

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN SPORT, CULTURE
AND SOCIETY

Female Fans of the NFL

Taking Their Place in the Stands

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In everyday conversation, we often hear sports fans, journalists, and pundits talk about bandwagon fans, fair-weather fans, super fans, diehard fans, true fans, devoted fans, casual fans, psycho fans, and the list goes on. We seem compelled to categorize the quantity and quality of one's fandom, often drawing distinctions between those who are authentic fans and those whom we dismiss for not suffering enough, knowing enough, or caring enough. The women that we interviewed were no different. They too tend to label fans, in part because we asked them to describe typical and super fans, but also because these distinctions simply came up when discussing their experiences having their own fandom judged, often by men. We make sense of the world around us by categorizing.

Yet our data also clearly show the problems associated with trying to create classification schema. Nonetheless, most research to date on sport fandom begins with an effort to categorize degrees of fandom. Wann et al. (2001) separate fans from spectators, defined as those who merely watch sports but feel little identification with a team or athlete. They further classify fans as highly and lowly identified, and spectators as direct and indirect consumers. Giulianotti (2002) classifies fans as either "hot" or "cold." A hot fan's identification with her team/sport/player is integral to her sense of self-identity, whereas cold fans have less attachment to the objects of their fandom and tend to experience mediated fandom via television or the Internet. Giulianotti further subdivides hot fans into fans and spectators and cool fans into followers and flâneurs (French for *idler*). Crawford (2003) offers a "typical career progression" of fans from Interested to Engaged, Enthusiastic, Devoted, Professional, and finally Apparatus.

Fandom, however, is a social construct and, like other social constructs, it is a fluid constellation of performances. Fans construct fandom through the complex interplay between how much you know about your team and how much you care about its success. Performative Sport Fandom, therefore, conceives of fandom as relational, contextual, and negotiable. Our data tell us that women consciously and unconsciously choose to engage in different modes of fan performance, depending on the environment, who else is present, and what other role performances (e.g. gender, sexuality, race) might

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be engaged at that time. From our data we are able to identify two *performance modes*: Knowing, one's understanding of football plays, statistics, and history; and Caring, one's emotional attachment to and investment in a team.

Knowing and Caring are not two types of fans, though we often hear people talk about the Stats Geek or the Crazy Fanatic to describe the extremes of both. Rather, they are ways of *performing fandom*. They also are not mutually exclusive. Most fans engage in both Caring and Knowing performances at various times and to varying degrees depending on circumstances. Women talked about the emotional commitment (and at times toll) fandom takes, the excitement of watching the game they love, and the loyalty they feel for their teams. They also discussed how knowledge enhances that experience. At a minimum, one must know the rules of the game. The most hard-core fans know more; they study and understand the strategic nature of football. Caring and Knowing are both important aspects of being an NFL fan but in different ways. Given that fans employ both modes of performance, we see them as intersecting axes that form a grid we call the Fan Performance Matrix (see Figure 3.1). The FPM allows us to plot fans' performances relative to one another and thereby visualize how fans' expression of Knowing and Caring often shift based on circumstances.

As we detail further in this chapter, there are various ways of Knowing; some fans may memorize a team's roster going back five years or extensively study playbooks, while others may only know the big play-makers on a team's current roster and be unable to explain a play-action fake. Similarly, with regard to Caring, one fan may cry or throw things when her team loses and decorate every corner of her home with team memorabilia,

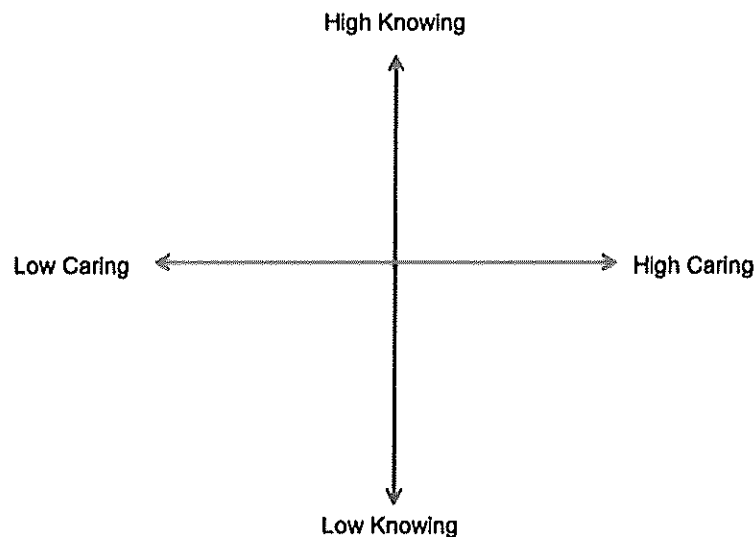


Figure 3.1 Fan Performance Matrix. Created by Anne C. Osborne.

while another may rarely wear a team logo and only talk football with close friends. Observers of such performances, our participants included, often then pass judgment on a fan based on these performative modes and then label that person as a particular type of fan: diehard, fair-weather, etc. Fandom, however, is not a fixed identity. Compare the concept of fandom to gender. The idea of a “real man” is a social construct. Such a label simply means that someone fits the hegemonic standard for masculinity; measurements of masculinity simply gauge adherence to the social script. Similarly, scales used to distinguish authentic from inauthentic fans are constructed in relation to and thereby reinforce the stereotype of a fan. Our research seeks to interrogate the social construction of fandom; the Fan Performance Matrix allows us to do that.

The term *matrix* may be somewhat misleading as the axes may suggest that we plan to measure Caring and Knowing. We are not concerned with quantifying fans’ knowledge or emotional attachment but with using the FPM as an integrative tool to consider different ways of being a fan. The FPM allows us to consider how Caring and Knowing interact to reinforce normalized understandings of what it means to be an NFL fan—how one should look and behave. It also provides a framework for examining why women are often deemed less authentic fans and how women fans challenge the stereotypical construction of NFL fandom. Finally, the FPM allows us to consider the fluidity of fans’ performances. In the remainder of this chapter, we first detail each mode of fan performance. We then underscore the contextual, relational, and negotiable nature of Performative Sport Fandom by showing how women’s fan performances map onto the FPM.

CARING

The women we interviewed define NFL fandom based on a person’s level of emotional attachment to the game and/or team. When asked to describe the ultimate fan, our interview participants almost always began by describing someone who is highly invested in his team’s success. It also is worth noting that the women we asked more often than not described a man. Amy offered:

My Pittsburgh Steelers-loving brother. He really takes it very seriously. I’ll call him up, and he’s just talking to me about the football game. . . . You can tell that it affects him. When the Browns lose, I’m like the Browns lost the game, but whatever. It’s not that big of a deal. But I feel like if his team does poorly, it really affects him emotionally. He gets pissed and angry. To me it’s just like, I guess I’m just so used to it. I don’t know. I like it, I like to watch it, but I don’t see it as, it’s not going to ruin my life if they don’t do well. And I feel like my brother just takes a step further. He is just like diehard.

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Kimmy began by discussing the knowledge her husband has about the game, but when asked if that is what marks him as an ultimate fan, she turned to his Caring performance of fandom.

... His super love for it. He truly loves the Browns. It's really such true feelings that he cannot hide them. There's no, "Oh, I'm disappointed with my team." Oh, no, no. That doesn't even begin to explain what he's like when they are losing. It affects him physically. I feel like he is just so upset by it, you know. He can't talk to anybody; he is that upset. When they win, he is so excited. He opens up beers on a play. "Oh, we're up. This is great." And he wants to walk out of the room and kick everybody out of the house when they're losing. It is a serious, serious issue.

Others, such as Natalie, compared football to religion. "These people who go out in you know, zero degree weather, no shirt, painted, um, colors, team colors on their bare chests. You know, someone who goes to their team's games regularly like through the week football games and you know, follows their team during the football season. To me that's pretty hardcore. Yeah it's just anyone who has that kind of religious devotion to their team like that." Kristy echoed this sentiment, saying, "Well football is kind of our religion, I guess, in a strange way."

