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Alumni, Athletics and Associations:

A phenomenological study of NCAA Division I revenue sport alumni fandom

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Education

by

Eliza Morse Bentley Epstein

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Alumni, Athletics and Associations:

A phenomenological study of NCAA Division I revenue sport alumni fandom

by

Eliza Morse Bentley Epstein

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Douglas Kellner, Chair

National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) sports are a century-old institution rich with tradition and, more recently, rife with controversy. The NCAA—the governing board of college sports—and activist student-athletes (alongside former players) are battling in the media over enormous sums of money and player rights. This contest mirrors the head to head action of the college game, and leaves fans, the driving consumers, on the sidelines. The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of NCAA Division I revenue sport alumni fandom and to examine more closely the unique quality of the *alumni* fan's relationship with his/her alma mater. I observed and conducted unstructured interviews at alumni association-

organized viewing parties and completed semi-structured interviews with three University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) alumni fans. I also analyzed alumni association documents to identify the frequency with which the associations employed the university's sports teams as a tool of engagement with alumni. Analysis of the data reveals alumni feel a strong connection to sports teams of their alma mater, and that they clearly distinguish their alma mater fandom from their professional sports fandom. Findings also indicate that NCAA sports bring alumni fans together, generate *collective effervescence*, and help to strengthen interpersonal relationships by creating a team of fans who identify the school's sports within themselves and recognize themselves in student-athletes and other fans. While limited in scale, the study's findings suggest alumni fandom should be considered as changes to the institution of NCAA revenue sports are studied and proposed.

Keywords: fandom, NCAA athletics, popular cultural capital

The thesis of Eliza Morse Bentley Epstein is approved.

Richard Desjardins

Teresa McCarty

Douglas Kellner, Committee Chair

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2014

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In the last year I spent a great deal of time learning about educational philosophies. I was particularly attracted to John Dewey (2004), who argued, “A being connected with other beings cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account.” This thesis is a testament to my very personal learning about respect for the activities of others.

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Introduction

College sports are fields of contestation in more ways than one. Beyond the pure athletic competition, debates rage from countless sides on the topic of intercollegiate athletics; the majority of the tumult centers on the major revenue sports: football and men's basketball. These sports are a billion dollar industry yet university budgets are being slashed from coast to coast. Student fees climb each year. So where does the money to support these programs come from? Sponsors. But whom are the sponsors attempting to woo with their advertising dollars? Fans. Schools have competed against each other for over a century, creating—over the years—enormous networks of fans. This phenomenological (Merriam, 2009) study examines National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I revenue sport fandom. It aims to better understand the unique quality of this fan group, to learn how alumni make meaning of their fandom, and to contribute to an understanding of the ways that fandom affects participant identity and behaviors.

Alumni are prime supporters of the institution of NCAA sports as well as important contributors to the endowment and special fundraising campaigns at any university. The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) is a highly competitive academic institution which regularly earns top 25 rankings nationally and internationally, though their endowment is much smaller than those of their scholastic peers (www.giveto.ucla.edu). Give to UCLA, UCLA's fundraising website (www.giveto.ucla.edu), appeals to alumni through a comparative analysis of similar schools (both by size and academic ranking) who have much larger pools of money accessible to strengthen their programs and infrastructure. Table 1 summarizes this information.

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Table 1

Top ranked universities and endowments featured on giveto.ucla.edu

University	Endowment	Endowment/Pupil
Harvard	\$32b	\$1.5m
Stanford	\$18b	\$1.1m
University of Texas at Austin	\$9.1b	\$175k
University of Michigan	\$8.3b	\$137k
University of Pennsylvania	\$7.7b	\$314k
University of Virginia	\$5.9b	\$253k
UCLA	\$2.6b	\$63k

The fundraising website also includes featured initiatives, providing detailed information about number of donors, fundraising goals, and percentage of funds earned to date. As demonstrated by Table 2, of the 12 initiatives highlighted, only three have reached their funding goal; one of these, money for a football training facility, brought in over ten times the donations of any other initiative.

Table 2

Initiatives featured on UCLA's fundraising website and their progress towards goals

UCLA Featured Initiative	Total number of donors	Funding Goal Reached	Current Donation Total
Football Training Facility	552	100%	\$20,300,000
Anderson School Dean's Fund	5,430	81%	\$3,200,000
Lab School	417	84%	\$1,800,000
School of Law Williams Institute	391	88%	\$1,000,000
Institute of the Environment and Sustainability	249	82%	\$774,000
Division of Undergraduate Education	788	100%	\$398,000
General Scholarship Fund	1,557	81%	\$251,000
Broad Stem Cell Research Center	61	70%	\$214,000
Center for Art of Performace	173	89%	\$210,000
Luskin Public Affairs Dean's Innovation Fund	408	100%	\$209,000
Fielding School of Pub Health Innovation Fund	678	73%	\$127,000

The football practice facility project is not the only one bringing alumni dollars to the athletic department. A separate website and fund named for legendary Bruin basketball coach

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John Wooden (www.woodenathleticfund.com) offers seven different funding opportunities for alumni looking to donate to the athletic programs at UCLA. Alumni can make monetary contributions to the athletic programs directly—through donations—and indirectly—purchasing tickets to games and buying branded apparel. Alumni often gather together to watch the performances of their alma mater's teams. Their fandom is integral in the success of this larger institution of NCAA sports.

This particular institution is currently embroiled in several battles around the enormous sums of money generated by fan support, corporate investment, and media distribution of the performances of the NCAA athletes. Universities are paying coaches multi-million dollar salaries, television networks are paying the NCAA and universities billions of dollars for the rights to broadcast games, video game makers are paying the NCAA licensing fees to use school names and athlete likenesses in products. Athletes are ostensibly being given an education in exchange for their participation in NCAA sports. Much of the debate is about the fairness of the exchange in this relationship. There are currently several lawsuits that could change the nature of the compensation system in NCAA sports. With the student-athletes on one side and the NCAA and corporations on the other, fans are, as they are in the arena, on the sidelines. In the broader debates about the validity and future of college sports, fan meaning—and in particular alumni fan meaning—may reveal a new perspective on the role that intercollegiate athletics—a contested arena—play in our society. A careful study of alumni fandom will contribute an important voice to the conversation about proposed changes to the institution of NCAA Division I revenue sports.

Statement of the Problem

When I was an undergraduate at Rutgers University I was a “student-athlete” as defined by the NCAA. Each year I competed, I—like all of the 450,000 athletes who competed in NCAA sanctioned events in 2010/2011—had to sign a document passing ownership of my likeness and accomplishments to that organization; it mandated a certain GPA and adherence to pages of rules and in exchange legitimated my status as an “amateur” athlete (ncaa.org).¹ Fifteen years later, this relationship seems more troublesome than it did during my college years. But as a track and cross country runner, the demands on my time were limited and the benefits of being a “student-athlete” were plentiful: access to athletic department tutors, athlete only-computer labs, priority class enrollment, team doctors, personalized counseling. My participation also meant a portion of my tuition was paid. However, *my* physical, emotional, and time commitments consumed a fraction of the hours that other athletes—particularly basketball and football players—were expected to commit to their teams. Their loss was my gain.

Today there are approximately 15,000 students enrolled in higher education in the United States who are also football players playing for teams in the Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision. Men’s college basketball programs boast another 4900 student-athletes, bringing the total annual number of male student-athletes participating in revenue sports to approximately 20,000. The time and sweat of these 20,000 people generate billions of dollars of revenue annually, along with intense controversy (Branch, 2011). Critics cite poor academic records of athletes (some blaming lazy students, others taking university officials to task), inflated athletic budgets that deprive the university’s “real” students, and exploitation of “student-athletes” by schools and the NCAA as arguments against the current system. Notoriously low graduation

¹ According to longtime NCAA president Walter Byers the term “student-athlete” was originally articulated to defend against “student-athletes” suing the NCAA for worker’s compensation claims (1998).

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rates have spawned concern about the integrity of the academic institutions that purport to serve the student-athlete (Friday et al., 2001). Ethical misconduct—from steroids to sex scandals—raises serious and reasonable concerns about the place of college sports in universities (Branch, 2011; Hanford, 1979). Coaches' salaries (dwarfing tuition costs for their entire teams) are either market-justified or appalling (Knight, 2006).

The present situation is rooted in a long history of sports prioritization on college campuses. Without college money, Harvard University football supporters used private funds to construct their first stadium and in 1905 paid their coach—again without university funds—more than twice the average salary of a full professor. These days, the average paycheck for head football coaches at public universities is more than 2 million dollars; basketball coaches, on average, earn twice that (Branch, 2011).

Despite the “amateur” moniker attached to the “student-athletes,” the corporate sponsors, athletic apparel distributors, advertisers, and—the biggest spenders—television networks that front the money are not beneficent non-profit players. Over the years, many voices have called for the end of the tradition of collegiate athletics (Mondello, Piquero, Piquero, Gertz, Bratton, 2013). Others question whether student-athletes should be paid for their participation. One NCAA basketball star made headlines recently reporting that he goes to bed “starving” (McDonald, 2014). This March, the National Labor Relations Board ruled that the football players at Northwestern University should be considered employees and that they can organize the first union of college athletes (Holst, 2014). An anti-trust lawsuit brought by Ed O’Bannon, a former UCLA basketball player (among other plaintiffs) looking to be compensated by a video game company who used their images, is currently making its way through the courts.

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A billion dollar industry—CBS paid the NCAA \$771 million dollars for broadcast rights of the March Madness basketball tournament in 2010—college sports, particularly football and basketball, play a huge role in American culture. Many observers have asked: if the courts find for O'Bannon, what will happen to the system of intercollegiate athletics? (Levick, 2013; Nocera, 2013) Will fans still be fans when former amateurs become professionals? Will the whole system collapse? These are not easy questions (and they are certainly questions that the NCAA hopes will never be answered), but a study of alumni fans will certainly shed some light on the meaning that alumni fans make of the phenomena of major intercollegiate athletics.

NCAA revenue sports make a lot of money. None of this money, however, ends up (legally) in the pockets of the athletes who work to generate it, and all of the revenue comes from the investment of fans. Not all fans are alumni. Not all athletes are on the receiving end of exploitation. I was a Division I “scholar-athlete” and had the opportunity to enjoy a paid-for (at least in part) education at a top school. I was not earning money for my school or for the system, however. Those athletes that were generating revenue, however, had much higher expectations of time commitment.

I do not believe that the system of college sports is going to dissolve. I do believe that alumni have a strong interest—a passion—for the teams they support. Nostalgia tied up in myths is a formidable opponent for reformers taking a social justice stance against the exploitation of student-athletes. As a beneficiary, and de facto benefactor, of this system, however, I would like to see changes that benefit all student-athletes. This study can add to the conversation about the relevance, veracity, and future of NCAA revenue sports. In order to answer questions about how the system can be altered to benefit the athlete—but not damage the relationship (and support) of the fan—the phenomenon of alumni fandom must be probed.

