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Masculinities, Affect and the (re)place(ment) of Stardom in Formula One Fan Leisure Practices

Writing from an autoethnographic perspective, this article explores male leisure practices via the mediated relationships fans enter into with stars. More specifically, my own fandom for Formula One driver Jacques Villeneuve is the locus of study, revealing how this affective investment shapes and furnishes my corresponding leisure practices. Notions of gendered ‘performativity’ come to the fore, with my own displays evoking, enacting and revealing oscillating performances of masculinity. Moreover, there are interesting gendered dynamics that such fan leisure practices flag in terms of the intersection of female/male relationships and the potential ‘fantasy’ and/or narcissistic readings that a male fan identifying with and performing as another male sport star afford. Finally, my research reveals paradoxes for contemporary masculinities, with fans reliant upon mediation and commodification to facilitate and sustain their performative roles.

Introduction

Despite an acknowledged dearth in research on masculinities and leisure practices, an emerging orientation towards conceptualising the pleasurable dynamics of men’s leisure practices within and as micro lived experiences is gradually taking place (e.g., Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b, 2007b; Moller, 2007; Pringle, 2009; Stranger, 1999). To add to this growing body of literature, I turn to Grossberg’s (1992a, 1992b) notion of affect to examine how my affective investment in, and attachment to, Formula One driver Jacques Villeneuve inflects my leisure practices through an autoethnographic account. As a writing strategy, autoethnography or personal experience narratives blend the personal with the cultural through an evocative and self-reflexive style (e.g., Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Denison & Markula, 2003, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holman Jones, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Pringle, 2001, 2003; Sparkes,

1996, 2000; Tsang, 2000). Thus, in this article, autoethnography serves to demonstrate the actualisations of affective investments in and attachments to Villeneuve embedded in my Formula One fan practices, while strategically being deployed to evoke an emotive response for readers, resonate with a wider socio-cultural experience identifiable within male leisure practices and to enrich critical analyses of affective relationships. To facilitate this analysis, I turn first to fandom and performance, before tracing my gendered, performative and affective Formula One fan leisure practices across mediated and consumerist social terrains.

Performing Affective Fandom

Despite the widespread use of ‘fan’ or ‘fandom’ in both popular culture and academic texts, fandom remains elusive to definition or categorisation (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Crawford, 2004; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992, 2007a; Sandvoss, 2005). This is reflected in both sport and television, where some authors have tried to articulate a distinction between live attendance and television spectatorship (e.g., Guttman, 1986; Rinehart, 1998; Wann et al., 2001), sport spectatorship and fandom (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991; Schirato, 2007), sport fans versus consumers (e.g., Giulianotti, 2002; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993) or distinctions between viewers and fans through their uses of television (e.g., Bacon-Smith, 1992; Gray, 2003; Jenkins, 1992). For others, fandom is ‘common knowledge’ and does not necessarily require specific definition. Indeed, as Hills (2002) suggests, “everybody knows what a ‘fan’ is. It’s somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse” (p. ix). Moreover, Jenkins (2007a) argues that, to some extent, ‘we’ all have become fans through engaging in contemporary online interactive, participatory and knowledge cultures. Clearly, however, not all people are fans or are comfortable with being labelled fans. What seems more useful is recognising the “‘*intense*’ relationship” (Hills, 2006, p. 100, italics in original) that fans have with the media,

shaped through their engagement with texts, famous individuals and their array of consumptive and/or performative practices. This is supported by Sandvoss (2005), who defines fandom as “*the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text*” (p. 8, italics in original), such as a media-specific text or other popular texts such as sport teams or stars/celebrities.¹

While it is difficult to adequately capture and theorise emotional involvement or audience pleasures as a closely related notion (see Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006a, 2007b; Plantinga, 2009; Ruddock, 2007; Staiger, 2005; Whannel, 1998), I would suggest that the notion of fan ‘intensity’ can most usefully be understood through Grossberg’s (1992a, 1992b) concept of *affect*. In particular, affect offers a vocabulary for articulating the attachment to and investment in media objects/texts by fans, the affective relationships and practices fans engage in, and the temporal, spatial and embodied dynamics which underpin the intensities of such investments. Grossberg (1992b) suggests that,

Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the ‘feeling’ of life.

One can understand another person’s life, share the same meanings and pleasures, but still not know how it feels. Such ‘feeling’ is a socially constructed domain of cultural effects. Affect operates across all of our sense and experiences, across all of the domains of effects which construct daily life. Affect is what gives ‘color’, ‘tone’ or ‘texture’ to the lived. (pp. 80-81)

Grossberg is offering a notion of pleasure which, although clearly socially orientated, also recognises the individual ‘feelings’ that are evoked or experienced without assuming that these remain consistent or constant. To understand these ‘feelings’ and how affect provides ‘colour’ to daily life, Grossberg employs an intersecting set of terms that construct and shape both the activation of affect and how it operates on a micro-social level for individuals.