Merchandise and costumes. The ultimate fan often calls to mind those painted and costumed fans in the Browns' Dawg Pound or the Raiders' Black Hole. Lisa pointed to two nationally recognized Saints fans:

They have to be dressed up. They're people you see like the Whistle Man with the whistle on his head or the Pope or the Nuns or whatever. I don't know if it's a certain gender. The face painted or something dressed in black and gold. It'd have to be something like that. Not just me in a jersey, it would have to be something wild just because it's New Orleans. Something wild and crazy probably.

According to our participants, not everyone goes so far as to employ costumes like the ultimate fans, but anyone can outwardly signify their Caring through merchandise. Football season or not, they adorn their homes, cars, and selves in team logos. In the previous chapter, we detailed how Natalie was mistaken for a non-Steelers fan until she began appearing at the local sports bar on game day in a Steelers t-shirt. The importance of merchandise in communicating one's loyalty and devotion is worth underscoring. It was a highly recurring theme in how women see themselves and others engaging in the Caring mode of performance.

I know a perfect person. And um, this guy did work—he was a contractor—he did a remodel on a bathroom for me at our house. And I've never ever seen him without a Saints cap on and a Saints t-shirt. He

was always very professional. He was a painter and a plasterer and he did everything. But every time I saw him, and so, and of course when I saw him, "You're a Saints fan?" "Yes." I went to his house to see some materials and look at some things getting ready, and I walked into his house and it was obvious. [*laughter*] His car, his truck, it's obvious, the flags and everything there and like, he's a season ticket holder. He, you know, he loves the New Orleans Saints. . . . You know, he's what I would call a true fan. I'm telling you. When I say I've never seen him without something with the New Orleans Saints on, and I'm talking about anything. Always professional work but he is a true fan. That's what I believe. (Shelly)

He is a Steelers fan, and if you walk in their house, everything is Steelers. Their clothes are Steelers. Their blankets are Steelers. Their decorations are Steelers. Their three-year-old daughter wears Steelers clothes. The wife wears Steelers clothes. He wears Steelers clothes. (Courtney)

He's the one that actually owns the trailer that's painted in the Browns colors. He follows them religiously and is always tweeting about them. He bought an RV and painted it. He won't miss a tailgate. He's always on the RTA at 5:00 a.m. He's probably the biggest Browns fan I know. (Katlyn)

Um, decked out in gear, the one that goes every week and tailgates. And if the team is playing out of town, it doesn't matter. They'll go to a bar and tailgate, per se. Um, and might even have like a man cave, and this pertains to women too. They might have a dedicated man cave with a bunch of paraphernalia. Yeah, you know, or like an area in the basement with paraphernalia, jerseys incased in a glass case or something, pennants, that type of thing. And, they like to drink, and they like to eat barbequed grill things—tailgating foods. And they get super excited when their team's doing well, and they get very, very upset when the team loses. Where when the game's over, it can ruin their night. That's my experience with ultimate fans in Cleveland. (Becky)

It's clear that clothing can be an important signifier of fandom. As noted in the previous chapter, men often enjoy greater social leeway to wear team insignias and merchandise than do women fans. Stephanie talked about the pressure she feels to look professional at work while her male colleagues can dress down in team embossed shirts and still be viewed as professional. In recent years, the NFL has added a wider array of clothing for women that may allow female fans to express their Caring in more diverse settings. Older women fans, in particular, talked about the difficulty finding age-appropriate and flattering clothing.

The investment. It takes a considerable financial commitment to accumulate the trappings of fandom. The average jersey costs approximately

\$100, while a throwback jersey can cost as much as \$300. Attendance for a family of four can average close to \$500 per game (Team Marketing, 2013). Money is not the only commitment required of diehard fans. As the quotes below demonstrate, fans must also be prepared to invest considerable time and emotional energy.

But not only that, when the game is on, he is talking to the TV. He's screaming at the TV. He is telling the ballplayers what to do. That's his thing. Football is his thing, but more importantly—the Steelers are his thing. Every Sunday, that's what he is doing. He is in front of the TV. He's watching the game. He is not going to dinner. He's not going over to somebody else's house unless they have the Steelers game on. He is a very dedicated fan. He is a very hopeful fan, and he is a very enthusiastic fan. I would think he is definitely the biggest football fan I know because week after week, he is in front of that TV and he is watching that game. He is there. It's pretty cool. (Courtney)

The ultimate fan would be down there at 6 o'clock in the morning tailgating and the first one beating on the doors to get in. Or pay the money to have seats down in those first few rows or something like that. That would be what the ultimate fan does. I don't know what they look like, but what they do. We're considering getting down there an hour and a half before kickoff. The ultimate fan gets down there the night before kickoff. (Lisa)

I think about the people who get up at the crack of dawn and have . . . You know, there must be somebody—a friend of somebody on my street who has one of those Browns vehicles that is painted in Browns colors and it looks like a dog or something [*laughs*]. The people who go and tailgate from the very beginning of the day and dress up in all their gear. Those are the real fanatics, I would say. (Alice)

The data clearly show that perceptions of the level of a person's fandom rest on how emotionally invested she is in a team. Diehard, hard-core, or true fans are expected to demonstrate their devotion through emotive performances and signal their commitment with team logo-emblazoned merchandise. Such devotion can border on obsession. Discussing one of the most committed fans she knows, Lisa said, "I don't know that she understands the game much more than I do because she would ask me questions about things that are going on like rules and what not and I'd explain it to her. As far as emotion goes, that's everything to her. It is kind of like her life revolves around it almost." A typical fan's performance, on the other hand, conveys less Caring. Donna explained, "they like the game, but one, they won't make sure they're off of work for a game. They won't compromise something else for watching a game. They're going to

root for the team, but as soon as the team looks really sluggish they'll probably give up." Jamie said, "First criteria, do you care what happens at the game. A casual fan is just kind of 'Great if they win. Oh well if they lose.' The ultimate fan is in it to win it. But there's a fine line between ultimate fan and bat-shit-crazy fan."

Emotional highs and lows. Whether a diehard or casual fan, the emotions experienced within the Caring mode of performance can be exhilarating. Women talk about their teams' successes in ecstatic terms.

But yeah, that season [the Saints Super Bowl winning season] was blissful. You saw us pull off games that you never thought we were going to win. It was like divine intervention. We were meant to win this year and nothing was going to stop it. It's just a lot happier . . . Being at games like that, like the playoff game, that's probably the best game I've ever been to is the Saints-Green Bay playoff game. I can remember the Green Bay playoff game. But so much is riding on it. The emotion and everybody is holding their breath and it was so stressful and there's so much anxiety but it's a good anxiety. When it goes your way—I don't know. For me there's few feelings that can replace that or just to say I was there and I saw it, it happened right in front of me and everybody went nuts. We all went out after and it was great. (Lisa)

Kimmy described winning as "Awesome. You are so excited. The whole house is awesome. You can jump up and down and cheer. The whole day is just awesome."

A team's failures can be devastating. Kimmy explained, "Because when the Cleveland Browns do not do well, no one in my house does well. The attitude completely changes. I don't mean just for the time of the game, I mean the whole day. So I really don't even enjoy Sunday football any more, at all." Kimmy went on to further describe the pallor in her home after a loss. "It is very quiet in the house. We don't really talk a lot. Actually when the game is over, we go separate a little bit for a while. Mike usually goes to listen to the sports talk in the basement. Me and the kids are watching cartoons and wait for their daddy." Talea talked about trying to take losses in stride but finding it difficult:

Sometimes it's accepted, but when it's a team that I absolutely [think] there's no reason we should not be beating, then it's a combination between being depressed and angry all at the same time, and then a commercial comes on and you laugh about it or somebody calls you to talk smack. There are some times I won't answer the phone if we're losing because I'll ignore people, I don't want to talk about it. And I tell people you got to give me at least thirty minutes after the game before we have this discussion. But for the most part I'm realistic

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about my team as well. So I know they're probably going to lose and that's okay.

