not for their bullshit anecdotes or for the purposes of football itself. I actually used football to learn about business management and management psychology - hence why I am probably a Management Consultant these days. I especially studied Van Gaal as a teen as I understood his management principles better. Ferguson's more of a Leader to me and that's a less instinctive skill for me, though I am reading his new book. Regardless, I learnt a lot from

these top level guys and not many professional people would know that a lot of the work I do in Business Process Engineering or Operations Management is based on my conceptual understanding of Team Tactics or Scouting etc."

The foremost thing to notice in this member's introduction is the value placed on situating his loyalty. He details the length of time that he has been a devotee of the club, placing his loyalty and authenticity at the prow of his aim towards brotherhood. These are indications of how his identity embodies the shared substance of "loyalty." This way of identifying with the group is a trend that is visible when reading the introduction posts over the past eight years. Identification bleeds into mysticism because of the limited nature of a fan discourse that evokes a sentimental attachment to the football team. A lover needs to place his loyalty upfront in the interaction to prove his worth to the group, which works to convey a sense of attachment that resembles a spiritual kinship. Each new introduction borrows and incorporates elements of the of community's values, which then gets passed on to group to reinforce its structure, and more significantly, the user begins to buy into his own participation goals. This way of communicating functions as a means to reinforce the relationship between the fan and the product as a romantic/spiritual one. It is through repeated interactions and a symbolic borrowing that community identity takes shape and is able to hold that shape. As such, purpose is applied to each participant based on how much he/she buys into the mystical definition of the role they play in the setting. Which in turn operates as mystification by obscuring the genuine nature of the relationship as an imbalanced one. Yet, to the individual fan that becomes irrelevant because the scope of the engagement has been reduced to those values that are the substance of this community, loyalty.

The way the above user introduces himself communicates attitudes of a fan whose attachment to Manchester United is rooted deep in his sense of self. Attitudes he learned by way

of a personal transformation that happened due to him discovering this organization that allowed him to define himself against his brother's Liverpool identity. What we start to see are the stems of a unification motive that is consubstantial with the loyalty value that is held in high regard. In this fashion, by noting that the game of football has transformative qualities he spiritualizes the relationship between himself and football to show how this club that he now belongs to helped him achieve a greater sense of individuality. By pledging one's loyalty to this club a fan can achieve transformation by tapping into the sense of unity that football has to offer, which for him extends to his work life. This is part of the persuasion factor of an identification rhetoric, as the group discourse acts upon the individual once he starts defining himself through the language used to situate his role for participation. A fan can then be transformed from a gardener, or a store clerk, or a nurse into the very essence of the loyal Manchester United fan.

The Unification Substance

Another post details the emotions involved with how fans go about their search for belong when engaging as a community member. What the user shares is a set of attitudes that he sees as reasons behind the fan base feeling like an authentic community. According to Burke, "identification is an acting together that grows out of ambiguities of substance" (1945). Brock extends Burke's point, "Both division and unity exist simultaneously, division because each person remains unique, and unity or consubstantiality to the extent that the actors share a locus of motives"(1972,p.319). What this says is that the community substance of loyalty is easy to accept and buy into when there are clear means of division, such as other football teams. A division that is unnatural based on how the footballing structure works to create a sense of rivalry among the teams. This then becomes an important element in the values held close by the

community where by football is a means for bringing people together. What Burke might see as "identification growing out of the ambiguities of substance" (1945).

"Hi all, just realised I haven't done this yet so better get going and introduce myself. I started supporting Man U in the 90s not because of the success but because of the way Sir Alex handled the team and put trust in younger players to achieve instead of buying success. Helped too that he was Scottish. Affection just grown from then and decided to become an official member in 2011. Yes it did take over 10 years but with a disability I tend to think more about how others sees me. Went to my first game at OT in November 2011 and any worries were dispelled. People just treated me as any other supporter so definitely made me at ease. Try to get to min 3 games a year but I compete internationally for Scotland at bowls so between training, working and competing - I can't get to as many games as I would like. My next game hopefully is West Ham on 5th December but no idea yet if tickets will be made available. So thats me in a knutshell - hopefully will spend a lot more time on here."