Central to notions of affect are investments (the caring or passion for something), mattering maps (how individuals chart their investments and make particular things ‘matter’) and intensity (literally the energy or intensity of the investment). With mattering maps providing coherency to these broader affective attachments, Grossberg (1992b) is intimating that affect, as an investment and plane of effects, temporarily anchors individuals in specific moments and practices. Therefore, although fandom is an “*essentially contradictory process*” (Hills, 2002, p. 182, italics in original), I will draw upon Grossberg’s concept of affect to articulate fandom as a shifting project of the social self which draws upon an embodied, emotive and affective relationship with a media object/text. In this respect, the interplay among fan identity, media texts, technology, consumption and everyday life in male leisure practices provides the terrain for navigating and theorising contemporary fandom.

Masculine Fandom: Performativity and Performance

Through the diverse uses that fans have with media objects/texts, in terms of their close engagements, encyclopaedic knowledge and productive capacity to scavenge, poach, (re)appropriate and reconfigure media texts (Jenkins, 1992), fandom is often considered to be a *performative* rather than passive process (e.g., Crawford, 2004; Jenkins, 2006b; Lancaster, 2001; Sandvoss, 2003, 2005). This has interesting links to Goffman’s (1959) notion of performance, wherein ‘the self’ draws on a set of socially-specific performances for the presentation of self in everyday life, malleable for garnering and managing favourable self-impressions in diverse social contexts. Moreover, connections to gender performativity are also apparent, with Butler (1990, 1993) noting that gender is interpellated as a performative imposition to be discursively negotiated rather than freely chosen. Butler (1993) argues, “subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of gendering, but emerges only within and as a matrix of gender relations themselves”

(p. 7). Hence gender is not merely a performance, but a constitutive *performative* process that regulates and shapes ‘our’ gendered subjectivity.

Turning to fandom, not surprisingly female participation has often been marginalised within an assumed male preserve, although numerous authors have debunked such assertions through the diverse practices and uses female fans forge with soap operas, film stars or sport (e.g., Bacon-Smith, 1992; Bruce, 1998; Coddington, 1997; Crawford & Gosling, 2004; Gosling, 2007; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Hopkins, 2002; Stacey, 1991, 1994). For our present purposes, and in attempt to reconcile Butler and Goffman, the dual performativity and performance of masculinity via fandom is pursued. Brickell (2005) suggests that “the masculine self can be understood as reflexively constructed within performances; that is, performances can construct masculinity rather than merely reflect its pre-existence, and socially constituted masculine selves act in the social world and are acted on simultaneously” (p. 32). Thus, to analyse the interrelationship between masculinities and my Formula One practices as a gendered fan performance, I consider how my ‘fan-self’ undergoes constant reinvention through the performative and consumptive (re)affiliation(s) with Jacques Villeneuve, the media object while, simultaneously, being reflective of and embedded within a socio-cultural performance of masculinity. Media fandom and my engagement with diverse representations of Villeneuve are explored here as a first point of entry, before returning to the salience and use of consumer goods later in this article.

Formula One and Mediated Fandom

With television viewing figures purported to be in excess of 50 billion annually (Hotten, 1999), Formula One is a profoundly mediated sport and, for most of its global audience, is experienced primarily through its televised coverage. Accordingly, these telecasts were my prime means for accessing mediated representations of French-Canadian driver Jacques Villeneuve during his racing career (1996-2006). By way of introduction, Villeneuve was

one of the most renowned star drivers in Formula One during this time, having won the championship in 1997, as well as being a previous IndyCar Champion and Indianapolis 500 race winner in 1995. As a fan, much of Villeneuve's appeal for me lay in the maverick traces he provided as the scruffy rebel, anti-corporate dissenter and macho risk-taker, aspects I have developed elsewhere (see Fleming & Sturm, 2011; Sturm, 2009). Mindful that Villeneuve is always already a media object, a specific concrete instance of my own engagement with televised Formula One offers an initial layering for analysing mediated fandom.

Malaysian Grand Prix 2006

It's nearly midnight. The last few hours have seemed endless. Bolting upright from my reclining position on the couch, I reach for the remote controls. As 'we' cross live to the Grand Prix I press record on my DVD and turn the volume up on the television. While the commentators highlight key things to watch for, I leap across to my computer and ensure the website is running. The live timing screen pops up with all the names listed on the starting grid. Glancing back at the television, I see Jacques' BMW for the first time. "He's so cool," I exclaim to myself, staring at his distinctive helmet; the bright blue, pink, yellow, green and red colours resplendent against the white backdrop of his car. Pride and expectation wells up inside me. "Let's go Jacques," I whisper, hopeful he can produce something today. I can't sit down, pacing back and forward between couch and computer, anticipating Jacques' start as the cars embark on their formation lap....