Research Questions

While many types of alumni events exist, I am particularly interested in looking at those that revolve around major revenue college sports and understanding the phenomenon of alumni fandom. This inquiry was guided by three main questions: 1) How do alumni fans make meaning of their fandom? 2) What happens at alumni organized viewing parties and what motivates attendees to attend? 3) Is there a unique relationship that exists between alumni fans and the teams fielded by their alma mater?

On the playing field in 2010-2011, nearly half a million student-athletes showed their support for the current system (or at the very least condoned it) through their participation in NCAA sanctioned events, while millions of fans cheered it on. *Past* students from the university under study are investing their time in the *present* on the lives of (hopeful) graduates of the *future*. In the broader debates about the validity and future of college sports, a study of these gatherings and their participants may reveal a new perspective on the role that intercollegiate athletics-a contested arena-play in our society.

Conceptual Framework

The study of fans is not new. Studies of fans in the 1960s and 1970s, such as those that looked at the influence of violence in the media and video games on human behavior, characterized fans as “passive dopes” who absorbed messages unquestioningly (Crawford, 2004). Academics refer to this as the "syringe" model, where the audience is injected with a passively consumed mass message (Crawford, 2004).

Studies of fans (not specifically sports fans) in the 1980s and early 1990s portrayed fandoms as counter-hegemonic groups pitted against the grain whose members' identities were strengthened by their association in fan communities. Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington (2007)

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explain that early fan researchers saw fandom as “a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meanings of the ‘power’” (p. 5). Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, cited in Crawford, 2004) define this era as the second paradigm of fan analysis, the “incorporation/resistance paradigm” (p. 21) where fans were either seen as passive consumers or active resisters to dominant ideologies. The intention of these studies was to frame the institution of super-fandom as a creative and productive outlet rather than a pathology. Many of these studies, though, looked at the super-fan and were not taking into account the everyday fan that loved or talked about the object of their fandom in a limited capacity (Crawford, 2004). Therefore, the non-fan/fan binary remained, though the identity of the fan was redefined.

The theoretical roots of this conflict between the fan as passive or critical were born from Frankfurt School scholars who debated the role that fans played in their interaction with the object of their attention). On one side, in his studies of jazz, Adorno argued that appreciation of art or culture required that the works were intellectually challenging. Adorno (1938) contended that popular culture fandom (though he does not discuss sports they fall into his description of popular culture) did not provide enough stimulation to conjure challenging thought in the spectator and therefore it only had the effect of "washing over" (cited in Crawford, 2004, p. 23) the audience. Benjamin argued, however, that fans could in fact be critical and discerning. Interesting to this study, he also argued that the art's value in culture comes from its basis in ritual. He wrote, “ *The unique value of the authentic work of art has always been its basis in ritual* ” (Benjamin, 2008, p. 19 italics in original).

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, cited in Crawford, 2004) developed what they define as the third generation of fan framework out of criticism of the Hobbesian

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"incorporation/resistance" model. They found fault with the earlier theories for many reasons, but one of their arguments is especially interesting in relation to this study, which, in step with their theorizing, recognizes the constant flux of power in current society. First, Abercrombie and Longhurst suggest that the fluidity of power in contemporary society makes it increasingly difficult to frame a theory that pits an empowered group against a group without power. NCAA Division I sports certainly has a faction with power (the media and the NCAA), and a group with significantly less power (the student-athletes), but the placement of the fans within this model reflects the fluidity of power that Abercrombie and Longhurst identify. It could be argued that NCAA alumni fans have a vested interest in a better performance by the revenue teams of their alma mater, which could result in a better reputation for the school and a higher cache for their diplomas.

Sandvoss et al. (2007) contend that contemporary studies of fandoms are essential to a continued examination of the modern world. Tracing the last thirty years of fan studies, they note the shift in perspectives from seeing fans as counter-hegemonic, to social replicators, and finally to a "taken-for-granted aspect" of life. They reason that it is precisely because fandom has woven itself into the fabric of our lives that we must continue to question its meaning. Additionally, they argue that the scope of fan studies should continue to be broadened, as the range of fans.

Crawford (2004) makes several observations about fandom and fan studies. He argues that while fans now are subjected to higher levels of mediation, from distractions and viewing guidance such as Jumbotron, cheerleaders, and professional commentators, there has never been a "simple" fan whose fandom was unmediated. Crawford (2004) provides much discussion about the globalization of sports and media influence. Many scholars argue that the increase of social media and the globalized world make fandom more meaningful. These arguments are rooted in

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the global consumption of brands like the British Premier League Football (Soccer) team Manchester United or the Major League Baseball team the New York Yankees. This market of NCAA sports is unique because of the fan relationship with the teams and students. At present, NCAA sports are not a major player in the global market, though as more foreign students enroll in higher education in the United States this could change.

Crawford (2004) argues the most effective framework for looking at fan communities as to look at fans as a "neo-tribe" which he defines as "loose, fluid, and often temporal communities and groups that individuals move in and out of often several times in their everyday lives" (p. 41). He maintains that the best framework for fan studies is an understanding of fan networks as "neo-tribes" or "tribus," which take the place of formerly strong social ties like families and local networks and recognize the "fluidity and temporality" of social networks in contemporary communities. Additionally, he contends that fandom should be looked at as a process seen over years, within a typology of a "social career," as opposed to a more limited framework. He explains that using this "career" based framework recognizes the fluidity of fandom as well as the situation where there are two fans that exhibit very different behavior (as there could be two people with the same career and very different career trajectories). While this study was conducted over a short period of time, the interview questions followed a chronological order that traced a narrative of "career" development for the participants over their lives.

Crawford (2004) argues for the importance of studies that provide insight into the individual experiences of fans to counterbalance the heavy volume of inquiry that peers into the world of sport fandom from the top down. In 1995, Wann and Hamlet (1995, cited in Crawford, 2004) made the observation that only 4% of all sport sociology and psychology focuses on the fan. And while this percentage has risen since their observation, most studies of sport fans are

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narrowly looking at those fans that attend live events. Even fewer of these studies focus on female fans. Wann (1995, cited in Crawford, 2004) found that for women, since the initiation of Title IX (a 1972 Senate Bill most well-known for its role in bringing equal opportunity and access to athletics for women), school has become the strongest determiner of women's fandom. Crawford (2004) asserts that women may experience the same "glass ceiling" limitations within their fandom that are felt in the literal career structure. While I did not intend to focus on gender for this study, of the three interview participants, two were female and mentioned several times during their interviews how their gender fit into their fandom.

Many studies have been done for the purpose of understanding sports fandom for marketing purposes. Fillis and McKay (2013) completed a case study of one English football team to develop a socially grounded understanding of fan loyalty and consumer fanaticism. They developed a theory that defines a hierarchy of fan support, but suggest in their conclusion that further research should be initiated to understand "what stimulates families, peers, and support organisations" (Fillis & Mackay, 2013, p. 22). This research study attempts to look at just these support organizations.

Guschwan (2012) writes about professional sports, branding, and marketing. He distinguishes between "fandom", which he characterizes as role with agency and empowerment, and "brandom... the pseudo-fan culture engineered by brand managers eager to cultivate consumer labor and loyalty while preempting the possibility of resistance that participatory fan culture promises" (p. 22). He notes that games broadcast on television are effectively two-three hour long "infomercials" (p. 22). This notion of "brandom" is interesting, as all three participants used the word "brand" when discussing UCLA as an institution. The way that the participants perceive athletics and the University makes this theoretical framework interesting to look at in

relation to the study. Muniz and O'Guinn, (2001) developed the term “brand communities” to refer to a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (p. 412). Like Guschwan, they describe a group of people who share an interest and passion for a certain object or group, but recognize the way that a mass-mediated, corporate entity is bound to the group's interest. Nearly all NCAA Division I schools are run as non-profit universities,² so the corporate status does not fit this study; the “brand” moniker, however, seems to be relevant to this study based on participant response. What is also interesting, though, is that participants frequently made a distinction between professional sports and NCAA sports in their own lives and in the nature of their fandom.

Exploring this notion of brands a bit further, Holt (2006) defines a group of product brands—Nike, Jack Daniels, Apple—that he calls *iconic brands*. These brands, he argues, “garner cultural power from their role in expressing identity myths: ongoing revisions of national (and occasionally global) myths that provide collective salves for major contradictions in society” (p. 374). He notes, though, that the *iconic brands* do not generate the myths, rather that they are “ideological parasites” (p. 374) that grow out of pre-existing myths within a society. In an analysis of the whiskey brand Jack Daniels, Holt (2006) draws on the importance of cultural myths in buttressing the power of consumer brands. He argues that myths help to explain away flaws in ideological cultural rhetoric. Focusing on the individual, he writes, “Myths are key source material for stitching people to national identities, imbuing personal identity with the solidity, status, and camaraderie that comes from the felt participation in collective ideals and

² In 2013, Grand Canyon University, a for-profit Christian institution publically traded on the New York Stock Exchange, was granted permission to enter the Western Athletic Conference, becoming the first official for-profit school competing at the Division I level. They are currently only fielding a basketball team and are not permitted to compete in the NCAA March Madness tournament until 2017. This move has created controversy, the PAC-10 coaches wrote a collective letter taking umbrage with the idea of competing against a corporate entity, but no legal actions have been taken yet. One journalist covering the story remarked that the situation leaves the NCAA with a “difficult look in the mirror” (Mandel, 2013).

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achievements” (p. 360). His illustration of the myth of the American frontiersman who faced “violent confrontations” which, over time, served to develop “virtuous traits—courage, self-reliance, honesty” is written in the same language relied upon by sports writers and analysts who portray athletes in this same light. NCAA athletes in particular fit into this classification of “virtuous” as they are ostensibly not driven to compete for financial gain—at least not in the immediate timeframe of their college years. This discussion of myth and brand power are interesting in relation to this study because participants so clearly framed their own identities through their relationship with UCLA and its NCAA revenue teams.

Much of the academic research to date in the collegiate sports realm concerns alumni giving trends. Studies analyze the relationship between athletic success and alumni donations. While it would seem reasonable to believe that there is a correlation between a schools athletic success and alumni donations, several studies report no identifiable relationship between team performance and alumni contributions (Sigelman & Carter, 1979; Sheehan, 2000; Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

While focused on one university, Boston College, and engaging a small and (perhaps overly) diverse sample, Sammartino (2010) concluded that in fact there is a strong correlation between the men’s basketball and football team success and alumni financial support. She used individual interviews and focus groups with alumni, major donors, and administrators. She indicates that men’s basketball and football create an opportunity for people to have a connection to the school. One of her subject’s comments:

I definitely find athletics as a way to stay connected to my classmates. It provides a continuous bond with classmates and the school for years to come. And, now we see that this is not necessarily just on campus. [Alumni organization] chapters have game watches

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and they can get 100 people at 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning somewhere to watch the game together. (p. 140)

In this comment, the participant references the unique habitat created by regional chapters of alumni associations who convene gatherings to root on a population's alma mater. These events take place all the time on campuses, around the country, and in far-flung locales; hundreds of thousands of former students spend millions of hours consuming sports (frequently accompanied by food and drinks) and interacting with fellow graduates.