This reflective personal introduction offers insights into how the unification purpose becomes a key value for the football fan. It also shows how that line of thought dominates the language football fans use to talk about their relationship with the game. The user points out the importance of feeling accepted in the group, where the audience can see him as an extension of them and himself as an extension of crowd. The opening line suggests that this individual saw his failure to introduce himself as a failure to effectively play his role as a loyal participant. He moves next to detailing how long he has been supporting the club, a common theme that is observable on the introduction thread. This way of identifying with the group allows the fan to place fate as part of the reason why he found this community. Once more, the loyalty substance is central to the football fans experience, or at least to the discourse the fan embraces. This by extension becomes fundamental to the way members of the Caf attempt to belong to the group while conversing it into being virtually. The member extends by telling the reasons why he chose this community over another. Once more, the sense of belonging comes to the fore as an important component for repeated participation.

When he mentions attending a game at Old Trafford for the first time that helped dispel his fears of being an outsider due to his disabled body, he eludes to ideals of community as an inherently positive inviting event. The unification substance operates implicitly in his discourse suggesting that Manchester United as a community of fans protect those within its borders. The identification is persuasive because of the features of mysticism relating to transcendence and transformation present in his accounting. This is a common identifiable theme in the majority of introduction posts. It communicates a way of unifying as a fan base that is above the limitations of human behavior. It suggest an authenticity in the coming together; pointing to the way language creates division and reinforce the need for repeated participation as a way to sustain solidarity. Whereby having a disabled body in normal everyday situations sees an individual being rejected by various other communities, but due to the fact that loyalty precedes the body in the football setting he is accepted as equal in his support. In essence, the division happens at different junctures in the footballing community. Where by in the physical setting that division is probably based on the material means of identification (color choices), while in the virtual it is based on the attitudes one communicates.

It is safe to say that if this fan was wearing the blue of Manchester City his disabled body would not be protected, but instead rejected as an outsider. This shows why idealistic identification is so central to the football fan experience when engaging virtually because it is not good enough to just be a fan of football who wears the appropriate colors on Redcafe. One has to show the seeds of loyalty to the group in order to be perceived and participate in said group as an authentic member. This can only occur virtually by means of a discourse that is rooted in the history of the club's values and beliefs. It is acceptance predicated on the acceptance of the group's symbolic boundaries. This amounts to a division among fan bases that leads to mystified

sense of how the sporting hierarchy offers a space for fans to unite. Whereby communities like the Caf allow fans to focus on their own relationship with the artifact by way of keeping talk that centralizes loyalty and unification as the substance of the group. Idealistic identification then keeps discourse circular within the group, constantly reinforcing the substance that is of key to the authentic supporter.

Formal Identification

The formal means of identification becomes tricky to locate when dealing with the virtual engagement. In our case, the symbol of community carries the expectations for how fans should interact in settings of this nature. I argue that these expectations for community are derived from a spiritual understanding of unification being an act of fate based on this "acting together" as being inherently positive. Burke claims, "Belonging in a sense is rhetorical…when considering the identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some societal or economic class"(1950, p.26). He alludes to the way people attend to the expectation of a situation when identifying as a group member, while sticking to a role that runs synonymously with group life.

Members of the Red café operationalize Burke's point at two different stages; first by situating themselves within the Caf's top-down social structure, which then by extension works to reinforce the fan's location at the rear end of a sports hierarchy. This happens because of the ritualization involved with community participation. Members on the Redcafe can identify with each other along the bottom of footballing structure. This enables them to embrace the suspicions of a capitalist hierarchy and participate according to the roles ascribed to them. Burke sees hierarchy as constantly reinforcing the separation between those with authority at the crown and those at the inferior lower end, which he interprets as a formation of mystery.

The mystery of positioning between the top and bottom works to reinforce and stabilize a mystified relationship between fans and the product. It is secret because the great unwashed at the lower end are unable to identify with those at the acme (Burke, 1950). So, even though, fans might believe they are gathered in an act of leveraging against the powers of corporate owners by constructing communities (like the Redcafe) to talk about the issues, they are simply reinforcing practices that conform to the rear. In essence, formal identification happens in the virtual world by attending to the mystery involved with the structuring of both communities, physical and virtual. As such, the expectations of being manipulated and influenced by capitalist powers are cloaked with the spiritualization that is associated with community as an inherently favorable event.

Fan discourse on the Redcafe carries with it an evasive rhetoric derived from the individuals' physical experience that suggests a spiritualized attachment between community and football. When individual members buy into a collective discourse that embraces the essence of cosmic purpose, a sense of unification becomes an act of faith. Where the individuals' search for unity allows him to internalize the group as his own, which subsequently reinforces community. Take this post for example by one member on the introduction thread:

"I have been crazy about football since watching world cup 98 when I was 8, after the league season started, I occasionally watched premier league and later became a fanboy of manchester united. First I only watched some highlights, especially from champions cup of europe. I remember I watched the club first full match when they beat nottm forrest 8-1. What a moment. I used to visit redcafe during gameweek and summer transfer, especially in the past four years, however I never think to become a member. Just now, especially after SAF era, I begin to think that it is time to join the forum!"