At times the emotions can be overwhelming, so much so that the women we interviewed sometimes choose to step away from the game.

And my adrenaline is just, I mean, it's really it's high. It's like "woo." I've gone to the mall. I've left the house. I just go to the mall saying "Ok. I'm going to leave." [laughter] "Text me the score." [laughter] You know, like that but yeah. I mean, like, oh my God I can't really. I don't like that. I don't like that . . . I don't like that feeling. So I just, move away from it. It's just a little too much. Like yesterday was, yeah. You see what I'm saying? Woooooh. Just pull away from it. Me, that's what I do. I'm not going to sit there. I'm going to get away. Oh, I gotta put all the clothes in the wash, go to the mall . . . really. Have to get out. (Shelly)

I once was so frustrated and upset over the Browns game that I left the living room. Once I left the house completely and went on a drive crying. I once locked myself in a bedroom. Now I look back on it. I can't even believe that was me but yet I could see me doing that again. I was so upset with them. If you're gonna have people over, you have to continue some modicum of hostessing. I cannot predict that that's what I will do. I can't predict that I won't turn off the game. So if people are there to see a game and wanna finish a game and you say, "I gotta turn this off. I'm so tired of them. I've had it. I'm done." And that's one of my famous lines, "I'm done." And I might turn off that game. My husband will roll with it. He'll just turn the channel. Guests aren't gonna do that. And I have literally had times where I've left the house or had a crying jag so bad that I've locked myself in the room. (Stephanie)

Gender stereotypes often paint women as overly emotional, prone to hysteria. As described above, some women do experience nearly unbearable distress when watching football. Nonetheless, our participants contend that men have the more extreme emotional reactions.

Men seem to be more fanatical and more emotionally affected by the games than women are. That's probably the biggest thing that I can point out. . . . We're talking about earlier how that affects their entire day, their team wins or loses. Women seem to not care as much and just move on with their day or whatever else is going on that week while men seem to dwell on it and the thought of the game lingers. . . . Women are better at multitasking, so maybe just the fact that a loss is just another thought in their head and they move on to something else

while men get stuck on that one thought and can't move on from it. (Elizabeth)

I think it's completely different. I enjoy the game, I enjoy watching it. But I don't let it interfere with my life. Whereas [my husband] will take the next three days, listen to sports talk radio and try to analyze every single thing that happened that day. Go over and over it again and again, talk to his friends about it, and talk to his friends about it again. Talk to someone else about it, and try to talk to me about it. I'll just tune out. Definitely different. . . . [Women] like the game, we enjoy it for the moment that you are in it. After that, you don't think about it again. I think it's a difference between men and women. You know men are from Mars, and women are from Venus, that kind of thing. I think that's one of the differences. . . . We hold dear our children. We hold dear memories, photos, things like that. But I don't think when it comes to the actual game itself, I need to rehash it over and over again, like I feel like my husband does. He has to do it, he has to talk about it again. He has to get into it again. I just don't have that kind of interest. Maybe it is a lack of interest. I do like the team, I do enjoy watching it, I enjoy the food that comes along with it, but I don't necessarily need to rehash it over and over again. (Kimmy)

Just a game. Despite the stereotype of the hysterical woman, our participants generally expressed aversion to extreme emotional responses. They consciously avoid letting football ruin their moods and are frustrated by others who do not do the same.

Remember the Browns game where they lost to Oakland, and Brian [Sipe] threw into the lake. It was a terrible, terrible, frigid day. I had to miss work the next day. I was working for a fundraising agency in Cleveland. And by no means did they look upon it kindly when you missed work. Yes, I was depressed. I was all these things. But I had cried so hard at that game that my eyelashes froze. And I had to go to the doctor the next day to be treated 'cause I got a really bad cold in both eyes. So I couldn't really drive or anything. That's the kind of stupidity that I would go through. (Stephanie)

Well one thing that has—one thing that has turned me off—I mean even throughout the years when I was going to the Browns games because we had season passes is how people, like, let it ruin their day or like get angry or you hear that random story where a fan, a Pittsburgh fan or a Browns fan ran over a Pittsburgh fan. Like, those types of things piss me off because, I'm like, I always tell people, they don't even know you exist, but you're letting it ruin your whole day. Or you're the angry person at the bar starting fights. Like, that type of stuff pisses me off, and that kind of turns me off. (Becky)

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If the Packers and the Seahawks both lose, I am bummed but it doesn't affect my entire week or anything. I can get over it pretty quickly and just look onto the next. . . . I've learned to "Okay, they lost," like I'm used to that but I know for some people, especially the players, it affects their entire week. That is one thing where I think it's like, it's just a game, not life or death so they probably should get over it a little bit quicker but these people don't have as much experience with losing as I do. (Elizabeth)

Now I've seen people that literally need the next day [to recover from a loss]. Now, I think that's a bit much, personally. I know I can't really judge by any means, but that's a lot. I know some people that you may not hear from them for multiple days, it just depends on how they feel about it. And then I know a lot of people that can shake it off instantly because they're like, "I'm not on the field so who cares?" (Talea)

Our participants see the extremes of Caring performances as an indulgence or a luxury, something they neither have the time, energy, or inclination to engage in to the same extent as the super fans—mostly male—they describe. The unwillingness among some women to (over)react may contribute to a perception that they care less, are less passionate, or are less committed to the game. Even other female fans reinforce negative stereotypes, as we see in Jamie's quote below. She assumes that women cheer less because they are more interested in how they appear than with the game.

Guys are way more animated. Girls are more reserved and, you know, concerned about how they look, I guess. That's why I like my friend, Gwendolyn. When she gets sore it's fun for me to be around. She makes me look like I'm a casual, country club mom fan. Compared to her at games I'm relaxed and, ah, low key. Yeah, I think guys tend to be more, um, outwardly involved. And I think there are probably a lot of girls that don't cheer a lot because maybe they're not sure that they're cheering at the right time. You know what I mean. That can be intimidating at times . . . if you're not comfortable in your knowledge. I mean you don't want to go crazy and look like a fool. So guys are usually the ones high fiving in the crowd. So yeah, I mean I do think that's a difference. (Jamie)

Our research, however, suggests women's performances of Caring are often a conscious negotiation between supporting their team and actively managing their own emotional wellbeing by lessening their Caring performances. Indeed women fans are caught in a catch-22 when it comes to performing within the Caring mode. If they express extreme emotions, they run the risk of being labeled hysterical. If they do not, they run the risk of being seen as casual or bandwagon fans whose interest in football does not run

deep enough. Men, on the other hand, are free to engage in intense Caring performances ranging from anger to tears to joy.

KNOWING

As important as the emotional connection with the team is, knowledge and understanding of the game are also central to fandom. Alice posited, "I think it's more enjoyable to watch if you know the rules and know what's going on. . . . It's not very much fun to watch if you don't understand the rules." Someone can be a fan without knowledge, but knowing the game adds to the experience. Faye explained:

I just like how there're so many ways that you can look at the sport. There're plays. And then the more you get into it, you know what various players' strengths are and you can watch the players and see where they're going and see what they're trying to do. And then you can see them trying to open holes in the defense or on the line. . . . It's more fun if you know what's going on.

Talking about her father, from whom she learned about football, Kimmy said:

I think he would say that more informed fans understand the sport better, understand what's going on. Therefore that would make them a more engaged fan. I don't know if he would say they would be a, quote-unquote, better fan. He would definitely say that they are more knowledgeable fan and a more engaged fan. I think he feels that sense of community as well. I think that's something that's unspoken between football fans. I think at the end of the day he would say that a fan is a fan is a fan.

Shelly discussed how her fandom has changed as she has learned more about the game.

It's grown as I, I guess . . . the more I've learned about the sport . . . the more I've gotten into the statistics and the "who's doing what," you know. There was things about the sport that I didn't have an interest in, like the draft . . . none of that mattered. I just wanted us to win. And now I'm getting more involved in the game itself.

