

# Football Fandom, Mobilization and Herbert Blumer: A Social Movement Analysis of F.C. United of Manchester

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## Abstract

This article explores the establishment and development of fan-owned association football club, F.C. United of Manchester. It does this by drawing upon extensive ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, observations and an analysis of multiple texts, such as fanzines, web-based and media reports materials and discusses this using Herbert Blumer's theory of collective behavior. As such, the article addresses two research questions: first, what the empirical case example of F.C. United of Manchester offers to the critical understanding of Blumer's theory and second, what the theory can give to the understanding of twenty-first century protests in popular culture. Therefore this article contributes to contemporary debates on association football fandom, social movements and the theories of Herbert Blumer.

## Keywords:

Association Football; Fandom; Social Movement; Herbert Blumer; Collective Behavior

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### Introduction

The Florida-based businessman Malcolm Glazer and his family purchased the economic ownership rights to English Premier League (hereon EPL) club Manchester United F.C. (hereon Manchester United) on 12 May 2005 for £790m. The Glazers had initially bought up a 2.9 per cent stake in the club in March 2003 and by 28 June 2005 owned 98 per cent of the club's shareholding, delisting it from the stock-exchange (*BBC News* 2005). Despite the Glazers leading Tampa Bay Buccaneers - a National (grid-iron) Football League franchise in the U.S.A. that they also own - to a period of sporting success, many Manchester United supporters were concerned that the buyout leveraged a £559m acquisition debt on to the club, that annually needed £60m to repay interest on the loan (see Conn 2010). While leveraged buyouts are not unusual in some North American sports this move was not normal in the UK (see Zirin 2010: 170). Brown (2007; 2008) argued that Glazer's takeover split Manchester United's huge supporter community, as some fans protested by setting up F.C. United of Manchester (hereon F.C. United) in the summer of 2005. The new association football (hereon football) club is organised as a members' Industrial Provident Society, which means that each fan who has bought a single share in the club for a nominal fee can take a vote on the club's major issues. On-the-pitch F.C. United runs on a semi-professional basis in the English non-leagues and is currently based at Bury F.C.'s Gigg Lane stadium but has been developing plans to build its own ground. This article will look at the socio-cultural processes involved in the establishment of F.C. United by using Herbert Blumer's (1951) theory of 'collective behavior' to understand this mobilization. In doing so, this article addresses two research questions: first, to ask what the empirical case example of F.C. United offers to the critical understanding of Blumer's theory and second, to ask what the theory – now around 60 years old - can offer to the understanding of contemporary protests in popular culture, such as F.C. United.

### Football, Resistance and Social Movements

These research questions are of prime sociological importance for five main reasons. First, Blumer is widely regarded to be one of the most influential scholars in the way that sociology is conducted through the important role he played in the development of the 'Chicago School of Sociology' (Hammersely 2010: 71). However, his theory around collective behavior/social movements has been less widely discussed than his contribution to 'symbolic interactionism'. Indeed, in the 300 original articles that had been published in *Mobilization* (up to August 2012), arguably the world-leading journal in the field of social movements, only fourteen had cited Blumer's work and of these, only three could be argued to have used his theory of collective behavior as a template. Therefore, the need to critically

explore the use value of his work in the understanding of contemporary forms of collective action is both novel and registers high on the sociological radar. Second, the context in which this article takes place means that it extends and updates the sociological analysis of Manchester United that has most notably developed through David Andrews' edited collection, *Manchester United: A Thematic Study* (2004). Manchester United have long-since held the reputation of being a global 'superclub' (Mellor 2000) and this was premised on two factors: a) the way in which the club coped with, and the subsequent reportage of, the 1958 Munich air disaster in which eight of its players died and b) the 'stylish' tactical game and the deployment of 'glamour' players within its teams (Bose 2007) that has captured the public's interest in the club. These players include the Northern Irish winger George Best and more recently, Eric Cantona (see King 1995), David Beckham (see Cashmore 2002) and latterly Cristiano Ronaldo (see Wagg 2010) who became cult heroes and/or 'global brands' to many across the world. This status has been augmented by the club's long-standing reputation of gaining fans from outside its immediate geographical catchment area (Mellor 2000) and the club now claims to have 659 million supporters (however defined) across the world (see Forbes 2012).