Returning to the edge of the couch I watch the light sequence begin. My focus is on Villeneuve's start from 10th. The lights fade. Springing to life, 22 cars explode off the grid. "Go JV!" Unsure if that was an internal thought, I catch myself yelling, "Yes. Go Jacques go!" as Jacques battles with three cars abreast into the first corner. The camera cuts to the front runners. Perched on the edge of my couch I am eager to know whether he is ahead of these competitors. Leaping over to the computer I await the first sector times, while rapidly

rechecking the on-screen televisual action. There is a BMW in the background but the focal point is the race leaders and I can't identify the helmet design. Meanwhile a car flies off the circuit and kicks up dust to add to the confusion. Like a slot-machine spitting out coins, the computer instantly updates positions with a flurry of names and numbers leaping on the screen. P9. "Thataboy!!! C'mon Jacques!!" He is just behind Jarno Trulli, but not by much...

Although a generic account of a 'typical' viewing experience, this autoethnographic vignette reveals the solitary nature of my viewing practices. Locality and place clearly impact on viewing televised Formula One in New Zealand, with a midnight start on Sunday nights for most European races not affording many opportunities for socialising or viewing in a communal setting. Such an occurrence goes against the significance of communal settings and forms of homosocial bonding for fandom established both in the sport literature (e.g., Crawford, 2004; Eastman & Land, 1997; Sandvoss, 2003, 2005; Trujillo & Krizek, 1994; Wenner & Gantz, 1998; Wenner & Jackson, 2009) and increasingly being emphasised in research on fan communities (e.g., Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b). Moreover, on a micro-level, the narrative reveals some discrepancies and specificity to my viewing patterns. For example, while I am reliant upon, and both use and share the dominant global telecast as part of an 'imagined' Formula One community (Anderson, 1991), the attention I devote to this one text is often of a more diffused, dispersed or interactive form. This reflects but differs from theories of the distracted *glance* when viewing television (e.g., Caldwell, 1995; Cubitt, 1984; Ellis, 1992; Gray, 2003), as my viewing is not distracted by either the specifics of my domestic setting (e.g., attending to chores or the gendered impositions of other family/household members), nor due to forms of 'channel surfing'.

Rather, the diffused or dispersed attention is derived from the "'intense' relationship" (Hills, 2006, p. 100, italics in original) that I have with Jacques Villeneuve, with my attention

piqued when either his image or name is on offer during a televised Grand Prix (e.g., through screened images, commentary or graphics). However, a homoerotic reading of this engagement is unconvincing for, unlike most other sports where the star image/body is accessible during the live telecast (e.g., the tennis player, the footballer), Formula One conceals rather than displays the athletic male body via the car, helmet and commodified racing garb (Kennedy, 2000; Sturm, 2009). Furthermore, due to Villeneuve's largely absent-present televisual representation (i.e., the brief and fleeting moments that he is shown on screen), my attention is fragmented and relies on contemporaneous live timing from the internet on which his textual presence and performances can be more easily garnered, measured and assessed. Thus, through these diffused and distracted viewing processes, I am navigating specific media texts with the intensity of my attention orientated towards Villeneuve, often either reinforced by or in spite of what the global telecast is broadcasting, as a second vignette demonstrates.

Lap 16, Malaysian Grand Prix 2006

The cars are spreading out, although Trulli is merely half a second ahead of Jacques.

Playing amateur strategist, I am feverishly dissecting each sector time and the gaps to surrounding drivers in an attempt to deduce what fuel loads each driver is running in the race. The director has obviously noted their duel, periodically cutting to a shot of Trulli being pursued by Villeneuve. My focus switches to the television as I listen to the commentators and see JV closing in on the position. Returning to the live timing, I see he is consistently improving his sector times. Hearing the commentators mention JV, my head swivels back towards the television. I feel a chill travel up the back of my spine as they observe that Villeneuve is lining Trulli up for a pass, while reminding the viewers of his strong performances so far this season. With a broad smile I leap to my feet and clap as JV pulls out of Trulli's slipstream and takes P7. The images show JV deftly overtaking Trulli

through the first corner. “Yes,” I cheer, punching my clenched fist in the air. “He’s done it!” JV has got the place. I am ecstatic. JV is returning to form and the commentators have noticed, praising his efforts. I intently examine the times as the camera cuts to other race action. Villeneuve’s battle for a points-scoring position is going to be close....

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest that fans are “those people who become particularly attached to certain programmes or stars within the context of relatively heavy mass media use” (p. 138; see also Drucker & Cathcart, 1994). With my complete reliance on mediation to consume and follow Formula One, as well as an explicit investment in Villeneuve, this definition of fandom seems applicable to my own practices. These aspects are further reinforced through the work of numerous scholars who advocate the central role that stardom plays in attracting sport media audiences (Lines, 2001; Whannel, 1999, 2008), how mediation constructs and represents sport stardom (e.g., Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Drucker, 1994; Smart, 2005; Vande Berg, 1998; Whannel, 1992, 2002) and the broader ‘intimate’ connections derived from contemporary celebrity cultures (e.g., Dyer, 1986; Holmes & Redmond, 2006; Hopkins, 2002; Rojek, 2001; Sturm, 2008; G. Turner, 2004). Unfortunately, however, often the research links such star/audience connections to commodification and the exploitation of stars (and of course, by implication, audiences too) for commercial purposes, leaving the pleasures and levels of intimacy for audiences relatively unacknowledged (for a rare exception see Redmond, 2006). While I turn to a discussion of fandom and consumption shortly, the intimate connection facilitated through mediation requires further attention.