His introduction identifies by means of a historical accounting that situates the authentic birth of a fan identity in those moments when football helped him achieve transformation. From

this story, he suggests that he evolved from the occasional onlooker to a "fanboy" the first time

he saw a full match. His post spiritualizes the events of the past by using a transformative

narrative to situate his loyalty to the club as the source of transformation. He draws on his own

images and truth using the clues offered by a footballing discourse to account for his

transformation. The spiritualized moment emerges when he references remembering watching

his first full match, the moment of transformation, leaving no room to challenge his narrative

truth. It was the moment where loyalty to this club became a value rooted in his own identity that

brought him to this community, a moment of fate. It is strategic because he details watching the

entire match, compared to just watching the match, because being a loyal fan means sticking

with your squad until the final minute. Farther, there is no means for knowing if he actually saw

the full match or a half or 86 minutes of the proceedings, but he felt it important to communicate

that point. Thus, by internalizing the events that took place that day to include his transformation

he can achieve the desired result of identifying with the group by presenting it as a spiritual

calling.

In addition, he references the reason for joining this community at this particular time.

Once more, it is a spiritualized discourse relating to loyal participation behind his urge to join in

this act of football unity. In the final line, he mentions Alex Ferguson's retirement as the special

force behind his will to seek out community at this point in time. As many United fans know, the

retirement of the long tenured manager left a yawning hole in the team's identity and by

extension the way the fan base identified around the team. His discourse is suggestive of a

moment of confusion, where his own fan identity became in doubt after the manger's retirement.

As such, the Redcafe community became his guide for how to evolve his Manchester United fan

identity performance once again.

According to Burke persuasion is "spiritual," in the manner that it often positions individual growth as produced by means other than material agencies: whether it be the spirits working in the world, or one's own spiritual force or will, or even the transcendent truth and values of symbols (Goodall, 1973). Community, specifically fandoms, enters the realm of the spiritual by the way it ask bodies to buy into an act of unity while implicitly accepting a dominant authority. When it is used to frame a gathering, it carries with it, as a symbol, a request to behave in a particular manner. In this way, a unifying purpose is deceptive as it is superiors with authority within the group structure that determines what the source of unity is. As such, inferior members rely on a mystical discourse to make sense of their placement in a structure that a bureaucratized society upholds as a positive way to be together. Redcafes' discourse utilizes a traditional legitimized transcendent language as a means of bridging individuals' different perspectives so they can effectively create community. As such, Manchester United fan discourse operates with a sense of the past, when the financial motive was believed to be less salient to the playing of the game. A symbolic relationship derived from a time when community and football were seen as co-existing parts of a whole in the eyes of those situated locally.

A Note on Drama And The Pentad

Burke believed that by situating talk as a part of a social drama, and using his pentad of dramatistic terms (act ,scene ,agent ,agency and purpose) to label the pivotal elements of the drama, the critic gains the language needed to expose how rhetoric operates and how the various identifications work to create identities. He clarifies "drama is present whenever people congregate but that the essential drama of a situation is not revealed until rhetoric exploits it" (Payne, 2002, p.265). The rhetoric of the Redcafe lies in the symbolism of this Manchester fan community where agents act out the drama using only words. The ways (actions) in which

individuals position themselves as loyal supporters (agents) operates as a substance to the scene (fan community); where the dialectics of community talk allows for a rhetoric that is implicitly based on the attention paid to the structure of the scene. Burke explains that rhetoric is the compass to dramatic action, as it points to what lies between the agent and his motive to act, in this case loyalty.

Dramatic talk runs throughout the thread of discussions as individuals try to capture the essence of loyalty that they understand as a key value to being a part of footballing communities. In this way, the drama that is played out as 'community' creates a rhetorical situation that comes with the expectation of proving one's worth to the group via social cohesion. In a reduced way, the fans' sense of purpose is attached to the idea of sports as a communal act or a loyal act, the grounds for this virtual scene. In a roundabout way, it is the sense of loyalty that is exploited by a capitalist design that operates with a "behind the scene" motive in the way this social virtual drama unfolds.