College teams have fans everywhere, but when alumni gather to watch their alma mater in a confined space, they are a more specialized type of fan. Durkheim's (1959, cited in Olaveson, 2001) account of "collective effervescence" speaks to the power of gathering fans. In his analysis of "collective effervescence," Olaveson (2001) quotes Durkheim (1959):

The very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousnesses that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others. The initial impulse is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along. And since passions so heated and so free from all control cannot help but spill over, from every side there are nothing but wild movements, shouts, downright howls, and deafening noises of all kinds that further intensify the state they are expressing. (Durkheim, 1959, cited in Olaveson, 2001, p. 99)

While Durkheim's focus was on religion as a place of gathering, many might argue that college sports are a sort of religion. Durkheim also argued that the "collective effervescence"

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depended on repeated gatherings to maintain strength; certainly universities are depending on and sponsoring these repeated gatherings. Schilling and Mellor (1999) maintain that Durkheim perceived a diminishing of social gatherings in modern society. Putnam (2001) also points to a decline in public gatherings and social capital in the 21st century United States. Looking at football and basketball fandom through this lens suggests an added importance of alumni gatherings to national culture.

Sperber (2000) did extensive research on the role of college sports, college sports fans, and the institution's impact on university life and alumni. He concludes that big-time college sports has created an atmosphere of "beer and circus," an environment where sports are lauded and academics are second-class interests. He coined the term "College Sports MegaInc" to explain the massive commercial investment in NCAA sports, and then contends that Orwellian doublethink clouds the minds of alumni fans. He concludes that fans are not bothered by the contradictory nature of the term "student-athlete" because of their obsession with their own fandom.

In an analysis of fandom, Fiske (1989, cited in Lewis, 1992) reworked Bourdieu's productive model of economic and cultural capital to include the category of "popular cultural capital", a form of capital "produced by subordinate social formations, which can serve, in the subordinate, similar functions to those of official cultural capital in the dominant context" (p. 33). He gives the example of a student in school that may struggle academically and therefore find himself deficient in cultural capital (which will in turn weaken his self esteem and social capital). Becoming a knowledgeable fan could bolster his popular cultural capital, and in turn

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improve his self-esteem and social capital-though not his authentic cultural capital. Fiske notes, however, that in most cases popular cultural capital does not translate to economic capital.³

Lesser and Prusak (1999) define social capital as an active commodity, the resources that a community utilizes to benefit the group. Providing a similar economic based explanation of social capital, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, cited in Lesser & Prusak, 1999, p. 3) define it as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit." This definition sees social capital as a fixed resource, "the sum of resources," but does not suggest that social capital has an intangible quality that creates something beyond these resources. In other words, a group tapping its social capital is very different than a group generating *collective effervescence*. Or, as Duguid (1995) explains, "Communities...have emergent properties that, while they are no doubt the outcome of individuals actions, amount to more than the sum of those actions and more than the amortization of transaction costs" (p. 115). While heavily rooted in economics, Duguid's assertion could be applied to the communities of practice generated by alumni fandom and explain the *collective effervescence* generated through fan communities.

This notion of popular cultural capital translating into economic capital is especially interesting in relation to the study of alumni fandom. In the case of UCLA alumni fans, one assumes that these graduates of a reputable university do not suffer from deficiencies of cultural or economic capital. Interestingly, the alumni fan's economic and real cultural capital may also be tied up in the success of the athletic teams success. Cox and Roden (2010) found the average college rankings of a school rose significantly in the two years after winning a football or

³ Fiske also discusses fan productivity and fan collecting. While outside the scope of this study, both of these topics would be very interesting to study with a specific focus on NCAA alumni fans and the way their university credentials are influenced by team performance, media depiction, and merchandise valuation.

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basketball national championship.⁴ UCLA alum, then, could rightly believe that rooting on their team will bring distinguish their own diplomas.

Fiske (1989, cited in Lewis, 1992) makes another observation about popular cultural capital and fandom that has a particularly strong relationship to the NCAA alumni fans. He writes of the way that fans with insider information about the object of their fandom can make the fan feel more empowered. Alumni fans share a life experience with the athletes they are fans of, and in this way feel a strong connection to the athletes.

Looking beyond the unique framework of fandom, social identity theory, communities of practice, organizational identity theory, and stakeholder theory may also lend insight into the study of NCAA alumni fans. This study looks at alumni fan interactions at viewing parties and individual alumnus's self-conception of the way that UCLA athletics fits into their lives. The alumni groups are considered in social constructionist terms, looking at "members' negation of shared meanings about 'who we are as an organization'" (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, and Thomas, 2010, p. 6). Communities of practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. While much research in this area is focused on learning and business efficiency, the fans studied here perceived themselves as members of a community (or members of distinct communities that belonged to a larger network of like-minded communities. Wegner and Snyder (2000) contend that the "practice" element of communities of practice can define traditions or rituals in which the community takes part. Participants in this study discussed the ways that they behaved ritualistically in their fandom.

Mael and Ashforth (1992) hypothesized a model of organizational identity and conducted

⁴ Cox and Roden (2010) note, however, that this rankings bump is not seen unless the schools win a national championship in the aforementioned sports. Therefore, they conclude, there is not a strong argument for the funding of college sports as a means of improving school rankings.

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a study to evaluate the model. In establishing their model they discuss social identity theory and its component parts, personal identity and social identity. Social identity is one's belief that he or she is part of a group. The group member experiences the successes or failures of that group as his or her own, and the group member feels that he or she is "psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Particularly relevant to the participants in this study, Katz and Kahn (1978, cited in Mael & Ashforth, 1992) social "identification allows the individual to vicariously partake in accomplishments beyond his or her powers" (p.105).

Building on the social identity theory tenet which states that individuals will identify with social groups that improve their self-esteem, Mael and Ashforth (1992) hypothesized that the higher a university's prestige, the more likely alumni are to associate with the school. Cameron and Ulrich (1986, cited in Mael & Ashforth, 1992) conducted a study, which illustrated one new university president's successful scheme to draw back alumni by improving the prestige of the university. Additionally, Mael and Ashforth hypothesized that alumni organizational identity would be positively affected by perceived university distinctiveness and perceived university inter organizational competitiveness. Their study, of one all men's catholic university, did suggest a correlation between two qualities (prestige and distinctiveness) but did not suggest a correlation between the perceived interorganizational competitiveness of the school and the alumni organizational identity. Interestingly, while the interorganizational competitiveness of the organization, in this case a university, did not appear to influence the alumni's identity with the organization in a positive way, the authors conclude that organizations can strengthen the alumni relationship with the institution "through the manipulation of symbols, such as traditions, myths, metaphors, rituals, sagas, heroes, and physical settings..." (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 117). Translating this to the study of alumni fans, the success of the team may not be as important as

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the history and traditions of the university's teams.

Freeman's (2010, cited in Crane & Ruebottom, 2011) Stakeholder theory offers an analysis and understanding of " 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives'" (p. 78). Crane and Ruebottom (2011) argue for a closer study of the twenty-year-old framework of stakeholder theory, which has historically looked at the way that management handles the relationships of particular constituency. They contend, however, that research in this field is too narrowly focused in an economic framework, and as such focused on firms' response to their consumers or employees. They advocate for firms to recognize the broader social context of the constituents: "for firms to effectively understand societal values and expectations, predict relevant social issues, manage stakeholder relationships, and assess impacts on their constituencies, they need to understand the identifications that drive constituency membership in more sophisticated ways" (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011, p. 77-78). While their focus, as in many studies of social identity and organizational identity, is in the corporate realm, these concepts are relevant to the relationship between the NCAA and its fans, and can be translated to the relationships between universities and their alumni.

Methodology

This study was completed during the 2014 Winter Quarter of study at UCLA and focused on alumni fans of the Bruin men's football and basketball teams. During the regular season, the basketball team performed well, if erratically. In the post season, they won their conference championship and advanced to the round of 16 in the NCAA end of season tournament, termed March Madness.

This study takes a social constructionist view (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, and Thomas, 2010). As such, the participants are seen as group members who negotiate their roles within the

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community to define their own fandom. Where the fan groups are the “organizations”, this study places “the focus of attention on the shared interpretive schemes that members collectively construct to provide meaning to their organizational experience” (Gioia et al., 2010, p. 33).

I conducted three distinct types of research: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Though I use the standard terminology “participant observation”, my research fit more closely into Gold’s specific typology of “observer as participant”, as my work as a participant was secondary to my work as an observer (cited in Merriam, 2009). In this capacity, I attended a series of officially organized alumni events hosted by different chapters of alumni support groups under the umbrella of the UCLA alumni office. These events were advertised on the internet on the pages of BruinWorks⁵, a UCLA run website for alumni engagement. The basic premise of these events is that alumni collectively view a UCLA televised game in a bar or restaurant. Sometimes these establishments offer drink or food specials for UCLA alumni.

I attended three events hosted by the Westside network and one hosted by the South Bay (CA) network. These events varied in attendance levels and degree of official organization. For example, two of the events were officially organized but un-hosted—meaning UCLA fans were invited to watch the game at a certain location, but no representatives of the leadership of the network were present. At the other two events, the leadership was visibly present. At the Westside event, the host gathered all the participants at one table, provided a sign in sheet and had a stack of fliers about upcoming alumni events. At the South Bay event, the leadership gathered all the participants at one table, organized a lunch special, and provided a large container for collecting donation for the South Bay scholarship fund.

⁵ As of the end of the school year 2014, BruinWorks is going through a re-branding by the UCLA Alumni office.

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At the first event I attended, an un-hosted Westside network event, I remained a pure participant observer. I watched the fans watch the game, but did not engage in any conversation with the participants. At the next three events, I conducted unstructured interviews with alumni about their fandom that fell into Spradley's (1979) designation of unstructured interview as "friendly conversation" (cited in Seidman, 2013, p.14). At the hosted Westside network event, I was aided in facilitating the dialogue by the event host, one of my semi-structured interview participants. I did not record these observations, and only recorded jottings and a few direct quotes from participants. I did a voice recording immediately after departing each event to enrich the writing of expanded field notes.

I also conducted three semi-structured phenomenological interviews with an interest in "uncover[ing] the essence of the [participant's] experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 38). Seidman (2013) advocates for a three-part phenomenological interview. For the purpose of this study, in the interest of time I compressed the three parts into one approximately 60 minute interview. I employed purposeful snowball sampling to identify interview participants (Merriam, 2009). I found all of my interview participants through an extraordinary lucky introduction at an education mixed event. I was introduced to an employee of UCLA working at the James West Alumni Center on the UCLA campus. She offered to send out an email on my behalf to her colleagues to gauge interest in participation in this study. All three of my interview participants were recruited through her outreach. These interview subjects were especially interesting to this study because they each had unique perspectives in terms of this issue; each of the participants (UCLA alumni) works in association with UCLA. Two of them work specifically in the capacity of alumni outreach; they mine the rich resource of the athletic department in their daily task of strengthening alumni relations. These two participants, both females, engage with athletes—or

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seen through a different lens—use the cache of these athletes to further their interests in the capacity of enhancing university identity and increasing university donations. The third interview participant (male), also an alumnus, works in student relations and is a passionate UCLA fan.