‘Intense’ Male Fandom in the Domestic Realm

Farred’s (2002) account of his long distance love (LDL) for the Liverpool Football Club seems to encapsulate the ‘intense’ attachment to a particular media text/object evoked in my

second narrative. Seeking to explain his position, Farred (2002) argues that, “fandom will not do as a description of my relationship to Liverpool. LDL is what happens when you overidentify” (p. 9), before going on to suggest that his version of LDL is of “enduring love, blind, rock-solid faith, and abiding passion” (p. 10). Thus, Farred reveals a long distance love which has been fostered through mediation, conducted in solitude and experienced as an intensely passionate and emotional investment. However, despite his humorous attempts, the linkage of fandom to notions of overidentification potentially mires us in earlier theorisations of fans as pathological or deviant (see overview in Jenson, 1992). Re-orientating fandom within a gendered domestic setting allows us to both witness and, to some extent, dismiss the ‘obsessed’ fan that can be read into my own specific practices. My then girlfriend of six years, Ashlee, arguably experienced the intensities of my fandom first-hand and most profoundly as images and narratives of Villeneuve were an everyday part of ‘our’ relationship. Reflective of the gendered politics that play out in relationships, Ashlee took an interest in Formula One and accommodated my Villeneuve focus despite not being a fan, while both became subjects or objects for us to invest in to varying degrees through discussions, jokes, gentle teasing and other activities.

However, to further develop an ‘obsessed’ fan layering, I often wondered whether Ashlee avoided watching Formula One with me. While race viewing was often not practical due to her early start on Mondays for work, I am sure the few viewing experiences we had together were blighted by my inability to sit still or remain calm during a race (as is demonstrated in my vignettes). With Formula One coverage, Ashlee saw the full range of emotions I went through as I interacted with the television (and Jacques); cheering loudly and bounding around the room during a good performance, castigating Jacques when he made a mistake, lashing out by kicking or punching furniture during misfortune, or needing consoling as I sulked in the corner due to a poor performance or another blown engine robbing Jacques of

points. No doubt she was accustomed to the intensity of my passion, although she often reminded me, “He can’t hear you!” Indeed, reflective of the allegedly ‘obsessed’ fan, I have a nagging suspicion that my viewing practices were an emotional roller coaster she preferred not to ride.

Nevertheless, linking my own fandom to notions of overidentification or pathology does not seem to take us very far. What becomes apparent in my second narrative (and is being implied with Ashlee) are emotive, passionate and occasionally ‘shared’ dimensions that, while clearly ‘intense’, are not usefully explained as deviant, asocial or antisocial activities or behaviours (there is no ‘deeper’ problematic component to my fandom that needs palliative treatment, reconciliation or resolution). In fact, with Ashlee, a long-term loving relationship was maintained in which Formula One was always only a small part (e.g., it was never the basis of our relationship or the chief ‘shared’ activity), while Ashlee would regularly tease me about Villeneuve’s scruffy appearance, age and results, much to her amusement despite my ‘intense’ attachment. Moreover, other ‘normal’ everyday social relations with others, absent of any specific Formula one link, were also maintained. So, the regressive stereotype of a singularly focused, ‘couch potato’ fan obsessed with only F1/JV and devoid of any sense of a ‘life’ seems to misunderstand, misinterpret and overly simplify the ‘intense’ relationship some fans enter into through their reliance upon and use of mediations in daily life. It is this use of diverse media forms that we will continue to develop here.

Media Fandom, Transmediality and Meta-Texts

Both of my vignettes have thus far been centred on television as the ‘prime’ text (as well as the overlapping salience of the internet). However, there are a broader range of media forms (metatexts) that also afford my entry into and experience of Formula One and/or Villeneuve. Indeed, it is not an understatement to suggest that my fandom is primarily a mediated relationship, reliant on an array of metatexts such as magazines, newspapers, video games,

posters, images, models/toys and even text messages or emails (e.g., the often abbreviated conversations with Ashlee via those last two technologies). Not only are these texts often scavenged for personalised usage but they also became shared resources for fuelling the occasional 'Formula One interactions' within my relationship with Ashlee. This process of transmediality (i.e., drawing on a diverse range of media) is recognised as commonplace in contemporary fan leisure practices while new media technologies, such as the internet, mobile digital devices and video games, also offer important contributions to the representation and experiential reception of mediated sport for viewers (e.g., see Crawford, 2004; Crawford & Rutter, 2006, 2007; Rowe, 2004). In fact, it is important to note that many of these processes of transmediality are experienced not only across but also *through* these media in terms of the modalities of embodied experience, mobility, personalisation and sensory perception they reproduce and enhance (Hermes, 1999; Marks, 2000, 2002; Sobchack, 1992, 2004, Sturm, 2009). Hence, the celebratory gestures, constant motion and other bodily sensations documented in the vignettes (e.g., the chill up the back of my spine) are embodied responses to the specific televised representations, while constituting part of my engagement with the materiality of the Formula One media text. A third vignette further substantiates this claim.