Kristy is a devoted Browns fan while her husband loves the San Francisco '49ers. When it comes to football overall, "He's probably a little bit more [of a fan] than me. But, yeah . . . I would say him." What separates them is their level of knowledge. "I think it's because he knows statistics, like crazy, crazy statistics. He knows all of these things about all of the players, and

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knows who absolutely everybody is, and I'm getting better at it, but I'm not anywhere near as competent with that as he is."

Respect. Knowing is esteemed among fans. Male and female fans alike afford greater respect to those who, in addition to loving the game, are also students of the game. Stephanie, for example, expressed her admiration for former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's football knowledge:

I don't feel tactically proficient in the game, I don't feel as tactically—I don't feel as analytic or as deep as I should be given my background [working in a highly analytical field in U.S. government]. And I also am very persuaded by the way that Condi could mesmerize a room by her knowledge of the game so that, even if people weren't football fans, they got it. They got that there was something bigger going on here than a game. And they could clearly see her mastery of it. I liked it. I like when fans bring a lot to it and aren't just like, "I hate that guy." They could really bring something into it that I didn't know. In order to stay interested in a team that is not winning, you've got to bring more to the story. You can't rely just on history. And you really are not in contention for long. So there's going to be several weeks where you're not in contention. You're not even maybe a wildcard contender. So you've got to have something that's interesting. And that, to me, has reignited interest in a way I didn't expect.

Talea expressed similar admiration for a knowledgeable fan that she knows.

My ex-roommate—yeah, I'll give it to her. The woman who is the reason why I fell in love with the sport in the first place, she knows the roster; she can tell you everything there is to know about them, what college they went to. I mean the only people I can tell you that are the ones I work with. I have no idea how she knows them so well, but she'll be able to tell you everything about it. It's not just for the Bengals; she'll know it across the board—I've always been impressed with that. I would say that she is the true definition of a fanatic—where the word [fan] comes from. She's extremely knowledgeable about the team, the players, the coaches, and even the owners. Anything that touches the team, she can pretty much give you some type of background about it, or be willing to research it. So, like I said, she's probably one of the most knowledgeable people I know.

Knowing is often discussed in awed tones as when Kimmy described her husband's knowledge of the Browns.

You could ask him pretty much any questions, I feel like he can answer it. We listen to the sports talk a lot, unfortunately. They always have

questions, and he'll answer right away. I would say 70% to 80% times he is right. He knows pretty much anything. He remembers the plays. "Do you remember that big play in 1976?" It's ridiculous. . . . He is really good. He knows stuff that I don't understand how he could even know it.

Criticism from men. To challenge someone's fandom, one need only attack that person's understanding of the game. We particularly saw this when men criticized female fans for what they perceived to be women's lack of football knowledge. Mike, for example, said this about gender difference among fans: "I would say men kind of watch the plays more, and study the mechanics of the game. I notice the women tend to notice what the players are wearing. Maybe what they are saying in interviews after the game. Stuff like that . . . In most cases, I guess, me, I assume that women don't know what they are talking about when it comes to football." Franklin commented, "They are more into the, I'm going to describe it as social experience of it. They don't always understand the rules. They don't always understand the penalties of it." Men and women fans alike esteem greater Knowing. The difference is that women's fandom is often dismissed based on the assumption that they are uninformed. It is up to the woman to prove that perception wrong. As Jack explained:

I think it's more of a cool thing to do. Like a Saturday, the cool thing to do is to go out and tailgate. I think [women] use football as an excuse to do stuff like that. They treat it as a social event I guess. I think if, yeah, I think a lot of guys have to dumb it down a lot. I know I do. I dumb it down when I have to talk to women about football. Unless they put in some kind of intellect into the conversation, like some kind of knowledge, then I'll talk to them. But I'm not going to sit there and try to have some kind of intricate conversation with somebody if they are just sitting there saying they like passing the ball, or something like that.

These assumptions are commonly held among male fans, and women thus have to prove their authenticity and legitimacy, a phenomenon discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Men, on the other hand, often are simply accepted into the community and assumed to be knowledgeable. Women are well aware of these assumptions. In Jamie's experience, "Guys just blow you off. They don't think you know what you're talking about. I don't, at this point, I don't really care. That's fine. You don't have to think I know what I'm talking about. I know I know what I'm talking about. And if you say something stupid I am going to correct you. Because shockingly [men] don't know everything."

Other participants expressed similar frustration with the assumption that as women they would not understand football.

I feel like men probably think that they know more but they don't always, in that sense. They might be able to stereotype women as oh,

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they probably are just being cheerleaders and just being here for the team. I think there's a lot more women now that know more about the game and want to know more about the game. (Katlyn)

Well, I've been in situations where to be honest they didn't realize that I *could* hang in the conversation. So, as far as the conversation and being able to be a part and work my way into a conversation or actually, whatever. . . . initially there were times when I was just around people that really didn't know and they would start a conversation or treat me a little different because they didn't expect me to say what I said, you know like. . . . I really know what I'm talking about. (Shelly)

Credibility (especially with men). Given that Knowing performances earn fans greater respect, it is through this mode that women gain entrée into the boys' club; it is how women establish credibility. For men, it is an assumed gender competency, whereas women often must fight against negative stereotypes of female fans. In the next chapter, we discuss at length the strategies women use to counter such perceptions. Knowing is generally key. Elizabeth explained, "I think really just knowing the game, that's what I try to do, being able to talk about it, what's going on, know the rules and the penalties, I think that helps in a way because people are like, 'Oh, she actually knows what's going on.'" Shelly proudly recounted a conversation with her husband about her football knowledge. "He actually told his coworker at work last week, he said, 'My wife can tell me so much about this sport until I'm just amazed.' And so the other day I said, 'Did you know something something . . .?'" and he's like, 'No, I didn't know. I did not know that. I was just telling a guy at work how amazed I am with you and football.' I love the sport."

For Amy, Knowing is acceptance. "I feel accepted by men. I never feel ostracized because I am a woman watching football. I can hold my own in conversations with a guy." When asked if that was important, she replied,

For me, yeah. I like to know what's going on in a game, know who the players are. If I am watching a game, and I see a guy holding a player, I'm like "it's holding." I think it's important no matter what you do to know the rules and reasoning behind everything. I'm not just like going, "Yeah, team! Go Browns!" It's important for you to be a credible fan. I think for anybody, even a guy. If a guy sits there watching a football game, and he is like "Hit a homerun!" he is going to look stupid.

Stephanie talked at length about how NFL fandom garnered greater credibility and respect in her workplace.

In the workplace I worked in, it was male-dominated but primarily white-male dominated for a good portion of my career. That changed

in the later portion. But to not be a sports fan probably denied you a seat at the table more often than not. You could make your way on other bona fides. But it was an immediate affiliation and an immediate bona fide. Football was probably the primary. If you would've come in and said I love tennis, you'd be seen as kind of weird—baseball and basketball maybe—basketball less so than that. Football pretty much always bought you bona fides very quickly. So yeah, you use it. You use everything you've got in that environment. Especially if you're a [fan of a] team that everybody knows—you know—if you look at a team like Tennessee, who cares, really. I just had this conversation with my husband at dinner last night. Do you even care? I don't care about Tennessee. Who cares? People don't. Even the people from Tennessee aren't really fans of Tennessee. For me, it was a bona fide to be a Browns fan. Everybody knows something about the Browns.

According to Stephanie, you had to be able to talk the talk.

Oh, yeah. But I didn't have too much trouble with that. Because even though I couldn't go deep in the game analytics, I was so steeped in the emotion of the game of knowing who we played, the ups and downs of the game, being able to know some of our history that was deeply coded in me, being able to go back generations in my family to talk about that. Yes, and I didn't find it very challenging. . . . Also, I could go head-to-head—we have a lot of Ravens fans. I hate the Ravens. I hate Ravens fans. I hate everything they stand for. So I could stand my ground very, very effectively. And I felt complete superiority and mastery—really important in a white-male-dominated environment. It just is what it is. A young woman today might not relate to that, but it's true. You need to be able to have that bona fide, assert it well and show some superiority.