As Burke would have it, the five points of the pentad operate to situate the virtual human drama in the same way it would in the physical world (in this view, dramatic representation is always "virtual"). Thus, using his five terms as a means for exposing how individuals attend to the drama of community we can conclude by showing how an online rhetoric emerges in settings of this design. Burke explains the purpose of the terms,

"In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed) and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means of instruments he used(agency) and the purpose" (Burke, 1945,p.14).

From here, the critic can start to investigate what points of the pentad dominate the drama as it plays out in the virtual sports community. By exposing the dominant points operating in the

drama, we can critically point out the ways individuals derive purpose from the central term or terms. In essence, once the fan identifies with the drama, he/she accepts a dialectic that reduces the situation to a spiritual connection that shifts the focus away from a money centric motive into a purpose related to the value of unification.

It is important to note that in further analysis, the idea of purpose, act and scene operate interchangeably and will be important ratios to focus on moving forward. The scene-purpose ratio operates in a unique way in the virtual space because of the way they shift, influence, divide, combine, and reduce each other within individuals act towards achieving community. The site becomes one where purpose is featured as the dominate term influencing the way the drama unfolds, but only insofar as the scene and act helps to construct that purpose. By extension it is the fans focus on purpose that allows for capitalist industries to operate implicitly as a part of the engagement. Before taking on the task of purpose dissolution, it would be beneficial to analyze how the other terms function to assign purpose. What is being argued here is that at times a scenic perspective is the dominate means for engagement, and at other times it is the act, all of which subsequently equals a purpose of loyal participation for the fan. The idea is that scene, act, and purpose mostly operate as one in the virtual space until the individual acts in a manner that positions one in front of the other. This type of interchange does the work of keeping the "substance" of community as central in each interaction.

Community is a noun that carries with it an implicit verb. Due to this it can become quite fluid in the way individuals understand the concept and the situations it symbolizes. Burke's ratios of the pentad speak to this liquid idea. Pointing out the ratios operating in a particular drama offers the insight of showing where the rhetoric becomes active in the discourse. If we think about this drama of community as a language of motives, then attention to the ratios of the

pentad allows for the illumination of the way motives shift in human interactions. Thus, scene and act are seen as interrelated terms where by the act can only occur in the scene, and the scene is determined based on the nature of the act it contains.

When one aspect of the pentad ratio is seen as fixed then the other is transformed to allow the drama to unfold accordingly. One cannot actively deduce the details of an action from the details of the setting in which it occurred. Once that separation happens in our speech one aspect of the ratio becomes dominant and becomes the central motiving factor for the agents actions. As such, these two terms forces the critic to pay attention to the way humans go through a process of division and merger using language. This all works to generate double meaning when both scene and act are constantly in flux. Further, this offers the possibility for symbolic transformation(rhetoric) based on the way the drama situates one point of the drama as dominant to another. In essence, attention to the movement of the points in the pentad ratio illuminates the emergence of a rhetorical situation that is constructed through language.

Scene-Act-Purpose

The idea behind a scenic perspective is that the agent is not the center of motivation, but instead his actions are a product of the scene itself. What this means is that agent falls into a pattern of communication that places the "community conditions, the social influence of the group and historical events" to the fore of their actions (Payne, 2002, p.265). The elements of the scene dictates what the agent sees as valued in terms of communication. It is a way of communicating that allows for the materialization of community as it is played out as a social drama, due to the expectations one brings acts of community. The unique part about the virtual scene is that it relies on an imagined state on the part of the actors to make this setting on the web actual. In this way, the agent is responsible for materializing the scene that is derived from a

sense of community, usually drawing on the language used to situate that scene in the traditional. From here, act and scene become intertwined on the web as the scene of community brings with it the agents linguistic expectations of how to actualize community.

According to Burke, "It is the principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the scene" (1950, p.27). It is a case of agent sees scene, agent does scene. One member shows this point: "Been reading this forum for a long time now and thought it was time to finally sign up. Been a United supporter all my life ever since I got a Ryan Giggs tshirt as a kid lol and I still love this great team." The user situates the scene of community as the central motive for his participation, pointing to his long history of support for the team as the base for his involvement. Though his act involves introducing himself to the group, he features the conditions of an imagined community as the main reasons for his participation. By doing so, he acts, but only in accord with what he recognizes as a familiar container for those actions, Manchester United community. Placing his support at the fore, proclaiming his long history of authenticity, he acts in a manner that situates his loyalty as one intertwined with the community scene of football fandom. By extension, his purpose becomes blended as a part of the scene, and act which further influences the shape of the group culture.