Playing at 'Being' Jacques Villeneuve: Video Games and Immersive Media Fandom

Qualifying, 2005 Australian Grand Prix (PlayStation 2).

Toggling through the menu options, the commentators are exalting the need for precision as I finalise the car set-up for qualifying. 'Stay focused' I remind myself, aware that I need to curb my speed and hit the apexes to minimise any lost time through the first two sectors.

Hurtling towards the first corner I intentionally brake late, negotiating the various curves through a mixture of delicate and decisive turns, all the while feathering the throttle mid-corner and running high on the kerbs to maximise my exit speed. This feels like a quick lap time. 'Come on, get this right' I tell myself, a mental reminder of the rapid change of

direction through Turns 11 and 12 where it is too easy to run off track. 'Nice!', I exclaim, as on-screen I see I have posted the fastest time in sector two. My eyes are consuming the track before me while I intently look for my braking points and the optimum racing-line through the final series of fast ninety-degree corners. 'Yeah, that's it. Nail it!' I encourage myself, aggressively using the kerbs to maintain my high entry speeds. Carefully negotiating the final corners, I accelerate hard towards the start/finish line. 'Yes!' I scream, 'got it!' as my lap time flashes up on screen. I've clinched pole position. 'Keep proving them wrong, Jacques!' I exclaim, endorsing the triumphant large on-screen image of Villeneuve's Sauber.

Video game play extends the embodied and immersive dynamics to mediated engagement by literally facilitating my playfulness with the material text. Offering elements of fantasy, PlayStation allows me to *become* Jacques Villeneuve and actively (re)play, (re)create and favourably manipulate his Formula One performances in a manner that is more than authentically possible as a fan (especially given Villeneuve's dire 'real' F1 results post-1998). Or, in Baudrillardian terms, PlayStation affords multiple layers of simulation; as a fan, as a driver and as Villeneuve in a simulated Grand Prix within a simulated Formula One season (Baudrillard, 1983, 1994). This process potentially reduces and redefines the 'textual' and 'lived' gap between fan and object and has interesting metaphysical possibilities for the place and performative merging and/or replacement of the male-fan-self and male-star, an aspect I also develop later through processes of narcissism. Nevertheless, with Hermes (1999) suggesting that identity construction is "a process of meaning-making whereby individual identities are formed as a result of social interaction based on or making use of cultural sources of meaning production" (p. 71), it can be argued that the investment in Villeneuve requires my navigation of and immersion in a plethora of media texts to furnish such attachments. In fact, evoking Grossberg, my mediated engagements *anchor* my

affective attachment to Villeneuve, while this *intensity* is enacted and *made to matter* on both a personalised level through fantastical gameplay and embodied practices, and on broader socio-cultural levels, such as through my interactions with Ashlee discussed earlier, where we navigate and share these Formula One mediations (i.e., televisual, web-based and via text messages). Therefore, the processes of mediated engagement that are evoked within and through the screened Villeneuve image become a first, prime site for my leisure practices.

Commercialisation, Commodification and Fans as Consumers

On another level, my leisure practices as a male fan are entangled in late capitalism and its associated practices of commercialisation (e.g., the socio-economic processes that turn a sport, such as Formula One, into a business) and commodification (e.g., transforming Formula One into a set of commodities, such as t-shirts, caps and other assorted paraphernalia for exchange and profit). Of course, Formula One as a transnational, corporate sport also transforms Villeneuve into a consumer object obtainable as commodified merchandise. Not surprisingly, fans are often conceptualised as consumers due to their procuring of such wares with, for example, Giulianotti (2002) suggesting that football fans are brand-loyal and market-centred as their identification is “authenticated most readily through the consumption of related products” (p. 36). Hence, despite acknowledging levels of intimacy, intensity and affective attachment, fans are deemed to be primarily reliant upon economic investments to display their levels of support (e.g., see Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Guttman, 1986; Sandvoss, 2005; Schirato, 2007; Williams, 2007).

For other authors, rather than assuming fans are merely ‘duped’, consumption constitutes a key avenue for enacting the social performance of fandom. An important marker for this broader socio-cultural phenomenon is Hills’ (2002) concept of performative consumption. Hills acknowledges that fan performances are always enmeshed in consumption, noting that “media fandoms presuppose consumption and are expressed through consumption” (Hills,

2002, p. 159). Nevertheless, he also recognises an “iterable space of fan cultural identity” (pp. 159-160) in the fan interrelationship with objects which enables the performer to express a degree of identity through his/her performance(s). Using Elvis impersonators as an example, Hills suggests that impersonation is such a project as, within their performances, they impersonate the archival record yet also improvise “the fan’s lived experience *as a fan*” (Hills, 2002, p. 165, italics in original). In this manner, the impersonator *consumes* the Elvis image and material goods, *performs* as Elvis while, simultaneously, *performing* his or her own lived experience as an Elvis fan. These points will become apparent in my vignettes shortly.