For the semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009), I composed a list of questions, which guided the interview, but deployed these questions flexibly and allowed participant answers to influence the order and content of some inquiries. Before commencing the interview, I asked participants to provide an oral consent to their participation in the study (see Appendix A). All of the interviews lasted approximately one hour, took place on the UCLA campus for the convenience of the participants, and were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Additionally, I conducted a document analysis of the Westside Bruins network monthly newsletter. I examined six months of newsletters published between August 2013 and January 2014 looking to see the frequency with which the newsletter advertised NCAA athletic events or relied on the institution of UCLA Bruins sports to engage alumni.

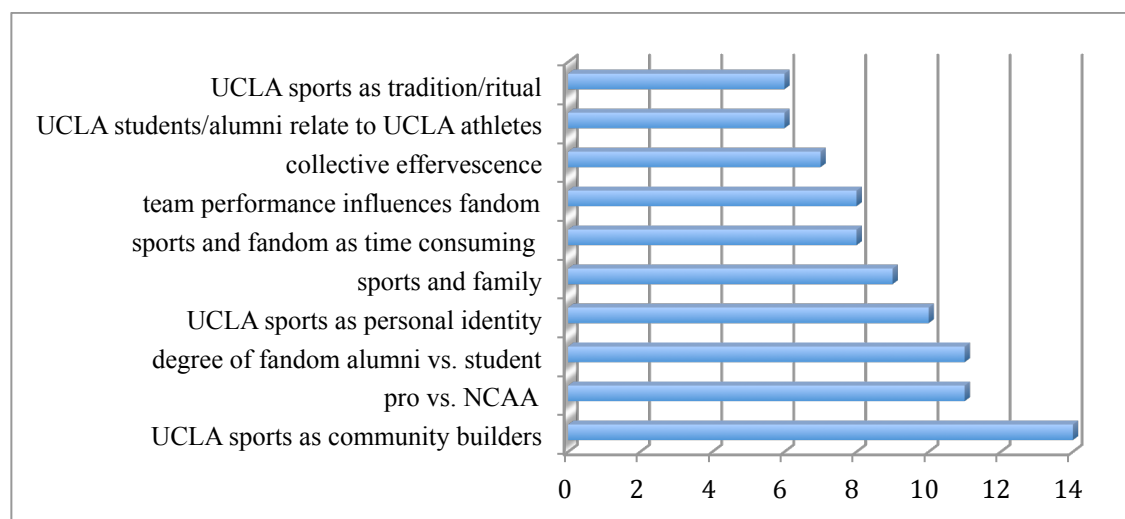
I did not commence analysis until after all observations and interviews were completed. Initially, I explored using DeDoose software to organize and sort my data, but after technical problems I decided to use Excel to code the data. I read through each interview, chunking out a section and looking for the overall message of that part, following the steps for Initial Coding (Saldaña, 2013). Simultaneously, I used In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013) in this first coding pass so that the participant's voice was married to the codes that I generated. Whenever the particular wording of the participant seemed to describe the meaning of the passage as well or better than I could, I included the In Vivo code in the Excel spreadsheet I was building. I repeated this process with the field notes from the observations. Charmaz (cited in Saldaña, 2013, p. 100) advises to be very open with the coding and to ““remain open to all possible theoretical

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directions indicated by your readings of the data.”” The Initial Coding, therefore, had several codes that would eventually be combined, but this practice allowed me to code without concern for missing something that didn’t fit into a pre-existing code.

After completing first level codes I made a chart to investigate frequency and to try to identify themes for a second coding. I had 38 unique codes at that point, but on closer analysis I narrowed it down to 29. For this second coding I employed Holistic Coding (Dey, 1993 cited in Saldaña, 2013, p. 142), continuing to chunk the data but with a better understanding of the sources. Chart 1 illustrates the top ten of 29 codes and demonstrates the frequency with which the codes appeared (see Appendix B for the complete chart of 29 codes and Appendix C for a sample of the codebook)..

Chart 1
Second Level Coding Frequency (Top Ten Codes)



UCLA sports as community builders was the most frequent code describing 14 different sections of the data.

To perform the third level coding, I took all of the codes I had generated with second coding and expanded the definition of each one, further narrowing the number of unique codes to

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24. Table 3 lists this set of codes and the frequency with which they appeared in the data. I then categorized them more broadly into *metacodes* (Bazeley, 2013), hierarchical codes that contain different branches for data that don't always relate to each other but each relate back to the main hierarchical code.. This was done by looking at the most frequent codes and working with them to identify the major themes revealed in the data.

Table 3
Third Level Coding Frequency

THIRD LEVEL CODE	Frequency
UCLA sports as community builders	14
degree of fandom alumni vs. student	11
pro vs. NCAA	11
UCLA sports as personal identity	10
sports and family	9
team performance influences fandom	9
sports and fandom as time consuming	8
collective effervescence	8
UCLA sports as tradition/ritual	7
basketball vs. football	6
emotional connection	5
UCLA sports as alumni engagement	5
UCLA sports as reflection of the University	5
athletes as celebrity	4
university as brand	4
Viewing parties as community builders	4
Viewing parties as friendship maintenance	4
NCAA rivalry with friends	2
perception of university (personal)	2
UCLA students/alumni relate to UCLA athletes	2
consciousness of fandom (perception)	1
economic handcuffs	1
general sports interest	1
UCLA sports as improving college experience	1

This process revealed three *metacodes*. I then used an In Vivo code for each *metacode* to allow the participants voices to frame the findings. Tables 4-6 contain the metacodes (listed with its In

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Vivo code), the sub-codes used in the writing for that finding section, the frequency of that code in the data, and the percentage of all the data collected represented by the sources utilized in that *metacode*. The percentage figure was calculated by taking the total number of data pieces (137) and dividing it by the total frequencies within that *metacode*.

Table 4

Metacode 1: The difference between professional and NCAA sports fandom (In Vivo code: “A different sense of camaraderie” and “A reflection of me”)

THIRD LEVEL CODE	Frequency
pro vs. NCAA	11
UCLA sports as reflection of the University	5
athletes as celebrity	4
UCLA students/alumni relate to UCLA athletes	2
university as brand	4
Percentage of total data pieces represented by this data	19%

Table 5

Metacode 2: UCLA sports as community builders/alumni/family (In Vivo code: “Something people can always rally around”)

THIRD LEVEL CODE	Frequency
UCLA sports as community builders	14
sports and family	9
collective effervescence	8
UCLA sports as alumni engagement	5
Viewing parties as community builders	4
Viewing parties as friendship maintenance	4
NCAA rivalry with friends	2
basketball vs. football	7
Percentage of total data pieces represented by this data	38.7%

Table 6

Metacode 3: UCLA sports and alumni identity (In Vivo code: “You’re like Miss UCLA”)

THIRD LEVEL CODE	Frequency
UCLA sports as personal identity	10
team performance influences fandom	9
UCLA sports as tradition/ritual	7

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emotional connection	5
perception of university (personal)	2
consciousness of fandom (perception)	1
UCLA sports as improving college experience	1
sports and fandom as time consuming	8
percentage of total data pieces represented by this data	31.4%

While there was data collected that was not utilized in this analysis, 89% of all the data collected was used in the findings section.

Findings

Analysis of the data reveals several important things about the meaning that alumni fans make of their fandom. First, alumni fans feel a strong and personal connection to sports teams of their alma mater, and that they clearly distinguish their alma mater fandom from their professional sports fandom. Findings also indicate that NCAA sports bring alumni fans together, generate *collective effervescence*, and help to strengthen interpersonal relationships. Finally, alumni fandom is a component of participant's self-conceptions and their ascribed identities.

“A different sense of camaraderie”

On the surface, there is a clear distinction between what is termed in larger society “professional sports” versus NCAA, or “amateur” sports: contracts are drafted and money changes hands out in the open in the professional realm. Many analysts take umbrage with the word and the status “amateur”. In a recent circuit court decision on athlete compensation Justice Claudia Wilken commented, “I don’t think amateurism is going to be a very useful word here” (cited in Solotaroff, 2014). But despite the tenuous nature of the distinction, participants repeatedly drew a line between the two arenas of competition. College sports, they argued, are different from professional, and its variances make it more attractive.

Rachelle (all names are pseudonyms), a single female in her early thirties, noted in her interview a few differences between the two levels of sports. We spoke in the early lunchtime

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hours at a busy campus restaurant. Her first assertion about the unique quality of collegiate sports focused on the role of money. She presented:

I don't follow pro as closely as I follow college, because I feel like a lot of what happens in the pros is things get so distorted by the pay. I like to see the immaturity of the college game; I like to see how students react in inclement weather. I like to see how the passion comes out in like, the tournament in March madness. It's just very different than- than what you see at the pro level. I'm more of a college uh sports fan, than an average sports fan to begin with.

For Rachelle, the construct of the NCAA sports institution, that students are given schooling in exchange for their athletic commitments, allows for, what she later called, “a purity...an undistorted” platform for fandom. Her comments suggest that the enormous sums of money that players used to compensate players in the professional game are toxic. She refers to a “passion” that the March Madness basketball tournament generates, suggesting her opinion that students are playing for pride, rather than fighting for fortune.

Rachelle discussed the official alumni viewing parties that she has organized over the last year in her consulting capacity with the Westside Network, the local branch of the UCLA Alumni Organization. She shared: “We've been able to really push our brand out there, the Westside Network brand out there, in a way that we weren't before.” This marketing language may only have cropped up because of her relationship with UCLA athletics and alumni as a part of her career, but her use of the term *brand* when discussing UCLA is interesting. Jenna also works out of the James West Alumni Center on the UCLA campus; she also mentioned UCLA within the frame of a brand. In discussing her enthusiasm about attending games and promoting UCLA athletics she commented, “I guess it's just that the concept of the product that is UCLA is

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something that I'm very passionate about.” She bundles the education, sports, life experiences, connections, and all the other parts of the institution into a commodity by using the term “the product” to describe UCLA.

Rachelle made another reference in her interview that suggests NCAA sports are, in fact, moving closer to the professional model that she had just defined as very different.

Where as we have Pauley [Pavilion—the home stadium of UCLA basketball], right? But now new Pauley is looking for a sponsor and who knows what'll happen with the Pauley name, right? And when you walk through Pauley, you see a lot more corporate sponsorship in there, whether it's Subway, or Adidas, or whatever the case may be. So I think it's shifting, but it's still not as in your face, as the pro side of things.

This comment and notion that sports at the collegiate level are becoming more like professional leagues is interesting, particularly because Rachelle expresses a preference for the “purity” of NCAA sports. Though a critical history of NCAA sports is outside the scope of this study, Crawford (2004, p. 11) argues that the past should not be glorified. He notes that while the world has become more globalized and the “contemporary nature of sport is changing,” it is not a “radical departure” from its origins.