Burke extends by saying, "the nature of the scene may be conveyed primarily by suggestions built into the lines of verbal action itself" (1945,p.3). In essence, this fan not only reduces his action to the scene of the United community he understands, but his language also works to co-create an extension of a scene that situates purpose at the fore. Additionally, he incorporates the external qualities of the fandom and creates an internal environment for it to make sense, where his historic involvement becomes the defining factor in his connection with the group in which he now operates. Thus, his understanding of this scene is largely based in

those past moments of fandom. In this way, he acts with a purpose as it relates to the container in which he sees himself acting.

This is where things tend to get tricky because of the way "purpose" is usually embedded in the scene and the act itself. There is a pattern within the introduction thread that suggest members have spent months just looking at the discussion boards before signing up for membership. If we consider reading to be a kind of act within this virtual drama, then it would be a case of scenic elements imposing itself on the agent before he starts to shape the drama. When thinking of community as a symbolically accomplished act, it tends to operate in a relational manner where members constantly reinforce the boundaries that situate this drama through talk. Boundaries that work to keep the group connected, and in the same conversation, while keeping non-members on the outskirts.

Being the thriving community that it is, Redcafe, if we buy into the idea of a money motive at its core can influence the individual by influencing the elements of the scene, such as embedding ads into the web page. Thus, through a process of identification the fan buys into the rhetoric of community as a scene, where he is compelled to participate in based on his perceived understanding of the situation as favorable to his fan identity. A capitalist motive then operates implicitly in the virtual realm, where interactions with ads seem to fall in-line with the new expectations one brings not to notion of community, but to the internet space itself in general.

Conclusion

The idea of community is one that is deeply rooted in the human experience. It is a concept that allows symbol-using creatures to cooperate and coordinate actions, and at times thoughts. It is a way of connecting and sharing meaning that is vital to how societies build and sustain order. By most accounts, these types of groupings become pivotal to the way individuals construct and maintain a sense of self. As such, this process of sharing meaning becomes crucial to the way individuals learn to value and appreciate the symbols that construct our communicative world. This thesis has been focused on illuminating the way an idea, such as community, becomes an elevated concept based on how it is situated in a historical conversation and in its day-to-day exchanges.

The notion here is that the word 'community' tends to carry a sentiment of being inherently positive. Thus, it becomes rhetorical in the everyday use based on how individuals attend to the expectations that come with situations label as such. Ultimately, the concept becomes primed for misuse and misunderstanding in communicative exchanges when it starts to operate in the virtual space. Due to the fundamentally capitalist structure that makes up the internet space, the frame of community then becomes operationalized as an invitation for individuals to perform in accord with their expectations of community as it plays out in the physical world. Yet, the sense making that occurs in the physical interaction operates without the vial of a scene that is structured to create profits. The virtual sense making process has to negotiate the ads that pay for this space to be available. This then creates questions relating to the

symbolic transformation that community is undergoing currently, where this new space for engagement has started to reshape the expectations that come with the term. The question becomes what happens when fans start to expect the vial of capitalism as a side order to their community engagement.

New media studies of fan communities have taken hold of the evolution of interaction possibilities between participants who engage in online fan groups. Before the rise of the internet, as a space for building solidarity, fan groups were largely a function of being in the same physical space. Communal boundaries were drawn on the map, which made fandoms limited in their ability to include outsiders to the group. Today when sports fans engage in rivalry talk they do so without expressed acknowledgement of the fact that rivalries started as a function of the physical economic boundaries used to build towns and cities. Virtual communication has changed the nature of fan interactions, to where Duke and North Carolina basketball fans can engage in a twitter war weeks before the game tips off. It is apparent that new generation of fans are starting to reshape how fans interact as a group.

For the purpose of this research, I asked historic questions surrounding community as a philosophical concept in order to make sense of how it becomes transferable to the virtual space. A central interest has been to ask how the lack of a physical location helps and/or hinders the groups' ability to sustain community identity. As a member of various online communities it is easy to accept the glorification that is attached to the word community. It is easier to buy into that concept when it is constantly within reach and hides the muddy undertones that accompany the physical engagement. I appreciate community as a tension riddled event consistently needing to be negotiated through language. It is the ability to create and resolve sports related dramas that

make fan communities feel comfortable as a tension-filled event. I am skeptical however when the community I am a part of is an invisible one.

Fan communities are a symbolic construction that has to be nurtured consistently in order to survive. The bodies responsible for constructing the group rely on the ritual contact with the space and other participants to help sustain the "communitiness" of the group. An individual's ability to recognize symbols and participate with the rituals of the social scene offers the feeling of solidarity, which is prominent reason why individuals seek out sports related social settings. This reliance on symbols and rituals within the social scene, leads me to ask who came first, the individual, the virtual collective, or the virtual space where this getting together happens.