Learning the game. Throughout data collection we often heard men comment that women cannot understand football because women do not play the game, at least not beyond the youth Pee Wee league level or the occasional weekend pick-up game. Mark, for example, explained:

I think a lot of my fandom comes from having once played the game. Growing up I played, in high school I played. And so when I see it, I can almost put myself there. I remember game days. Granted, it's nowhere near the same scale or same level. But I remember being there and I remember formations. I remember like looking and like play calling and all this stuff. And trying to read everything you see. I guess you have a lot of inside perspective, inside the player. You can put yourself right there on the field. It was your dream, if you played football, it was your dream to be on that field, or it was most people's dream to be on

that field one day playing professionally, so you always imagine yourself there. And I guess in a way as a fan, I can still do that. I can still see myself there. At times where I can still remember what it was like to be there again. Where as women I don't think get that. Women don't know what it feels like to get hit hard like that. And that's like a good feeling in a way. I miss getting hit like that. Or women do not know what it's like to go across the middle and know you might get hit, and you don't or you do. And most women—I'm not saying all women because I'm sure some have played—but women in general don't have that experience so I don't know if they can put themselves into it. I don't know if they appreciate the beauty of the physicality of football. I think that is probably a big difference there.

While most women have not played the game, a lot of female fans have been immersed in football since childhood. According to them, they developed the Knowing mode of performance just by watching. Katlyn explained, "I've grown up around football so I know all the terminology. I actually have a friend who's a defensive lineman on the [Cleveland Browns]." Kimmy had a similar experience:

I think I learned what's going on just by watching it. I don't think anybody taught me, or sat me down and said "Okay here's the formation and here's what we're going to do." I think it was all just by, you know, I think it was just born and bred in me. You know, this is what happens, this is what you do. I think a little bit happened, probably is seventh grade, I was a trainer for the football team, for the junior high school football team. So I had to take some of the statistics down, you know, if it was my week to write it down, I had to know what play it was. I had to know who caught the ball, who got the tackle, those different things. So it happened to me a little bit more when I was in the seventh grade.

Such knowledge building doesn't happen overnight, particularly when you are afraid to ask questions.

It was kind of a long process. Sometimes I would ask questions, but I knew how many questions I could get away with asking before my brother or my dad would be like "Oh my gosh, stop asking questions." I would ask a question here and there, and I would really just pay attention to what they were saying. If they said there was a flag on the play, I would listen to their conversation about what happened. Then I would be like, "Okay, someone did something that the ref is not sure is ok and that's bad. That's what a flag on the play is." Or false start. Oh, that guy just said, "false start," and that guy was running before this ball went into this guy's hands. I'm like eight or 10 years old trying to figure out who's this player? Why is this player standing there? What is this ref

saying that they are doing? It's kind of piecing a lot together, which took me a while. Sometimes my dad would laugh because I would try and be like, nine-year-old Courtney would try and be like, "I know everything about football," I'd try to be all smart and be like, "Oh, dad, did you see that interception?" My dad would be like, "Courtney, that was a sack." I'd be like, "Oh, man." I thought I knew what it interception was, but it was actually a sack. Sometimes I would embarrass myself, and my dad would make fun of me. I guess it's all in the process of learning. (Courtney)

Um, well so my father never really took the time to explain the rules to me [*laughs*] so it took awhile before I figured out what was going on. Um, my father was also, he is a very quiet very reserved man. So he wasn't really prone to uh, "yay!" or any kind of gestures. Every now and then there would be a [*clap sound*] "god dammit" [*laughs*] you know, or, you know, a smile or something. But you couldn't really pick up cues from him as to what was really going on. And so a lot of it would be cues from the television. Like cheering or something, if the Steelers team members would be celebrating or something. It took me awhile to figure out what was going on. I mean I knew if the ball made it to the other end but and all, but the other rules were not filled in until much later in life. (Natalie)

Recognizing the value of performing within the Knowing mode, women go out of their way to build greater capacity to do so. Because most of the women we interviewed did not learn the game by playing football as children, they have had to learn by studying.

I actually have a plan to go to the Hudson Library and get the *Football for Dummies* book and learn more about the positions and stuff like that. I know basic positions like linebacker, tight ends, and the linemen. But I don't really know the plays—like who's running where and who's responsible for what. I think I want to learn more about it just because I want to work in sports in the future. (Katlyn)

I watch football but I admit I just watch it. I understand the game; I know you have the four downs. I understand all that but I don't know what a screen looks like, I don't know what a post pattern is. And I watch the ball, I've been told. I watch the player with the ball. I don't see the holding penalty, I don't see that kind of stuff. I watch the game but I'm not one of these guys, "there's a penalty holding." I'm not one of those people. At one point I kind of wanted to learn. I'm like, I spend so much time watching this, I should know more detail. I kind of learned the positions, I went online. I looked up the safeties and corners just so I would know what they're talking about when I hear that. I did that. (Lisa)

Media's role. Media play an important role in educating fans. Not all the women we interviewed chose to learn the game. Those who did often turned to television shows such as ESPN's *SportsCenter* and talk radio where they could learn from experts as well as other fans. Media allow women to gather knowledge without the fear of embarrassing themselves with questions others, particularly men, would deem dumb.

I just read a lot. I get *ESPN*, the magazine and *Sports Illustrated*. I read through the whole magazine cover to cover every . . . *ESPN* is a biweekly and *Sports Illustrated* is every week. I read through the whole thing so I read a lot through that. Also, I, off and on, run a sports blog. . . . I just write opinion stuff on sports or analysis because I really like statistics. I'm always looking at the stats of baseball, basketball, football, and analyzing that stuff and I read *ESPN* online, their articles they post and everything. I watch it, seeing what the commentators have to say and stuff. Also watch *SportsCenter* a lot and *Around the Horn* and *Pardon the Interruption* are two of my favorite shows. (Elizabeth)

I've just really learned to love that kind of postgame analysis. I love that it's analysis. I love hearing the fans call in who are usually pretty sophisticated in the analytics of the game, bring a lot a history in it, know a lot about the trading, a lot about the record of the player that I don't bring to the game. I loved listening particularly to [former Browns head coach Pat] Shurmur. I think he was the stupidest coach in the NFL. As you probably remember, a couple seasons ago, there would be games where if the Browns won or if they scored at all, it was through field goals. And the same quarterback, whose name is escaping me, that my dad felt should be given more time—Shurmur would use that and say, "I think we see in today's game the kind of things we want from a quarterback." I would be by myself in the car in a very stressful—my dad is dying—and I would be laughing because it would be like, "Really? This is what we want in a quarterback?" We're on the board only because of field goals. What don't I get? Or he would say things like, "Before we begin, I just want to begin with an announcement. Clearly, we have to earn more points." It's just great theater. It was great to make fun of him. The whole packaging of it was great. But I liked the fact that the fans were analytic in ways that I wasn't so I could learn a little bit. And I could go home and say to my husband, "Hey, I never thought about this. But here's what I think could be going on there." So it was really interesting to me. (Stephanie)

When I was in college, we would watch football on Sunday. I would watch *Pardon the Interruption* and *SportsCenter* and all those things all the time. I think that's just because I was in a house where that was okay. Now I wouldn't subject my husband to that because he would go crazy if I watched that all day. When I was in a house where that was

okay, I would leave it on and do homework or whatever, and I would definitely watch it. I would always like to see who the top quarterback is this week, who the top team is this week, that kind of thing. Also, why are the Broncos throwing more than they are running? For one, it helped me understand a lot more about football or why teams do the things that they do, or why coaches pick the plays that they play. (Courtney)

Digital media provide another important source for information. Many of the women have apps on their phones that allow them to access information quickly and get regular updates on their favorite teams. Claire explained:

During the season when there are games going on I have alerts set up through ESPN, so I pick that I want to get game updates from ESPN on my phone. Even if I'm not in front of a television I get updates on my phone. I do check ESPN, get those updates even when it's not during the game. Sometimes even during the off-season I follow them on Twitter. I get those things there and, if nothing else, I usually read the sports section of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* online, so I'll check those and get updates that way. (Claire)

Or they can go online to do research.