Randy, an alumnus who also works at UCLA—though not in alumni engagement capacity—also spoke of the way that UCLA athletics serve as commodity for the school and the way that athletics plays a major role in the branding of the school. Randy works for the school organizing orientation for new students. When I asked him the ways that athletics work into his job he explained, “On the third day of our first-year sessions we do a tour around campus and one of the tour stops is in the JPMorgan Center were someone from athletics, someone from I think the marketing department will kind of do a presentation with them in the trophy room or in

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the hall of fame about UCLA athletics and about the Den package and enticing them to sign up on the spot.” In this description of the way that university athletics are woven into the experience of students Randy reveals the source of what, for many students, becomes a lifelong relationship with their alma mater’s athletic teams. As demonstrated by the earlier discussion, the participants clearly draw a line between professional and NCAA sports. Even they, though, seem to recognize the economic power of the UCLA *brand* and demonstrate an understanding of their role as complicit consumers.

A second feature of NCAA sports not present at the professional level is the element of shared experience that students and alumni have with current players. Rachelle spoke of her feelings about this topic:

... The majority of people who are coming to a college game are really just young and passionate and want to see their players play. I think part of that is there's a personal relationship that happens at the college game, that doesn't necessarily exist at the pro level, right? Because there's these layers that happen. The students that come to UCLA to watch the game, they know the students on the court, on the field, and that breeds a whole different level of um fanaticism, than, you know, watching a pro player...And so that I think it's a different sense of camaraderie with the team, per se.

Rachelle uses the possessive pronoun “their” to describe the sense of ownership that students feel about their academic colleagues playing in the games. Through her language, we can see that she perceives a connection between current students and UCLA student-athletes. She identifies this connection as integral in the creation of “camaraderie” between the student and the athletes that is not present in the relationship between fans and professional teams. But does this relationship last? Do alumni have that same bond with student-athletes when they are no longer peers?

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Randy, a UCLA alum in his early thirties who is also employed on campus, used similar language when talking about the development of his fandom while a student. Randy grew up in Los Angeles and his father worked as a cameraman at local sports competitions—he frequently shot the action at Angel and Dodger Stadium—so sports were always a part of his life. He shared this about becoming a Bruin fan: “I think gradually over the course of my first three years it came to the point where I was at every game. My friends and I would get there early and sometimes tailgate or sometimes take the-the rooter bus, and always make sure to get as close student section seats as possible and be yelling with all the other students and really just invested in our football team.” Through this statement, Randy reveals the way that the team became “ours” over the course of his time at UCLA. His choice of the word “invested” also reflects the way that his time spent as a fan “investing” in the team created this degree of ownership in his fandom. This developed relationship falls within the “practice” portion of community of practice theory. Duguid (2005) writes about the debate in economics surrounding tacit knowledge and communities of practice. Looking closely at the “practice” element of communities of practice he makes the assertion that learning involves more than just acquiring information. He argues that “membership in the [community of practice] offers form and context as well as content to aspiring practitioners, who need to not just acquire the specific knowledge of the community but also the identity of the community member” (p. 113). While Randy does not explicitly talk about the team being a part of the school and the school being a part of his life, he weaves the years on campus into this description of his budding fandom.

Jenna, a female alumna in her early thirties who also works at UCLA in alumni development, mentioned the special interest that she has in the athletes that compete for UCLA because of the university experience that she shared with them. She commented, “And so I think,

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because of that, I feel much more interested in following them.” And when these Bruins leave campus, she continues to follow their careers. Their time on campus generated in her very powerful feelings of connection. She continued, “So the players that are went into the N.F.L. I'd say within the last five years, I'm pretty aware of like what team they're on. Some of them more so than that, because I just love them.” Certainly there are professional sports fans who “love” the players on the teams that they follow, but Jenna’s comment that she is “more interested” in following the athletes because of their time on campus reveals the unique nature of the alumni fan relationship.

Rachelle reflected further on the relationship between her and the athletes after graduation. She explained that most of the conversations that she shared with players while she was a student were about the games and the athletes’ performances, but she noted that she also worked in the athletic department and was able to spend more meaningful time with some of the players. That camaraderie had not dissolved after they left Westwood, but rather the bonds were stronger because of shared experience. She talked of the way that social media maintained connections that were made while she and the athletes were sharing an experience on campus. She observed, “I remember at one point I got a friend request from JR Henderson, who was one of the players on the national championship team, and I was like, ‘Really?’ And I think he still is playing in Japan, but it was just really nice to reconnect, and like message back and forth and share some memories...” Any professional sports fan would relish the victory of their team winning the Super Bowl or the NBA championship, but they would not necessarily have the experience of “sharing memories” with the athletes.

“A reflection of me”

From the perspective of Jenna, the relationship that Rachelle describes is almost exclusive to collegiate sports.⁶ While discussing this closer relationship that is possible at the collegiate level she told a story of “one of the ten best days of her life” when she was allowed down on the field during a game and standing close to the players and a former coach who was being honored with an award. Her voice rose and her speech cadence quickened as she told the story: “It was very surreal...it’s weird how, um, how close you are to things going on, because it’s a big university. You know, it’s not like a pro situation, so it’s very, um, I don’t know, it was, it was very cool...one of the ten best days of my life!” She marveled at how big the school is and yet how close you can be to the action. Later on she again compared this experience to going to a professional football game: “Even if you went out on the field at like a Chargers game for example, it wouldn’t feel nearly the same because I don’t feel connected to like what’s happening there. It would more just be as a fan. So I think working at UCLA I think that being down there and seeing it all is a different, is-is transcends to me football. It was more about the sense of pride and like wow, this is a UCLA event and the University that I’m so proud of is making this all happen.” As an alumna, Jenna elucidated, she feels like more than “just a fan” but a member of a university community that has created this experience.

Jenna made another interesting observation about the distinction between NCAA and professional sports and the degree to which she feels a part of UCLA athletics: they represent the University. She talked about an opportunity she had to see some of the trophies awarded to UCLA teams over the years. Despite being teased by her colleagues, she was effusively happy

⁶ I choose to say that it is almost exclusive because a former professional athlete would have a special camaraderie with current professional athletes. Conservative estimates of the percentage of United States residents who are currently professional athletes are .00005%. Using further current statistics, this would suggest that .0008 percent of the population is a former professional athlete. “Almost exclusively” feels like an appropriate designation for the relationship that alumni have with collegiate athletes.

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about the chance to snap some pictures holding the usually encased awards. But then she paused and added, “I’ve had a realization lately that I connect even with the players when they do something not good, I look at it as that is a reflection of UCLA, which on some level is a reflection of me.” A bit later she continued,

“Now I have more of a sense of pride when they’re really good people and they’re really humble and nice. I think... I’m so glad that you are represent us out there, because it fills me with as an alumna a sense of pride that we are producing these athletes, but producing these people that I think are—are good representations of the University. And I find that I am disappointed in—in or, uh, if they do something that’s not good, because I understand as I get older, how people are like hey, you’re, you represent UCLA when you’re an athlete and so don’t do things that tarnish our image the way that, you know, some other big athletes have.”

While Jenna was not speaking directly to the feeling she gets as a fan, she was drawing a connection between the players on the field, the players on the court, and the way that their actions are linked to her. When UCLA players are portrayed in the media in a negative light, Jenna identifies this as a negative “reflection” on herself. Through this insight, Jenna shed light on the implicit connections that persist between players and fan/non-fan alumni alike. And while it is possible to frame an argument that NCAA athletes are “pros”, it is not possible to argue that NCAA fans are the same as professional fans. Professional fans do not perceive the potential threat of living in the shadows of “their” players’ poor choices.

Addressing directly the nature of her fandom and the feelings she has about the players Jenna remarked, “I have more of a sense of pride when they’re really good people and they’re really humble and nice. I think, ‘I’m so glad that you are represent us out there, because it fills

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me with, as an alumna, a sense of pride that we are producing these athletes, and producing these people that I think are good representations of the University.”

“Something people can always rally around”

UCLA sports fandom is a powerful cementer of networks and relationships, both for fan groups and the larger school community. Randy, the early thirties alum who works on new student orientation at UCLA, spoke specifically about a viewing party he shared with several alumni friends and colleagues. They gathered together during the fall football season to watch a tough away matchup (UCLA was playing Oregon, then ranked #2 in the national football polls). I spoke with Randy nearly 5 months after this event took place, but he spoke with clarity about the memories from that day and that game:

I would say maybe 15... 10, 15 people, uh, everyone's super invested in the game it's what... You know, when there's a play we're all watching it intently. When we complete a pass or do something well, you know, everyone cheers. Uh, when we got our first touchdown and we were beating Oregon seven to zero at one point everyone was super happy, super cheery. Uh, I just remember loud, um, and just kind of... I guess there was a really good sense of like we're all in this together and we're all watching this TV. together and we're all huddled around on our couches watching this game and super invested in the game... that was a chance for us all to be together and in an environment outside of UCLA or outside of our work and be together, you know as friends.

In this situation, the NCAA athletic competition has created a physical space for the participant and his colleagues to “huddle” around and share their “investment” in the game. The points scored in the game by their alma mater generate a feeling of joy in the participants. In line with

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Durkheim's *collective effervescence*, Randy distinguishes between the daily grind of work and the high-energy space created by the worship of the sacred team.

Official alumni viewing events breed *collective effervescence*, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and generate revenue for scholarships that allow for further growth and reproduction of a solidified UCLA community. During my observations the degree of fandom varied, but the presence of these elements was universal. On a sunny and breezy Sunday morning in February I attended a web-advertised meeting at El Segundo's Tavern on Main hosted by the South Bay Bruin Network organized around the UCLA game against Oregon State. The Tavern on Main lives up to its own billing as the "friendly neighborhood tavern" in this quaint Southern California enclave, nestled in the shadows of Los Angeles's eponymous airport (it is also owned by a Bruin alum). The ocean breeze flowed between the slats of the low white picket fence and through the flung open doors into the bar and eating areas, sparsely populated by the Super Bowl Sunday lunchtime crowd. The main dining room was serving up brunch fare to parties of four and five, while the narrow room behind the bar catered to the Bruins fans I journeyed to observe. The sounds of chatter, laughter, and clinking plates mixed with the cheers of fans both here and in Corvallis, Oregon where the UCLA men's basketball team battled a Pac 10 opponent. A long booth ran the length of the room; a row of televisions tuned to sporting events hung above the booth. Three of them were broadcasting the UCLA game. On the opposite wall there was one large television also tuned to the UCLA game. At the far end of the rectangular room sat a row of stadium seats taken from the old Pauley Pavilion. Seated in this area were eight patrons focused on the NCAA basketball action. Six were women who appear to be between the ages of 60 and 80. There were also two men—one appeared to be about 45 and the other in his late twenties. The women were draped in Bruin garb—sweaters, scarves, and even earrings that one of the

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women made out of UCLA pins—and the older man was wearing a UCLA t-shirt. They chatted amongst themselves during commercial breaks, and turned from the action to order meals and drinks, but aside from these brief respites, the whole group gazed over each others heads focused on the game. They cheered audibly, clapped their hands, high fived as if their enthusiasm would drive the team playing 1,000 miles away.