A Critical Conclusion

For this project, I investigated the football fan site Redcafe.net, an online forum dedicated to fans of Manchester United. The site is the self-proclaimed leader when it comes to Manchester United forums, and a thriving community. A questioning of how talk unfolds within the frame of community points to a process of identification as central to the construction of a stable group identity. Members draw on previous language relating to similar situations as a way to fit within the group's shared sense of meaning. The virtual fan experience incorporates these symbols along with other written/verbal acts as a means for showing that the online engagement can carry that sense of solidarity. As such, when fans engage the online space they do so already having purchased the loyalty substance, and subsequently accept the nature of a money motive operating at the core of the internet structure. Ultimately, one's language primes him to accept ideas and themes that are promoted through the online community discussion boards.

What emerges in the online space is a materialization of relationships where the fan is constantly operates as a source of profit due to his wiliness to keep participating at the base of the structure. Through a process of identification a cycle of acceptance emerges where the individual's identity becomes a product of the group and subsequently becomes reliant on the group to sustain that sense of self. Community as a symbol works rhetorically to help offer cues to the individual that this coming together is safe and authentic. Community in the virtual space then becomes an influential term that suggests a favorable human situation for fans to engage based on its historic use.

Various internet strategies are implicit in the virtual interaction, such as data mining, direct marketing ads and overall site hits that are capitalist tools used to profit off the fans search for solidarity. Each time a fan logs on to Redcafé to participate in community discussion he creates profit for someone operating above him on the site, and in a sports hierarchy in general. Yet, by means of the language fans use to achieve their shared sense of togetherness they understand this event as a spiritual coming together.

To clarify, this sketch of the Redcafé community is by no means comprehensive. Instead, it is the first layer of a layered questioning of what fans bring to make community possible, virtually. By drawing on various schools of thought, this study places the fan at the center of the action and asks how a rhetoric emerges by means of a social actor attempting to fit a drama. Thus, it is important to keep in mind the three interchangeable ways community and communication are intertwined. By this, I mean community and communication as co-terminus terms, a community as a function of symbolic interaction, and community as a situational accomplishment by ritualized performances. This formation allowed for a strategic set-up to do

criticism that points to the mysticism built into the language used to structure and sustain the social order via the principles of hierarchy.

When fans do the job of embracing the frame of community, as it relates to sports, they unknowingly situate the entire engagement as a drama in terms of community as it is envision it in the physical realm. This occurs because of the need to make sense of being at the lower end of a social structure. Burke believed that the sharing of ideas with other symbol using creatures was largely an act of misdirection, which is a basic condition that comes with the complexity of language (Payne, 2002, p.264). In this way, it becomes vital for the critic to pay attention to the speaker-audience relationship, by looking pass the text to the participants needs and expectations. The individual's relationship with the words on the computer screen is unique in the virtual world because the speaker is required to be both the audience and performer, simultaneously. In an abstracted manner, members of the Redcafe are constantly communicating in a pattern that allows them to see themselves as agents of the scene and not agents to the scene. Thus, fans are constantly working to keep the drama turning over, in this way they can spiritualize their positon to make sense of the hierarchy. Where to be a loyal fan becomes an act of fate that allows for a complete transformation.

According to Burke (1960, p.45) "Even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality, and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality." He speaks of the way humans situate truth as a spiritual part of the human experience, one that allows the individual participant to see loyalty as a kind of universal truth in this "human situation." Once more, means and ends collide, as the idea of support functions as an end to the engagement; when in reality it is a means by which the fan

becomes profitable. Thus, a dramatics perspective reveals a dialectic of substance as the users internal motives is pit against the external motives of the scene.

The next stage of this layered type of questioning is to detail the way this drama unfolds fully using Burke's pentad. Further, this will illustrate the various other layers of questioning involved with the virtual space; how is the virtual community reshaping our sense of community? Are we establishing a new universal third space, or are we situating individualism as an act of community to replace community? How can we build and sustain a sense of community in these virtual spaces without the tensions involved in a negotiation of physical identity? Are these virtual communities creating a new more advanced version of Burber's narrow ridge? On the other hand, are we using the limitations of online communication to interact without regard for connecting? In essence, are we crowning these virtual communities to be communities too soon, are we sure that they are upholding the principles of community and not dissolving them?

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