Consumer Goods and Performances within Fan Communities

Crawford (2004) also locates and develops the significance of consumption in fan practices which, he suggests, do not necessarily determine, dupe, subsume or transform fans into powerless consumers. Focusing on sport merchandise, Crawford (2004) notes that sport-related goods allow fans to “display their identity and membership to a particular supporter community” (p. 114) while arguing that consumption plays an important role in how we define and make sense of our ‘self’, as well as distinguish our ‘self’ from others. This merging of consumption, performance and merchandise potentially can be explained through the three theoretical concepts of narcissism, conspicuous consumption and cultural literacy. Rather than pursuing a strictly psychoanalytical approach, understanding narcissism as a process of self reflection in a broader socio-cultural and mediated context has proven to be more useful (e.g., see Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). In particular, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest that narcissism underpins and shapes our ongoing performance of media consumption as, on an everyday basis, we perform various *diffused* audience roles through our oscillating engagements with media spectacles. In this capacity, narcissism constitutes the public display of performance in quotidian settings, with the visual signifiers

of fan consumption (i.e., the items procured and displayed) seemingly also being pivotal to such performative displays. Recalling my own first experience of live Formula One provides a useful starting point for applying these concepts.

Friday, Practice Day, 2002 Australian Grand Prix.

Wearing my 1999 Villeneuve cap and JV t-shirt, I rush through the gates and make my way towards the Fangio stand. I can't wait for to see Jacques 'live' for the first time. As I press on I begin to feel slightly underdressed. Scything through the vast crowds, I observe the number of people in team gear. Just like the teams themselves wear. A guy in a Benetton F1 shirt walks past. 'Man he looks so cool. They all look like authentic F1 people'. An easy decision is made: 'I've got to get myself a team shirt!' After the first thrilling day of seeing live Formula One action, I join the masses on the tram back to the city. A nondescript shop near Spencer Street Station seems to have attracted a throng of F1 attendees. Pressing through the sweaty sea of bodies, I strike gold. Inside the shop they have a rack of team shirts, although I quickly become agitated. 'What's with all this Ferrari gear, is there any British American Racing (BAR) stuff? Aha, here's one. This looks like last year's shirt. Omigod! Is that how much it costs? I guess I won't be getting any other gear'. Bubbling inside, I take the shirt up to the counter. Since I'm parting with (Aust)\$300, the guy inquires if I want to see other 'exclusive' team gear not on display. I don't hesitate to say yes and am ushered into a cramped back room. Like a child in a candy store, my eyes devour the items in front of me. Unfortunately, it is mostly Ferrari stock but I look at what BAR gear there is. I see a signed JV cap, but the asking price is nearly equivalent to the shirt. Politely declining the offer, I purchase the BAR shirt instead. I can't wait to wear this at the track tomorrow.

My purchase of the BAR shirt is consistent with Veblen's (1926) concept of conspicuous consumption, through which people use consumption as a strategic, conspicuous and

symbolic act to display their social status and worth (see also Baudrillard, 1998; Rojek, 2000; Wearing & Wearing, 2000). Procuring and displaying authentic team gear operates as a symbolic marker; signifying an economic status (the expense of the item), in addition to a social distinction based on perceived social status and worth. There are clearly also performative and narcissistic dimensions to this self-reflective display of self to others too, reinforcing how consumer goods are used to associate the fan-self with his/her particular object(s) of fandom. Crawford (2004) suggests that, “it is through consumer goods that the ‘fan’ can increase their knowledge, and more importantly, display their commitment through conversation and the consumer goods they own and display, which allows them to progress along their individual career path and feel increasingly integrated within their chosen supporter community” (p. 81).

For ‘real’ fans of Formula One, it can be argued that the social display of this authentic gear in public (and primarily Formula One-specific) spaces accords a sense of belonging to or integration within a ‘Formula One insider’ community. Semiotic and cultural relations also come into force, with logos and symbols permeating the knowledge encoded within merchandise while serving to buttress the Formula One knowledge, interest and display by insider fans. In this manner, logos become a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), allowing fans to recognise and/or reveal the team and/or driver that the insider is supporting through adornments such as team, sponsor or driver symbols. For example, for driver-specific fans, the racing number, national flag, helmet design and/or signature is often important for such displays, as is evinced by my strategic demonstration of Villeneuve-specific merchandise. These Formula One displays shall now be investigated in more depth.

Conspicuous Consumption and Male Formula One Fandom

As a gendered practice, the consumption processes noted above potentially contribute to forms of homosocial bonding. In fact, the forging of male relationships is often premised on

obtaining such material goods as, inadvertently, these goods tend to elevate the status of their bearers via their displays of Formula One knowledge. Therefore, status can be strategically achieved within the Formula One fan community, with a degree of prestige and authority (symbolic capital) ascribed to those fans who procure and display authentic team gear inscribed with the 'correct' team and/or driver logos (a form of cultural capital), and who are culturally literate in their readings, discussions and demonstrations of Formula One's forms of cultural capital (e.g., through merchandise and being highly knowledgeable in race strategies, driver statistics, team information, etc.). Hence, strategically reflexive, 'insider' fans utilise conspicuous consumption through their purchases and (narcissistic) displays as they are highly literate in recognising and articulating markers of social differentiation and distinction.