Their *collective effervescence* was palpable, echoing through their cacophony of voices, claps and high fives. The easy rhythm of their conversation revealed the depth of their relationships. They spoke of the sense of community that watching together engendered within their group. Pressing her hand to her chest and revealing a row of UCLA bracelets wrapped on her slim wrist, Estelle, one of the females in her 60s or 70s explained that while she has season tickets to the Bruins for football and attends every home game, viewing with this group is just as much fun. In this comment she reveals the power of fandom even in this small group. She noted, “At Pauley, there are 11,000 fans; today we are a small group but it isn’t any less fun.” She emphasized that she really enjoys sharing her fandom with this group. Estelle interwove references to her commitment to UCLA in this conversation. She remarked on donations she makes to the UCLA Chancellor’s Fund and the Graduate School of Education. As she said this she reached for a large plastic jug that likely once held a Costco sized quantity of pretzels. “This is our South Bay Bruins Scholarship Fund,” she remarked, and explained that they bring it to all of their events to raise money for grants to award to current South Bay Bruins. The recipients of this scholarship will likely be influenced by the fervor of the donors—and their passion about UCLA. In turn, the recipients may adopt a similar passion about UCLA.

The funds and fervor generated by these alumni events are not accidental. Two of the participants work directly with alumni liaison groups on campus. Rachelle spoke of planning

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alumni events for the Westside Bruins network centered around UCLA football and basketball games, averring “our primary focuses are to create those engagement opportunities for Bruins...to engage alumni and build connections with each and back to the University, and to raise funds for our scholarships.” I attended three of these events that Rachelle and her colleagues arranged and witnessed the engagement of alumni that they were aiming for. In late February, the Bruin basketball team was playing a bit erratically. They had a few unexpectedly strong games, and then some terrible missteps. They seemed to be wavering on the edge, which meant an additional heaping of suspense for fans. I stopped by Rivalry Sports Bar (another Bruin alum eatery) on a sleepy Saturday and encountered an eclectic group of UCLA fans. Rachelle was present and accompanied by four men ranging in age from 30something to 50something. This Westside Bruins Alumni event did not have a repurposed pretzel jar, but did have a clipboard for signing in and information sheets about scholarship fundraising and other events.

UCLA was down when I arrived towards the end of the first half. The conversation ebbed and flowed in a similar rhythm to that of the event in El Segundo. This group was comprised of four regulars and one first-timer (two if you count me). During halftime the group talked about local breweries and beer shopping. Ralph, a 1970s era Bruin and (painfully⁷) confessed graduate of USC Dental School, bantered with Jason, a Bruin of at least a decade and a half later, about visiting bars and breweries in the Long Beach area. I cannot say with certainty that these two men have little in common, but their easy dialogue about beers intensified as the Bruins began to unravel in the second half. What could have been described as an elementary school “inside voice” chat quickly progressed into a steep sine wave of intense silence and explosive utterances

⁷ Ralph is a very passionate Bruin supporter. The Bruins archrivals are the USC Trojans. Ralph attended Dental School at USC when he finished UCLA because, in his words, it was the “better dental training program.” But this was, according to him, not an easy decision at all. He denigrates USC (in a playful way) many times during the course of the observation.

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directed over each other's heads at the televisions. Undoubtedly, these men were sharing their passion about UCLA basketball in this space. They were engaging with each other and the school. Rachelle reflected on the work it takes to get these events together, "We're exhausted, 'cause it's a lot of viewing parties." But she and her co-workers persevere and continue to put together these sorts of events, because in her words, "sports is always something people can rally around."

For a major research university like UCLA, there are certainly many ways that alumni stay connected to their alma mater. Bruin sports, however, are one of the most powerful connections that the school has to both the wallets and hearts of its former students. My review of six months of Alumni Newsletters from one local alumni network reveals the importance of Bruin athletics for these organizations. The Westside Alumni Network, the most local of Bruin alumni groups, published a total of 58 pages between August and January. On those pages, over 40% of the photos depicted NCAA athletes or pictures of alums gathered for the purpose of cheering on Bruin athletes. Additionally, exactly 50% of the events advertised on these pages involved Bruin athletes (all but two of the 17 sports related events were viewing parties while the other 1—mentioned 2 times—was a lecture given by a former Bruin football player). These statistics demonstrate the way in which the formal alumni organizing outreach efforts depend on the presence of NCAA athletes.

Members of the alumni organizing community support this quantitative data. In addressing the importance of Bruin athletics to her job at with the Westside Bruins network Rachelle stressed the ways that her organization cultivates the attention of the alumni fan. In speaking to me about event planning, she commented,

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Well, I think what I would say first, and I can't speak wholeheartedly on behalf of the alumni association and their overall agenda, but what's become clear to me, is that they're really focused on engaging alumni. In a way, maybe differently than they've done in the past, and helping alumni build connections with each other and build connections back to the university. That's my general sense. And I think that is my network's reason for hosting viewing parties.

Here, Rachelle uses two words that came up frequently in my conversations with participants about alumni events: “engaging” and “networks”.

Jenna, a female in her early thirties who also works in an alumni liaison capacity at UCLA echoed Rachelle's earlier comments about alumni engagement. While she was not referring specifically to viewing parties as generators of alumni connections, she made a strong assertion about the value of UCLA sports to her department's mission: “I think it would be difficult [to do my job in alumni affairs without the athletic department]. I think we could be successful, but I think it would be very different because I think that what we find is there is a large percentage of alumni who their connection today is athletics and that is a way that they connect with UCLA. So I think, specially for non-local alumni, I don't think UCLA would be present in their life in the same way this it is [now] because of sports.” In her capacity as an alumni expert, Jenna describes the intensity of fandom and the way that fandom works to keep alumni connected to their alma mater. NCAA alumni fandom is not just a forum for social capital exchange, but also a generator of economic capital for the school.

Participants identified their fandom as a relationship builder outside of specific alumni viewing event. They reminisced about the ways that the UCLA sports shaped lifelong friendships; they described the excitement that comes from talking about their alma mater's

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upcoming competitions. Rachelle, the 30something female who works as a consultant for the UCLA Alumni Association testified that many of her best memories and closest friends sprung from fandom. Randy described his frequent chats with co-workers in anticipation of upcoming games as a way for “everyone to share in their UCLA experience. When I am there I feel like I am in a family.” He elaborated later on in our conversation: “I think it definitely [brings] us closer together. It helps us bond.” Physically, there is no question that being in one place to watch a game brings fans closer together, but participants indicated that the relative proximity has a strengthening effect on their interpersonal relationships and thus the larger UCLA community. At the events of the Westside Bruins Network and the South Bay Bruins Network, UCLA alumni shared stories, food, drinks, and their fandom of UCLA athletics in a way that strengthened their own personal relationships. In the broader scope of the study, however, participants emphasized that the viewing parties specifically, and their fandom in general, goes beyond the cementing of interpersonal relationships and influences the creation of a stronger UCLA community.

Rachelle shared a wonderful story about her first experience at Pauley Pavilion, UCLA’s famed basketball complex. She found herself alone—she thought first in line—hours before game time, waiting to snag a front-row student section seat. She struck up a conversation with a man named Marcus, a long-time Event Staff employee, who joked with her about her enthusiasm and loyalty to Bruin basketball. As game time drew closer, Rachelle remained the lone student fan, and she began to worry about the lack of other students. Marcus too became concerned and told her he would go check out the situation. He returned with the troubling news that the rest of the student fans were assembled in a new waiting area and that, unfortunately, Rachelle would have to take her place at the end of that line. Crestfallen but understanding, Rachelle made her

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way to the back and waited to get into the stadium with the throngs of student fans. Just before the group was let in Marcus came over with a man in a suit. They plucked Rachelle from the line and escorted her to the seat section she had shown up so early to occupy. During halftime she was escorted over to meet legendary Bruin coach John Wooden. She smiled knowingly and finished the wild tale: “So that was—that kind of set the tone for me. I think that's a very unique experience, but between that and having winning seasons, and having personal relationships with a lot of the athletes, and then being a season ticket holder...when I went to games, I felt like I was part of a family in a lot of ways. And I never tried to take advantage of the relationships, but it's true in life, it's about who you know.” For Rachelle, who she knew and with whom she created relationships meant for her a new family centered around UCLA fandom⁸. Rachelle’s description fits into Crawford’s fan framework that identifies “neo-tribes” or “tribus”, replacing traditional families or long-term job identity frameworks.

Each of the participants I interviewed and several of the participants in attendance at the viewing parties talked about the differences between being a UCLA fan of basketball games and football games. Football fandom was ubiquitously more popular; the regularity of the schedule and the limited number of competitions was frequently cited as the reason for the increased football loyalty. That said, each interview participant mentioned their love of Bruin basketball and all of the participant observation took place at basketball viewing parties. Jenna, a football season ticket holder who works less than a football field length from the basketball stadium, confessed that she is not a frequent attendee at live basketball games. Despite this, she spoke of the special kind of “magic” she experiences as a fan at Pauley Pavilion. Rachelle echoed Jenna’s

⁸ Rachelle stayed friends with Marcus throughout the rest of that season and over her years as a student at UCLA. Marcus fell ill during the later years of her time at school and was moved from staffing the student section area to riding an elevator that shuttled VIPs to private viewing boxes. She would spend halftime riding the elevator with him and chattering about the games, the players, and life.

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comments about the energy and magic of seeing a game at Pauley. Her description of the super-fan who everyone knew and loved reflects the earlier discussion of *collective effervescence* and of family. Like the crazy uncle that shows up at Thanksgiving, Rachelle described a fan who never missed a UCLA home basketball game: “He would always dance like a crazy person, just so he could get on like the Jumbotron. We all knew him. We knew what he was going to do, and game management they just let it go, that was just kind of par for the course.”

The desire to generate *collective effervescence*, however, was not ubiquitous across interview participants or observation groups. I observed a few officially organized alumni viewing parties—some with three participants and others with more than eighty participants. Across these gatherings of variable size, there were displays of fandom of variable intensity and of variable rhythm. Jenna allowed that while she was a season ticket holder for football and attended all of the home games, she preferred to watch the away games by herself. For her, this was not an aberration from her behaviors as a college student:

It just seemed like the student section was just a big mess. I remember sitting with my friend and then games are really hot. That I remember because it was like dangerous how many people would, like, pass out from heat exhaustion. It was like well you probably shouldn't have had five beers on the way or you'd feel a lot better like I do. I mean, I'm hot, but I'm not dying. I think it took a lot of them, especially girls had no interest in football; they were just going for the social experience, so they didn't care whereas I wanted to see the game. I didn't want to be late. Same thing today actually, I don't want to miss the kickoff whereas the people don't care while they're still, you know, tailgating or whatever.

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Her patterns as a fan have persisted, and while, as an alumnus she will occasionally gather with friends or co-workers to watch a game, she prefers to watch alone. She told me, “For me, it's less social and more that I love football. So I'm fine to like watch the away game at home by myself before I go somewhere else. And I will enjoy it probably just as much because I'll be like intensely watching the game.”⁹ The joy that Jenna finds in watching the game alone, or her *individual effervescence*, represents a different manifestation of an element of fandom. While taking her perspective into consideration, this does not invalidate the experiences of other participants.