I think the Internet helps. These days if you want to get caught up in sports you can just read and really quickly find out everything you need to know, whether it's rules. You can just go to a wiki page and read the rules on how hockey works or what does it mean if they're saying this or what's the difference between a yellow flag and a red flag or what are downs. People can look up what they are, things like that. You can look up stats and you can look up coaches, their histories, their players. You can get caught up really fast and then you're a fan. Before all of that, I think, if you didn't know it you were just kind of lost. And it's hard to join. (Faye)

Online discussions. For as much as women consume sports media, they tend to eschew online message boards and forums. By and large, the women we encountered were put off by the tone of Internet conversations about football and did not see message boards as friendly environments for them to share or acquire knowledge about the game.

Once people find out that you're a female fan they tend to get a little . . . I don't know if jumpy is the right word, but . . . you know, they tend to make you prove yourself, especially online, more than in person. I don't think any of these people would do it in person because they'd probably be too terrified to do it to someone in person, but online it's kind of like if you're a woman you don't know anything, and that can be frustrating. (Kristy)

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No. I keep away from doing that [going on message boards] because they are some stupid people, and I just don't want to get on their level. They'll just make really uneducated comments . . . I just, I like getting into face-to-face arguments, Internet arguments just get so petty. (Donna)

I never post because I'm very wary of all the bullying. I like face-to-face trash talking, like if I know who I'm talking to. But just going online there are so many people who are just rude, or not making sense, or nitpicking if you mistype a letter. (Faye)

Our findings complement earlier research that has found that online football forums are dominated by men and rife with misogyny (Kian et al., 2011). It is little surprise then that women choose to avoid them. It is not that female fans do not care enough or know enough about football to participate in message boards. Women, instead, find less hostile environments to engage with other football fans.

Limited time. Much like Caring, Knowing requires time and many of the women we interviewed simply are not interested in investing the time needed to become experts. Faye offered an explanation that we heard echoed by others. She noted that boys are socialized from an early age to pay attention to sports statistics. Girls often are not. It is also more socially acceptable for women to be uninformed whereas men face social pressure to know and follow football.

I don't know a lot of girls who will just spit facts. Most of them who do watch will just watch the game. I don't know if it's a thing where guys feel like they should know. Because really you could watch the game without knowing a lot of players' histories. Maybe there're only so many hours in a day and a lot of girls are doing other things. Or maybe once you get started on a trail, like if a guy grows up watching and reading sports it's really hard to stop, I think. And it becomes sort of a habit and routine to keep tracking people, whereas if girls don't start off that way, it's more of a learned habit. . . . [For guys] they look like less of a fan. It's just more okay if girls don't know because they're not used to knowing. I've heard guys get into tech talk about players and games and whatnot. They'll get all macho on each other. Who's the bigger fan? [*mocking tone*] "Well you didn't know . . ." (Faye)

Several participants echoed Faye's comment that "there're only so many hours in a day." One of the most common reasons offered by the women we interviewed for not knowing more about football statistics, history, and strategies was the time constraints they feel.

Stats are a big part of it though; men tend to be more into stats than women are. I've never been a real big stats geek. And I don't know

if most men really know what the stats mean in the grand scheme of things. I love stories of kids and coaches. Fandom can be a 7-day a week activity. It shouldn't be a 24-hour-a-day activity. (Jamie)

. . . I don't follow other sports teams. When I get a new coach, and they are talking about it on TV, maybe it's just a new person they put in position, I don't know anything about that coach, whereas my husband knows what that team has done in the past, why that person would be good or bad. I don't follow other teams, I don't have enough time to know all the Browns players, coaches, anything, let alone be able to follow other teams' players and coaches. Who are they promoting? I don't make time in my life to do that. (Kimmy)

This was particularly true when it comes to fantasy football. Very few of the women we interviewed played fantasy football, though many expressed interest. Even those women who already know enough about the NFL to have won fantasy leagues, however, do not want to invest the necessary time it takes to do it well.

I got back into football, and I was kind of a little crazy about it when my friend started a fantasy football league. And then I joined—that was an all-girls football league—and then I joined a couple, like two others with guys. And I was really into that 'cuz I was good at it. . . . So, all of a sudden it was football in general that I liked, and I found myself, I would call up the corner bar and say, "Are you guys playing this game? Are you playing this game?" And I would go there, by myself, and watch the game—that's how into it I was. . . . And, so that was—that was not hometown pride. That was just I—I guess I'm good at this fantasy football thing and I like it because, it's suppo—you know, I'm a girl, I'm not supposed to be good at it. And, that's why football was fun for me then so I would watch all kinds of teams. But, what have I done now? Gosh, um, hmm, and that's another reason why I got out of fantasy football because it took up so much time, like all weekend preparing and then the day of football I was just watching football all day long and getting upset—I found myself getting upset [*slight sigh*] and I was just like, ok, this—this—I don't know, this isn't good. (Becky)

It seems like a lot of work, and something I don't have time for in my life right now. (Heather)

So, fantasy, I just never, I don't even know actually. I may enjoy it if I ever got involved in it but I don't think that with my personality I think it's best that I don't. I'm spending enough time with what I do enjoy doing. To add something else to the mix would take me away from things and I don't wanna do that. I know me. (Shelly)

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Never, never, never. I think because the people who I know who do it are investing so much time and money. And I feel like those aren't investments I can make. I'm kind of interested in it because they're so obsessive. And I love obsessions. But to me, it feels like an investment I can't make at this point in my life. So that's why. (Stephanie)

I think it takes over people's lives, kind of like Candy Crush. I don't play Candy Crush for that reason. I'm pretty sure that I would completely fall in love with it, and people just go overboard from what I see, and I don't even want to try it out. (Talea)

I don't [play fantasy]—and I've never filled out a bracket for March Madness—because I know that I will be up for hours. If I'm going to do it I'm going to do it. But I've always been invited to join people's leagues and I'm like if I'm going to do it I'm going to get obsessed. I'm going to read about everybody and everything and it's going to take up so much time. It's a decision, an educated decision, a calculated decision to make sure that I don't spend my time. (Faye)

Another common reason for not engaging more in Knowing performances of fandom is that female fans are turned off by the perceived arrogance of male fans that act as if they know more than other fans or even NFL coaches.

They have, no matter what their trade is or no matter what they do for a living, they act like they know exactly what the Browns should do and who they should pick and what coach they should hire. And it bothered me because I'm like, why do you think—did you read this? They are so confident in their, you know, “Oh, so and so is so stupid for doing this,” and sort of, “yeah we got to get rid of this owner.” All those opinions—usually negative—about the owners, the coaches, or decisions they make, and I'm like, “Why do—Why do you know so much? Why do you think you know so much about the best move that the Browns should make and the player we should get. It's—It's weird to me that people will really believe they know exactly what should be done. I'm like, well, why do you all know and the people that own the Browns and actually make the decisions don't know and they just lose every year? (Becky)

There are people who know more about what happened to the Browns than I do. I don't want to be one of those Monday morning quarterbacks. I don't want to claim that I know more than what the coach knows, because that is not my job. I am just the fan. I don't have all of the information. I just have the information that the media tells me. (Kristy)

The Knowing performance mode enhances the quality of that fandom. You can be a NFL fan without much knowledge of the game but you will enjoy it more and other fans will respect you more if you understand the game. For this reason, many women actively educate themselves about the game. Viewers can absorb a certain amount of knowledge simply by watching football but if you really want to join the community of football fans and be respected within the ranks, you have to know the mechanics of the game and be able to discuss Xs and Os. As we discuss in the next chapter, women are often tested on their knowledge and have developed strategies for responding.