The ideas traced thus far reveal the uneasy tension that exists between male Formula One fandom and consumption. Clearly, at a basic level, consumption is fundamental to most (if not all) forms of fandom. However, as my examples of Formula One merchandise and the insider status demonstrate, there are multifaceted dynamics to how consumption inflects fan practices, constructs hierarchies and social relations, and the salient role that consumer goods, place and consumptive displays play in fan communities. On the one hand, it could be argued that authentic team gear *defines* what constitutes cultural capital which the culturally literate insider must 'buy' into (economically and figuratively) to articulate and demonstrate their level of symbolic capital within the Formula One fan community. In light of this reading, my procurement of Jacques Villeneuve merchandise, often branded with transnational corporate logos, potentially reduces my display of fandom to merely a marketing ploy for these companies (e.g., I literally and voluntarily become a walking billboard on their behalf). There would also appear to be a reinforcement of Formula One's implicit code of high-technology, bravado and risk-taking as somehow deeply 'masculine' through these performative and knowledge-based displays, a point we will return to shortly. On the other hand, despite the

fatalistic overtones of inauthenticity that underpin the 'Formula One insider' fan community due to its corporate and commercial underpinnings, it can be countered that such 'duped' fans also see something of worth and/or value in the sport and forge their affective attachments accordingly. At this juncture, another autoethnographic narrative considers fan performances and broader gender relations within Formula One.

Formula One Fan Performance and Gender

Saturday, Australian Grand Prix 2002

Back at the track, I am feeling really good! With my hair spiked up, 4-day stubble, yellow tinted sunglasses and the resplendent BAR team shirt, I am feeling like and, in my mind, looking like Jacques. I've also made sure that no one needs to guess which driver I've come to support, as I'm carrying a large Canadian flag with Villeneuve emblazoned on it. I am, in a figurative sense, submerged in a sea of red, being heavily outnumbered by the Ferrari-clad fans. Unperturbed, I feel unique in my display of driver and team allegiance, as very few are dressed in BAR regalia, and I only see one other replica shirt like mine with the large Lucky Strike logo. I also imagine that there is a sense of individuality with my hairstyle, glasses, stubble and comportment, although of course I am trying to replicate Jacques and lack any real sense of my own individuality. Walking back through the crowd, I can feel a lot of eyes on me. I try to remain detached and outwardly 'cool', playing out in my mind how real I look, like an F1 insider and, hopefully, like Jacques too. Some guys take a second look, while the pretty girls smiling at me certainly boost my confidence. Perhaps I'm having the effect that the Benetton F1 guy had on me yesterday.

Through my public display, I am providing a symbolic connection to Villeneuve as the object of my fandom, while ingrained in my performances is also an assumption that, to some degree, Villeneuve has become an extension of my fan-self. That is, the performative

dimensions that I evoke within my narrative contain an assumed link to Villeneuve through reproducing and resembling his appearance for which, as a fan-performer, I am seeking broader audience awareness (see also Stacey [1991, 1994] on female fans, film stars and resemblance). Underscoring these points is the primacy of the Albert Park venue. This temporal moment and spatial site provides an audience for my performances, facilitates levels of recognition for the apparent merging of fan and object and, conjecturally, provides positive reinforcement for my performative display. As such, the merged *fan-self-star* public image is performed for (and potentially can be read by) both the culturally literate insider fans who are able to decode the JV-specific signifiers and the collective array of casual attendees, some of whom acknowledge my performance but always on varying scales of recognition.

Indeed, turning to gendered fan and race-track attendee relations specifically, I would suggest that the alleged positive appraisals for my display sustain, reinforce and provide impetus to my performances as a heteronormative act. That is, ingrained in my performative displays are forms of homosocial bonding and hierarchal relations within male fan communities (based on the layers of capital, literacy and symbolism circulating within this specific space), while a masculine fantasy of garnering favourable attention from attractive female attendees persists and underpins the performance. This second theme could be seen as a reflection of the broader gendered sporting terrain of Formula One; wherein active men race the cars and run the teams while conventionally beautiful women, provocatively dressed and displayed, problematically provide the ‘glamour’ (Kennedy, 2000; Sturm, 2009) or function as trophies for the male drivers (Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000). B. Turner (2004) suggests, “it is the ultimate male fantasist’s sport: fast cars, expensive kit, global jet-setting and beautiful women with spray-on smiles” (p. 205) and my performative displays seek accession to Formula One’s gendered fantasies on some level. It seems fair to assert that narcissism can

also be read into such performative displays and potentially offers an important final conceptual framework here for (male) fandom.