“You’re, like, Miss UCLA”

UCLA is woven into the identity of alumni. In part, this is attributable to the education—the learning done on campus from professors and students who represent UCLA—and the time spent on campus soaking up the culture of the University. Participants frequently mentioned the academic caliber of the school, the beauty of the campus, the vibrancy of the community, a class that “changed my life”. Randy “fell in love” with the campus the first time he visited. Rachelle took a tour in 6th grade and she “fell in love instantaneously.” For most students, a UCLA degree is earned in four years—that usually take place during a formative time in development—and the school having an impact on identity is not revelatory. This identity, though, is often bolstered by fandom for UCLA athletics. As time distanced the alumni from their own collegiate experience, the presence of Bruin athletics provided a continuing connection to the school that continues to shape both the self-conceived identity and the ascribed identity of participants.

Fiske (1989, cited in Lewis, 1992) writes of fandom in terms of *popular cultural capital*, a specific type of capital that resembles the surrounding society’s legitimate *cultural capital*. He

⁹ After Jenna shared this with me I said to her, “I think it's such a nice sentiment that you're willing to give your day up for the team.” She paused, smiled, tilted her head up to look me in the eye and said in a softer voice, “Yeah.”

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argues that the knowledge that dedicated fans have about the focus of their fandom gives them a special kind of capital that (for the fan) manufactures self-esteem. As mentioned in the literature review section, the interweaving of cultural capital, social capital, and popular cultural capital is particularly interesting in the identities and motivations of NCAA alumni fans. For the participants in this study a sort of bragging about their knowledge—or popular cultural capital—bubbled to the surface.

Alumni fans are proud of their team and of their own knowledge about the team. Rachelle spoke of the way that UCLA sports fit into her own identity conception when sharing a story about watching and predicting the performance of the Bruin basketball team. She compared herself to some of her male fan friends:

I'd be the only girl in the room talking sports with the guys... I was always kind of one of those sports girls...I don't know the numbers like they know the numbers, and all the ins and outs of the plays. That's not my thing. But can I hold my own in that conversation? Absolutely. Did I know the players? Did I know their routines? Absolutely. In fact, the year-the year that we won the basketball championship, I called it. I didn't know enough to know, other than I could see it in the way they worked. In the way they got along, and the way that they trained, that was just my call.

Rachelle is proud of her intuition and her prediction of the team's success. Her ability to “hold [her] own” in a conversation with male friends is also a source of pleasure. Her admonition that she “called it”—underscored by her later comment that it was “my call”—reveals her ownership of a UCLA Bruin *popular cultural capital*. Additionally, Rachelle identifies herself as “one of those sports girls”, but uses her fandom and knowledge of UCLA basketball as a means of proving this self-conception.

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The bragging wasn't always directly connected to the individual, but rather to the success of the UCLA teams and the way that reflected on the identity of the participant. In the calm between halves at the Westside Bruins alumni event at Rivalry Sports Bar, Ralph relayed a characteristically funny comment that teetered on the sharp edge of humor and dead seriousness. He said that he saw a friend recently who ribbed him commenting, "Hey Ralph, it used to take you two weeks to get over a UCLA loss. Is that getting better?" "It only takes a week now," Ralph responded with a tight smile. Ralph's emotional state hinges on the success of the team. He mentioned other ways that the team patterns influence his behaviors: he gets his haircut before every USC football game, he bakes brownies before every home football game to give out to the other UCLA fans in his section when the Bruins score, he implores his seatmates to remain seated during UCLA third down conversion attempts. As he and the other attendees focused more closely on the game late in the second half, I asked Ralph one more question about UCLA football. In 1998, UCLA played a late season make-up game at the University of Miami that had been cancelled earlier that fall when a hurricane struck the Florida coast. After a strong season and shocking losses by other highly ranked teams, UCLA was poised for a bid to the National Championship. They needed a win in Miami, but they fell one point short. I am not a great expert of UCLA football history, but circumstance placed me at that game; Ralph, too, had made the journey to root his Bruins to victory. I asked him, as I got up to leave, how long it took him to get over that loss. "I'm still not over it," he remarked. Ralph's comments demonstrate the deep connection between alumni fandom and alumni persona.

Jenna spoke of the challenges of being a fan when she was a UCLA student because of the poor performance and record of the football team. While she lamented the lackluster Bruin squad, she capped off her comment by noting, "But we never lost a game to USC in football!"

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This direct comparison to the Bruin rival Trojans shows Jenna's pursuit of a positive identification for the team and for herself.

Jenna also revealed the way that UCLA team success is connected to her identity and to the identity of all alumni. As mentioned above, the football team was not very successful on a national scale while she was a student. However, Jenna highlights two ways the team's more recent accomplishments have reflected on her identity. In terms of her own conception, Jenna has become more of a fan because of the team's success. She comments, "I've seen my passion in the last two years really grow now that we're better because I want to watch the away games. Whereas before I was kind of like, well we're not doing that great so I'm going to do something else on Saturday." As UCLA's performance improves, Jenna's conception of her identity as a fan becomes stronger. Randy, too, comments on his increased fandom in the recent years. He has become a season ticket holder and in the last three years has watched every football game "unless I absolutely can't."

Second, in terms of her ascribed identity by her peers, Jenna's identity has also changed due to the betterment of performance by the Bruins football and basketball teams. She reflects, "It's become very much a part of my identity. All my friends are like, you know, gosh, you're like Miss UCLA and I never thought of myself like that when I was a student." Through the moniker "Miss UCLA", Jenna's friends weave together the identity of the school and the identity of their friend.

Jenna made another comment about the improvement of the team, however, that highlights the way that the team's performance and success can influence the identity of all of the school's alumni. While she did not elucidate the way that the increased national attention on the school could bring additional cache to the school and to the diplomas of all alumni, she did

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comment on the heightened media attention surrounding the school: “And so there's been a lot more general hype about the team and the sports universe has been more aware of them recently. So it's-it's nice, because then they are on TV more and all those things. And it's just been nice because it's more fun obviously when we're, when we're winning than when we're not.”

While the fandom described thus far has revealed that *collective effervescence* produced pride and its affiliated bragging behaviors, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and influenced positive identifications, fandom must also be viewed in terms of the amount of time is dedicated to it, and what else could be taking place in that time. Though my participants rarely spoke in negative terms about their fandom, *time*—often expressed in terms of opportunity cost—snuck into their comments about their fan experiences. On several occasions participant spoke of the way that they shaped their social calendars and free time around watching games, but their attitudes seemed to be that the games were worth it—something that they wanted to prioritize. Randy, however, made one very interesting remark about the institution of college sports and the way that it influenced his identity as a student. He did not extend this comment to reflect his alumni fandom, but speaking about his time at UCLA and how it might be different if the school did not have an intercollegiate athletic team he said, “I think I probably would have been much more focused on academics, um, because, you know, on any given basketball week we have two games two nights per week...” His identity as a fan, he confessed, came at the expense of (at least a bit) his academic performance.

Sperber (2000) cites schools with excellent academics that, in his opinion, fall victim to the party culture that surrounds NCAA sports. While Sperber takes issue with many facets of what he terms "College Sports MegaInc." (p.238), one problem he notes for fans is that half of the schools do not have winning records. He surveyed student fans who spoke of the terrible

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shame of being associated with schools that have teams with losing records. His broad stroke analysis would suggest that within this environment it is not possible to generate *collective effervescence*. As UCLA is currently experiencing strong performances from both of their teams, this was not an issue for the participants I interviewed. As noted by two of them, however, their enrollment during poor sports team performance years did not negatively impact their fandom; the successful years, they commented, are "more fun" though.

Others can also perceive fandom as an aberrant behavior. Participants spoke of the “crazy” nature of their behavior and mentioned that their friends and families sometimes teased them because of their deep passion for Bruin sports. Jenna drew a line between crazy fandom and herself underscoring that fandom is, in a way, part of her job in alumni development. She told the story of talking to one of UCLA’s young football stars: “I was chatting with one of our new stars, Miles Jack who plays both offense and defense, so he was like a phenom on ESPN this year. And he was at the event, so I met him for the first time, was chatting with him and took a picture with him. And it didn't feel creepy because I am at this event in a work capacity, not a fan capacity. I think I feel like I'm not like every other fan that would just approach him like, “Oh, hey, you’re great.” Jenna reveals here even a member of the alumni fandom tribe can perceive that fandom is “creepy”.

Conclusions, limitations and implications

The fieldwork and interviews in this study provide insight into the phenomenon of NCAA alumni fandom. The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the feelings, meaning making, and motivations of alumni fans of UCLA athletics. NCAA sports, as an institution, have become increasingly controversial in recent years as debates arise over the viability of maintaining the status of an “amateur” organization when the programs and

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governing board are awash in money. Additionally, critics question the integrity of the “student” portion of the “student-athlete” designation bestowed upon participants. While fans—and alumni fans in particular—certainly have their own opinions in this debates, the loudest voices in the conversations about NCAA sports reform are those of athletes, the NCAA organizing board, and expert commissions such as the Knight Commission. This study brings the experience of the fan into the conversation. If reforms are to be effected, the alumni fan’s experience should be considered in the negotiations. Additionally, this study brings to light the importance of fandom and fan communities to NCAA sports alumni fans. While much research has been conducted in organizational identity for the purpose of streamlining and strengthening corporate interests, little work has been done in organizational identity and alumni and their alma mater.

To guide this study, I borrowed from Fiske’s (1989, cited in Lewis, 1992) adaptation of Bourdieu’s cultural and economic capital framework, employing Fiske’s terminology of “popular cultural capital”. Additionally, I used Durkheim’s notion of *collective effervescence* (originally applied to religious gatherings) to describe the collective fervor generated by fans at alumni viewing parties. I also looked at social identity theory, organizational identity theory, stakeholder theory, and the ways that these models appear in NCAA alumni fandom.

This study revealed three distinct findings about alumni fandom. First, alumni fans draw a clear distinction between their fandom of their alma mater and their professional sports fandom. Extending this argument, the participants distinguish between the institution of NCAA sports and professional sports. This finding is especially important in terms of current debates about the possibility of paying NCAA athletes directly for participation in intercollegiate athletics. If “student-athletes” are offered remuneration beyond the current scholarship offerings, how will this change the experience of the alumni fan? Participants used terms like “purity” and

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“undistorted” in their description of NCAA sports. Naïve as this may be, paying athletes will certainly influence alumni fans’ meaning making about their fandom of their alma mater. The extent of this impact, and the potential loss of NCAA fans, could be explored with further research in a broader study across schools.

The second finding—that Bruin basketball and football viewing strengthens interpersonal relationships, supports networks of alumni, and generates collective effervescence—coupled with the third finding—that NCAA team fandom is woven into the self-conception of the alumni fan, and often a component of the identity ascribed to them by their community—are not groundbreaking on the surface. These findings are more important, though, when considering the reproduction of sports consumption and university wealth gained at the expense of these alumni fan networks (Bauman, 2010, cited in Crawford, 2004) argues that while modern industrial societies hosted “stable economies” where individuals defined their identities by their roles as producers, today’s fans live in a “liquid” (post-industrial” modernity where individuals are more often defined by their role as consumers. As people cannot find stability in jobs that they keep for a lifetime, they turn to consumption and the purchase of goods that bestow upon them ready-made (and easily changeable) identities. For those fans that find their identity through their alumni fandom, the time and capital they invest in their fandom serves to enrich their own lives, but also the advertisers, commodity makers, and coaches and administrators working within the NCAA system. As noted by Guschwan (2012), “On the one hand, fan culture can be a vibrant form of leisure that forms the basis for deeply felt emotions, relationships and identities. On the other, fan culture is rooted in a consumer culture that constantly quantifies, monetizes, and leverages human impulses under legal regimes that do not recognize any value in fan sentiment” (p. 35). This study offers a first step, which should certainly be followed up with additional

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research, into understanding precisely this “fan sentiment” that Guschwan argues is being ignored.