FAN PERFORMANCE MATRIX

Having detailed the two modes of fan performances, we now turn to considering how they intersect. For the women we interviewed, Caring is essential to fandom. As explained earlier, the women we interviewed see Caring as indicative of the scope of one's fandom. Talea said:

I wouldn't put myself on the low end of the [fan] spectrum because I may not know about every single player, I don't even know the entire roster, I'm not going to lie, but I will say that when it comes to the game, being expressive, being excited about it, really almost sometimes scheduling your entire day around it to make sure . . . one of my least favorite things about when I moved back to this side of the state was the fact that all the Cleveland games trumped the Cincinnati games if they play at the same time.

Performances within the Caring mode can even be sufficient to make one a fan if the performance is persistent, not a fleeting attachment to a team only when the team is winning. The two modes generally work in concert, however. Persistent Caring seems to naturally lead to greater Knowing. If you love the game, you want to learn more about it.

The opposite is not true. One cannot be a fan based on detached knowledge of the game. In fact, extreme performances of Knowing can actually erode Caring. In discussing fantasy football, Lisa noted the betrayal she felt when her ex-boyfriend started paying more attention to players' stats than his team's success.

My ex-boyfriend [played fantasy] last year. He would be complaining because his quarterback was hurt that week or something. He didn't get the points for that or he picked this team's defense and they didn't do well. But he was pulling against the Saints sometimes because Matt Ryan was his quarterback. When we're playing Atlanta he's kind of pulling for Atlanta because he gets points if Matt Ryan does well. It's like [in an exasperated

tone], “we’re playing them, what are you doing?” I think your alliances become a little messed up if you’re doing the fantasy football thing.

Jamie simply stated, “Fantasy football changes how you feel about teams.” Engaging in Knowing performances thus affects the quality or nature of one’s fandom, both positively—as when one learns more about a team’s history and mythology or when one develops greater appreciation for the strategy involved—and negatively—as when one becomes more interested in the statistics for individual players and stops identifying with a particular team.

Knowing and Caring clearly work in concert to shape one’s fandom. As we stressed earlier in this chapter, fandom is not static. Fan performances vary considerably from person to person but also from time to time for a single person. In the following section, we detail how through the Fan Performance Matrix we can map the complexity of fan performances.

Contextual. The women we observed and interviewed engage in different modes of performance based on whom they are with and what is expected at that time. Figure 3.2 shows how the performances of a single fan can change significantly based on the context. Let us begin with considering the setting for the lowest level of Caring and Knowing performances: the off-season. During the Spring and Summer months when the NFL is not playing, fans maintain their fandom but have little reason to actively engage with it. Fans may still wear team logos and may scan sports media and fan websites to gather information about players and possible roster or coaching changes. These Caring and Knowing performances, however, are necessarily limited by opportunity. It is only when something happens—if a major coaching change occurs or a star player is injured or gets into legal trouble—that fans reengage in greater Knowing by gathering information, commenting on message boards, and joining in conversations with other fans. During these times

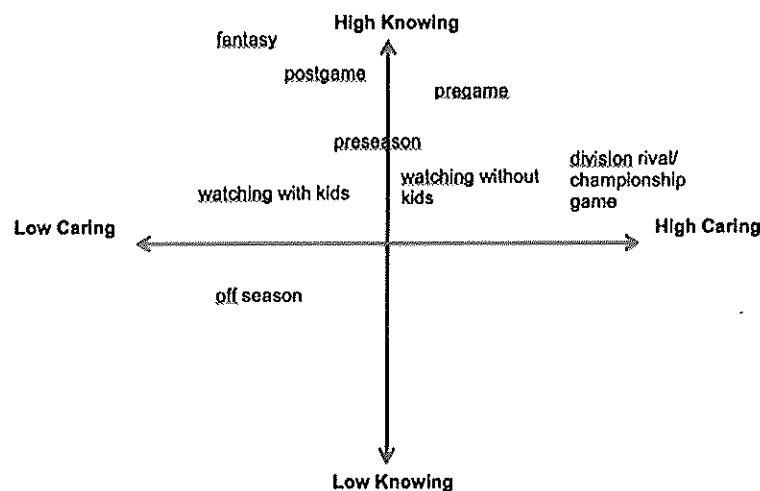


Figure 3.2 Situational fan performances. Created by Anne C. Osborne.

fans likely also engage in greater Caring, often expressing extreme emotions, but the Caring performed is very different from the Caring one sees during a game, for example. As noted earlier in this chapter, many women consciously choose to limit their Caring performances. The off-season provides a time for them to focus on other things and catch up on other interests. Becky, for example, noted that she took up gardening.

As the preseason approaches, fans are more likely to engage in performative fandom across both modes. Fans often buy new merchandise. Some attend training camp to get an up-close look at and to meet players and to bond with other fans. This is also a time that a fan is likely to start studying her team's roster and follow sports media more diligently. During preseason games, we saw fans perform greater Knowing than Caring. These early games do not count toward the team's season record and so the women we observed did not cheer or express as much emotion during these games. Instead, they watched games as a way to learn the team's roster and often engaged in conversation with other fans about prospects for the season. The preseason is a time for building excitement, but mostly for analysis and prognostication.

Even during a single game day, we often see women negotiate the two modes of performance. As discussed earlier in this chapter, women often begin game days in a Knowing mode. Donna discussed waking up and immediately turning on sports television. Others listen to sports radio in the morning or go to their mobile apps and the Internet to read about the games ahead. The earliest pregame performances are Knowing. As the day progresses, performances generally become more Caring, particularly among those who tailgate before the game. In Chapter 7, we talk about the importance of tailgates as an expression of Caring performances. Chapter 6 talks about the more subdued Caring performance we often see among women watching at home. Whether at home or at the game, during game time everyone is dressed in team-labeled merchandise and sharing in the community of friendship and fandom.

Women's game time fan performances are more Caring than Knowing, but the Caring performances vary based on the other identity roles involved at that time. Take, for example, Julie, who is a young mother and season-ticket-holding Saints fan. She actively engages different modes of performance depending on whether she must also act as a mother. As we discuss in considerable detail in Chapters 7 and 8, when Julie is at a game without her children, she engages in heightened Caring mode performances. She dresses to communicate her team affiliation, she yells and cheers, and sometimes becomes rowdy with other fans. There would be no doubt to an outside observer that Julie is highly invested in the Saints' success. When she watches games at home with her children, however, her Caring performance is more reserved. Her attention is divided between caring for her team and caring for children. While she still dresses for the occasion, when with her kids, Julie is more likely to spend time talking to friends—often

other mothers—or playing with her son. Regardless of the performance at any given time, Julie maintains a self-identity as a Saints fan.

Caring performances also change based on the opponent and importance of the game. As with preseason games, non-conference games affect teams' rankings less than conference games so fans tend to engage in greater Caring during conference games as well as during games against division rivals or during championship games. The height of Caring performances occurs during the Super Bowl, particularly if a favorite team is playing in the championship game. Male and female fans alike cheer, scream, curse, and cry both for joy and for sorrow during these most important games. A fan is said to bask in reflected glory (BIRGing) when her team is winning. When her team loses, however, she cuts off reflected failure (CORFing) (see e.g. Spinda, 2011). BIRGing and CORFing occur because a fan's self-esteem rises and falls with the performance of her team. Both BIRGing and CORFing are emotionally rooted. In BIRGing, a fan will speak about the team in the first person, thereby strengthening her connection to the team: "I can't believe we won that one in the end." In CORFing, on the other hand, a fan talks about her team in the third person, putting distance between herself and the team: "They played a horrible game." One of the ways fans create greater emotional distance after a loss is to switch from Caring performances to more Knowing performances. When CORFing, fans often critique coaches' strategies, players' execution, and referees' play calling in a detached and analytical manner. We often observed this response, sometimes called Monday morning quarterbacking, on the day after a game, particularly a big loss.

It is clear from our data that women's fan performances change considerably based on the contexts such that the mode of performance is determined by outside variables. Women also change their performance modes based on what other identities might be salient at that time. At times the choice of how to moderate Caring and Knowing modes of performance is consciously decided. More often than not, however, the negotiation between modes occurs naturally and without consideration.