Narcissistic Fandom?

Sandvoss (2005) suggests that,

The theoretical challenge here is to account for the dual function of the object of fandom as experienced not in relation to the self, but as part of the self, despite constituting an external object. The basic premiss of my argument, then, is that the object of fandom, whether it is a sports team, television programme, a film or a pop star, is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are. (p. 96)

Adhering to Sandvoss, within my narratives and performative displays are Villeneuve as the external object separate to my self but also Villeneuve as the sought after ‘part of the self’ through performative acts wherein an alleged resemblance to the object was being crafted. On a broader level, my acts of conspicuous consumption (through selectivity, procurement and display) were all strategically orientated towards Villeneuve and a public awareness of this *fan-self-star* relationship (again, with a recognition that cultural literacy affords varying degrees of readership for such embedded practices and is often limited primarily to F1-specific sites). However, much like the Elvis impersonator noted earlier, Villeneuve also becomes interwoven into my sense of self through the embodied manifestation of this *fan-self-star* performance which is simultaneously merging the star text, self as fan and the fan knowingly performing as a fan. Sandvoss (2005) suggests the objects of fandom act as extensions of self and are enacted in ways that reveal both their centrality and the assumed highly personal relationship being entered into. In this respect, it can be argued that Villeneuve is not reflective of self-identity but constitutes a part of self through the embodied

articulation of performance (where the fan knowingly ‘acts’ as a JV fan). That is, the demarcation of a subjectively-conceived ‘self’ and/or the notion of ‘self-identity’ both become vexed due to the performative layerings fans are reliant upon when enacting the mediated star image and persona, coupled with their own embodied articulations of performance. Conversely, such performances are also strategic and reflexive in design. So the process is part of one’s ‘selfhood’ and deemed important but, nevertheless, these performances do not completely subsume one’s identity. In fact, such *fan-self-star* performances are often imbued with the homosocial, heteronormative, affective and fantastical dynamics that have been traced across this paper.

Concluding Remarks

This article has explored my own Formula One fandom as a specific site for male leisure practices. Mapping fandom across mediated and consumerist social terrains, I have also revealed how gendered, performative and affective dimensions inflect my displays and leisure practices as a fan of a male star. Crawford (2004) observes, “identity then is not something simply bought off the shelf...but rather needs to be understood as a ‘project’, where consumer goods and mass media resources may be drawn on by fans to fuel their performances and the construction of their identities” (p. 123). As such, it has been argued that my male fandom is a fluid and malleable ‘project’ that is both embedded in a performative interpellation of masculinity but, also, becomes a performed masculine act that engenders, enables and enacts oscillating homosocial, heteronormative and fantastical gendered relationships.

Moreover, autoethnographic vignettes have been deployed to ‘expose’ some of these processes and as a means to blend both the ‘personal’ and the cultural/theoretical in explorations of male leisure practices. The subjective fan accounts have attempted to evoke the performed, performative and experiential project of a male fan’s life that, despite the inferred ‘deterministic’ quality of the mediated and commercial structures, is still ‘felt’ at

various stages on a micro level. That is, via fluctuating forms of affective intensities, attachments and investments, Formula One is something that ‘matters’ in the fan’s quotidian existence. In turn, the gendered and embodied processes of performativity, performance and affect, embedded in the vignettes, potentially reveal the specific temporal and spatial sites of social reality in which this fandom has been anchored. Hence, autoethnography has served to illustrate the actualisation of Grossberg’s concepts of affect and mattering maps within the leisure practices of male media fandom, while re-emphasising a theoretical recognition of the broader social, economic and cultural realities that always shape such ‘subjective’ accounts of fandom.

However, Sandvoss (2005) also reminds us that, “the first and foremost audience for the performance of fans is the fan him- or herself” (p. 98). So despite embodied performances that are modelled on the physical and external Villeneuve (as disclosed in the last narrative), such an appearance is carefully groomed and coiffured to ensure presentations that satisfy ‘my’ self in the first instance. In this vein, my fan ‘voice’ has strategically been contained within the vignettes to clearly demarcate the affective intensities of fandom from the performative interpellation of the scholar-fan (and a more traditional academic discourse) attempting to scrutinise himself (sic) as a valid object of study. In fact, this vignette fan can be conceived as a self-created character, whereby my fan-self and the scholar-fan watch him watching and/or performing as Villeneuve to further understand the intense fan’s affective attachments, investments and playfulness with the object, and to further enable the blurred *fan-self-star* relationships to materialise. It is hoped that this approach may encourage future experimental works to engage with the concrete contexts and wider socio-cultural phenomenon of gendered leisure experiences, especially its affective dimensions and dynamics, to advance critical understandings of male leisure structures, realities and practices.

¹ Recognising, of course, that stars and celebrities, including Villeneuve, are always already operating as media objects rather than 'real' people through their mediated production, circulation and consumption – see Dyer, 1979, 1986; McDonald, 2000; Redmond & Holmes, 2007; G. Turner, 2004; Whannel, 2002.

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