Another interesting area of future research calls for a closer look at Fiske’s research on “popular cultural capital”. Whether or not the *popular cultural capital* of a successful sports team translates to legitimate *cultural capital* (or even *economic capital*) is beyond the scope of this study, but Jenna’s comments demonstrate the heightened profile of the school as a result of athletic team prowess. Further research into quantifiable benefits of a successful sports program for alumni personal success could yield interesting results about societally ascribed identities connected to university credentials.

Certainly there are limitations to this study. The largest concern is that of scope; this research was conducted over a relatively short period of time and with a small sample size. Additionally, this research focused on the *fan* population, without studying the larger community at UCLA or considering the percentage of the community presently on campus, nor the larger community of alumni, who may not support NCAA athletics or identify themselves as fans. Sperber’s (2000) survey data suggests that student support for NCAA sports on college campuses is very “shallow”, and this fandom is actually hampering the learning experience (p. 238). Additionally, this study was conducted during basketball season, which is the lower profile NCAA sport in terms of alumni fandom.

As a fan of professional sports, the success of the team may be pleasing or upsetting, but for the most part does not have an impact on the fan’s personal life. Further research into the unique qualities of the alumni fan could look at the way that the success of an alumni fan’s alma maters teams impacts the economic and social capital of the fan. Additionally, Fiske provides a

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framework for analyzing fan productivity (in terms of blog posts and other social/social media engagement) and fan consumption specific to their fandom (memorabilia, etc.).

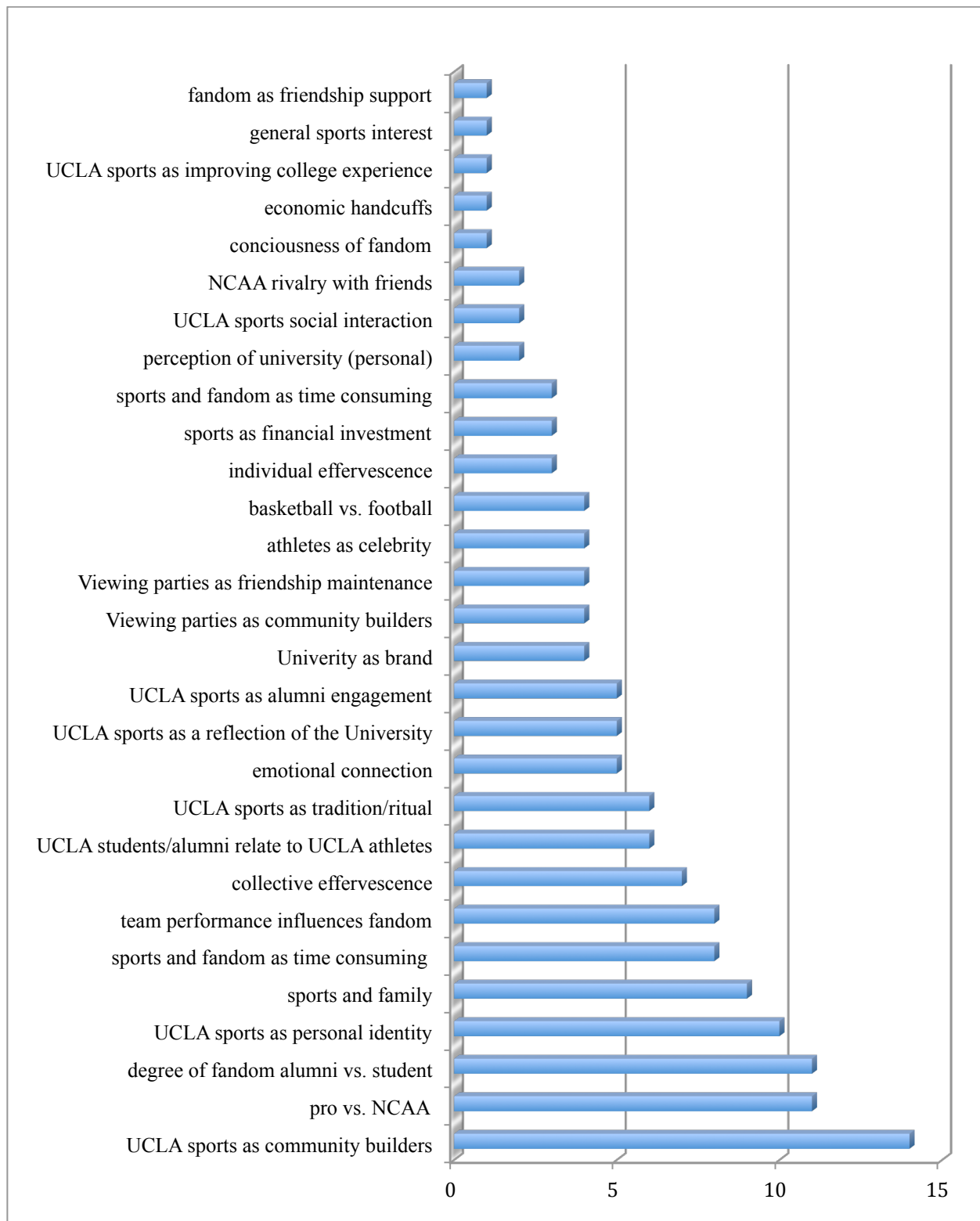
Appendix A

Oral Consent Agreement

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participating in my study. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of my research is to obtain a better understanding of the experiences and interest of fans of Division I college revenue sports at a large research university—in this case basketball and football at UCLA. I want to get insight into what your alma mater's teams mean to you and why you continue your relationship with the teams. If you agree to participate we will engage in a conversation guided by some questions about your experiences as a student, alumni, and fan. I am going to record our conversation and then transcribe it so that I can accurately represent your feelings. I will not record your name and will give you a pseudonym when transcribing the interview. All personal information is kept on a password-protected computer. If possible, I would appreciate feedback on my analysis of your interview. In this case, I will email you my thoughts, and, if you have time, I would appreciate any comments. If you have any questions, please email me at the address that we have already corresponded on (bruinbballstudy@gmail.com). Thank you for your help and your insights.

Appendix B

Second Level Coding Frequency



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Appendix C

Sample of Codebook

3rd level code	Freq uency	Content Description	Brief Data Sample	Source ID	Additional Thoughts	Nvivo
UCLA sports as community builders	14	p mentions a way in which experiences with NCAA s	UCLA so I would see them at basketb	TB1, 7	social networks as "exchange	x
pro vs. NCAA	11	p makes a distinction between professional sports and	"I don't follow pro as closely as I follo	TB1, 7	"pay" in the pro leagues cor	x
degree of fandom alumni vs. student	11	p defines fandom intensity	She watched sports when she was a st	EFN2, 4		x
UCLA sports as personal identity	10	p is bragging about knowing a lot about the team	like I don't know the numbers like the	TB1, 13		x
team performance influences fandom	9	team success influence	She watched sports when she was a st	EFN2, 4		x
sports and family	9	p describes sports family	I more-more remember we have this a	TB2, 9		x
sports and fandom as time consuming	8	p refers to time spent	And so coming to college, looking back	TB2, 6		x
collective effervescence	8	positive feelings	She says that going to the games is diff	EFN2, 4		x
UCLA sports as tradition/ritual	7	p speaks about the ritual of watching the game	But we're pretty, um, we're pretty, uh,	TB2, 10		x
basketball vs. football	7	differences	And because the experience in Pauley	TB2, 16		"its own magic"
emotional connection	5	p uses language of emotion to describe relationship w	"I took a tour here in the sixth grade,	TB1, 2	this idea comes up in all three	"fell in love"
UCLA sports as reflection of the University	5	athletes/teams and UCLA	I think there are a lot of people who d	TB2, 15		"engage"
UCLA sports as alumni engagement	5	mentions personal relationship	I think there are a lot of people who d	TB2, 15		x
university as brand	4	p makes mention of the university as a branded com	"like it's such a brand in its own..."	TB1, 3	the image is what is at stake	x
Viewing parties as community builders	4	pt is speaking specifically to the role of the viewing p	And it gave us an opportunity to bring	TB1, 14		x
Viewing parties as friendship maintenance	4	p discusses the friendship element of the viewing par	I think it's interesting, 'cause a lot of n	TB1, 16		x
athletes as celebrity	4	p speaks with reverence about athletes	I do remember though just going with	TB2, 6	this isn't necessarily an NCA	x
perception of university (personal)	2	p asserts that the university (or members of the com	"it literally changed by my life..."	TB1, 4	"And in that one instant, I fe	x
UCLA students/alumni relate to UCLA athle	2	p reveals the connection that he/she feels to athletes a	story about the Brendan lecture	TB1, 19		x
NCAA rivalry with friends	2	p is talking about how they have fun rivalries with fa	Uh, it's totally fine. In fact, I root for	TB2, 15		"talk smack"
economic handcuffs	1	p discusses the ways that economics guide choices	"so I decided that I need to find a job	TB1, 6	if I am going to make any arg	x
UCLA sports as improving college experience	1	p explains that the presence of NCAA sports had a po	I'm a huge sports fan, so I think that t	TB2, 2	the presence of the sports, di	x
general sports interest	1	p talks about his/her past interest in sports	And in junior high started kind of bei	TB2, 6		
consciousness of fandom (perception)	1	p discusses meta the fandom	I was chatting with our, one of our nev	TB2, 12	I feel like this is important be	x
emotional connection			It helps us bond, it brings us closer tog	TB3, 9		"passion"
emotional connection			It was more about the sense of pride a	TB2, 14		"pride"
emotional connection			It was kind of funny but I think I have	TB2, 16		"special memories..."
emotional connection			fell in love with it	TB3, 1		"fell in love"
university as brand			"But all of those experiences are what	TB1, 6	Rachelle is talking about the	x
university as brand			I guess it's just that the concept of the	TB2, 13		x
university as brand			I mean we... You know, we try and giv	TB3, 10		x
perception of university (personal)			I've got a great education	TB1, 5		x
UCLA sports as community builders			Charles/meeting John Wooden	TB1, 10		x
UCLA sports as community builders			it-it's-it's funny you say that, 'cause a	TB1, 13		x
UCLA sports as community builders			And it was a small group, probably on	TB1, 13	in this example, the creation	x
UCLA sports as community builders			And so, the idea was to... sports is som	TB1, 14		x
UCLA sports as community builders			"focused on engaging alumni..."	TB1, 14		x
UCLA sports as community builders			I think part of that is there's a person	TB1, 18	but this is important because	x

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