Relational. We often heard women talk about themselves as different types of fans at different times in their lives. Unlike Crawford (2003), who explains fandom as a progression from Interested to Apparatus, we did not see women's fandom evolve in a linear fashion; rather, we saw women continuously engage with and modulate their Caring and Knowing performances. Becky, for example, refers to herself first as a fair-weather fan, but later talks about being a die-hard fan.

When I was younger I really got into the Cavs [the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team]. . . . And then in high school Indians [Cleveland's baseball team] were a big deal. And then, later on, it was probably more NFL football. And I guess that, you know what, I guess that relates to how well we did, so perhaps I'm one of those fair-weather fans. But definitely

a theme from childhood to adulthood is, if I was into sports, it was more of a party atmosphere. I mean, obviously when I was eight I wasn't drinking, but it was that party atmosphere, like everybody got together and it was a fun experience. High school it was a reason to get together and underage drink. [*slight laugh*] Then college it was a reason again to drink at 10 am, tailgating and barbecuing in asphalt parking lots and those types of things—so it was more of a social thing for me. . . . I've been, you know, I've been a different kind of fan, different degrees, at different points of my life. So, it's, you know, whatever, like you can be the token girlfriend who wears, like high heels to the game and looks all cute in her tight jeans and has her cute little jersey on and her big Gucci purse walking up the stairs—I mean I don't care, you can do that. But when I was a die-hard fan I was like, "Oh God, look at this dumb girl; this is probably their first date. She knows nothing about football." You know, and that's usually when I was drunk I would feel that way. . . . I mean there's all kinds of fans, and there's room for all of them I think. Um, the ones that annoy me now is just those—those guys who get belligerent drunk and swearing because there are kids there, and the ones that want to start a fight, and it's like, "R-really? You know, like, you're spilling beer all over us, like go sit down and relax and enjoy the game." But yes, you can be—there are all kinds of different fans.

Becky explained that she chose to take a step back from practicing her fandom because she feared becoming too obsessed. She points to meeting her husband as one of the factors for her making the shift in fandom.

I think I was in one more league after my husband—my husband and I have been together since 2010 or end of 2010 so maybe three years cuz I think I was in a league and he had to witness me being football crazy for a little bit. . . . I guess he was kind of like, well no I wouldn't say he was annoyed. I wasn't too crazy, I wasn't going to the local bars and like leaving him to go watch a game or anything. But he was just kind of indifferent.

Taking Becky as an example, we can plot her fandom over time, showing that at various points in her life her fan performances have been more Knowing and at other times they have appeared more Caring. It would be a simplification to say that she was a fair-weather fan whose interest deepened as she learned more about the game or to say that she used to be a fan, who eventually lost interest in football, though on the surface both assessments might appear accurate. It would be more accurate to say that over time Becky has adapted her fandom to be more congruent to the relationships in her life. Using the FPM, we can see that Becky's fandom has always been a nuanced interplay between Knowing and Caring (Figure 3.3).

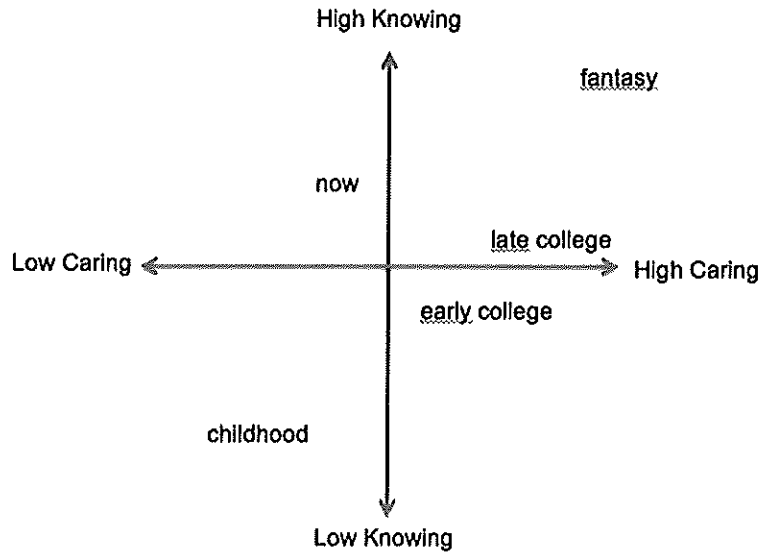


Figure 3.3 Becky's performances over time. Created by Anne C. Osborne.

When Becky was a child, she was interested in football because she enjoyed the social atmosphere during games, when her aunts and uncles would gather and watch together. At this early stage of her life, one might not call Becky a fan because she did not understand the game and her enjoyment centered on time spent with her family not on attachment to a team. Nonetheless, she clearly valued football as the reason for family gatherings. By engaging in Caring performances of fandom she was able to bond with her family. In high school, football provided an avenue to socialize with friends. Over time she came to feel an attachment to the game itself such that when she went to college, she chose to attend Browns games and buy Browns merchandise. Her Caring performances became more autonomous and more internalized behaviors she learned from her family. By the time she went to college, she attended at least one Browns game per year and had come to know the basic strategies of the game. Becky engaged in both Knowing and Caring Performances at this time. By the time she left college, she would consider herself a more die-hard fan. While her interest was still centered on the Caring aspects of socializing with friends while cheering on her team, she was willing to make sacrifices to attend games and had developed a commitment to her team's success.

Her fandom deepened when she started participating in fantasy football. Now she really studied the game. As quoted earlier in this chapter, she liked that, as a woman, she was not expected to win at fantasy—but she did. Spurred by the sense that she was challenging stereotypes, she would go to bars by herself in order to watch games all day each Sunday. At this point, she considered herself a die-hard fan who was deeply entrenched in both Caring and Knowing modes of performance. As the quote above indicates, being a die-hard fan meant that she was more likely to judge other fans, particularly women, for how they performed and to assume that women knew less than she did.

When Becky met and later married her husband, she made a conscious choice to be less involved in football fandom. Her husband did not participate in her Browns fandom and she worried that she had become “obsessed” and was “being football crazy” so she lessened her performances. Becky does not actively follow football now, but she still considers herself a fan; it is part of her identity. When asked what team she supports, Becky answered, “None, but if I had to pick one I would say the Browns, which is very painful in and of itself.” Even though she does not actively support the Browns, she feels pained by the team’s lack of success. She explains that it is a “hometown pride kind of thing.” Her attachment to the Browns has become ingrained such that even though she does not follow the team now, she still feels allegiance. She also still knows a great deal about football and the Browns, particularly the team’s history, even if she does not know its current starting lineup. When asked about football, she is a wealth of knowledge. The example of Becky shows how fan performances change with different life stages. Even now that Becky less actively performs her fandom, she still considers herself a Browns fan and, when appropriate, can engage in Caring and/or Knowing.

CONCLUSION

According to the theory of Performative Sport Fandom, fandom is constituted through the performance. A fan is not something one is; it is something one does, such that through performing fandom, the identity of fan is created and then maintained. The Fan Performance Matrix breaks those performances into two modes: Knowing and Caring. As detailed in this chapter, the scope of a fan’s fandom is expressed and proven through Caring performances while Knowing performances enhance the quality of fandom. As such there are fans whose performances are almost exclusively Caring, with Knowing performances limited to only the most basic understanding of the game. Often, however, as one’s Caring grows, one engages, both consciously and unconsciously, in greater Knowing. As such, the two performance modes are not mutually exclusive. They also are not constant; they change over time and in relation to the context. The Fan Performance Matrix, thereby, offers an interpretive tool for considering the complexity of fan identity, even for an individual fan.

The FPM allows us to visualize how individual fan performances adapt to particular situations as well as how performances change over time. Unlike other approaches that read fandom as fixed and measurable, Performative Sport Fandom and the Fan Performance Matrix underscore the fluidity of fandom.

Football fandom is consistent with male gender identities; fandom often conflicts with social expectations of women’s roles. Women fans, therefore, often feel particular pressure to negotiate their fandom in relation to their other identities and role performances. In the following chapter, we discuss challenges to women’s fandom and the strategies women employ to address them.