Third, the study of social movements in sport is important given that Melucci (1996) pointed out that prerequisites of collective action are to have a group of people who would regularly come together with similar purposes and renew their beliefs /identifications with a movement; this is applicable to the context of football (and other spectator sports) where fans aggregate with the common purpose to support a team. Crossley (2002: 7) argued that 'there are doubtless many reasons' why social movements should be a core sociological issue, but specifically argued that protests and mobilizations are important composites of the daily news and so must be sought to be understood. Sport, fronted by elite football, undoubtedly occupies a similar position in the daily news. What is more, given that EPL matches are annually broadcast to a cumulative global television audience of three billion people (Deloitte 2008: 30) across 211 nations, the protests associated with Manchester United were reported in the world media.<sup>i</sup> Fourth, although Byrne (1997: 62-63) noted that the size of collective action is often difficult to measure, it is reasonable to suggest that the twenty-first century protests at Manchester United contained protesters that could be conservatively estimated to stretch into the small hundred thousands across the globe, making them amongst the best supported forms of social movement in the world.<sup>ii</sup> With specific reference to F.C. United, the most recent season (2011/12) saw its average match gate at around 2,000 people per home game. Given that 21 home games were played that season, the intensity and number of fans coming together to watch a specific football match by the protest club marks it as important. Fifth, Tarrow (1998: 4) argued that 'movements mount challenges through disruptive direct action against elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes' whilst Goodwin and Jasper (2003) infer that many movements set out to change the conditions of the state. In light of the socio-cultural value of football, the movements concerned with the ownership of football clubs prompted a political response in both the Labour and Conservative parties' manifestos for the 2010 British General Election (Conservative Party 2010: 75; Labour Party 2010: 50). Indeed within one year of the 2010 General Election, a cross party 'Football Governance' inquiry was launched. In doing so, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee invited written evidence submissions from 30 supporters' groups across the country (including F.C United), highlighting the potential that these fan movements may have in creating political and legislative change.<sup>iii</sup>

Despite football supporters' long-standing and regular protests for the removal of coaches, managers and chairman (for a historical overview, see Taylor 2008; or for more contemporary populist stories from multiple English football clubs see Brimson 2008), such developments have rarely been explored with the use of the large canon of social movement theories. Indeed, a very rare exception to this point has been provided by Wilson and White (2002) who used a new social movement framework to explore the emergence of the 'Revive the Pride' movement that sought to bring back the defunct Ottawa Rough Riders Canadian (gridiron) Football League team. In the context of football, there have been a number of areas where fan movements could be described as 'mobilizing'. First, it must be remembered that however spurious Taylor's (1971) explanation of football hooliganism may now seem, he was arguing that fan violence was the 'sub-cultural rump's' way of reclaiming the sport. Second, Giulianotti (1999: 61-63) described the emergence of football fanzines in the UK – amateur magazines that are made and produced by supporters – as 'new social movements' in response to the portrayal of football fans as social villains in the 1980s. Third, Scraton (1999) points out that since the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, when 96 Liverpool F.C. supporters died, an active group of the club's supporters have collectively asserted pressure on the UK government to launch a full inquiry to find out why the incident occurred. While fourth, Testa and Armstrong (2010: 69-86) argue that the politicising and de-politicising actions of Ultra fan groups can also be considered to be 'social movements'. In the light of the claims and nature of these studies, it is perhaps slightly surprising that none of this research analyses the fan actions they detail using any of the large number of social movement theories that have been developed.

Manchester United supporters have a recent history of mobilization. In 1995, a group of active Manchester United supporters launched the *Independent Manchester United Supporters' Association (IMUSA)* to oppose the club's moves to eradicate standing at matches. Then in 1998, the 'Not For Sale' campaign was launched by 'raggy-arsed fans' (Bose 2007: 165) in response to *BSkyB's* proposed takeover of the club. At the time, club's board had decided to accept *BSkyB's* owner, Rupert Murdoch's bid to purchase the club and rallied by a confluence of *IMUSA* and *Shareholders' Unite Against Murdoch (SUAM)*, later to become *MUST*, fans successfully challenged the decision through the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (see Bose 2007; Brown and Walsh 1999; Lee 1999). The Manchester United fanzines, *Red News*, *Red Issue* and *United We Stand* supported the campaign and were used as mediums to communicate with fans. Supporter accounts in these publications showed a number of concerns about the planned takeover, such as raised ticket prices, an over-mediatization of games, the breakup of the EPL collective broadcasting agreement and conflict of interest within the club whereby Murdoch would deliberately not fund player transfers if Manchester United continued to be successful. In the recent protests against the Glazer family's ownership of Manchester United, then-*IMUSA* chairman, Andy Walsh, worked with other important members of the group to set up F.C. United. Thus, F.C. United is rooted within the *IMUSA* traditions and formed by some of its original leaders. There is nothing to suggest that F.C. United supporters are demographically a homogeneous group but many of its leading members were connected to the 'lads' group that King (2002 [1998]) studied, even though it is notable none of those he researched took up roles at the new club.

Through the creation of F.C. United, the example of AFC Wimbledon - which was established by supporters of Wimbledon F.C. (later renamed MKDons) in 2002 after the parent club announced plans to relocate 70 miles north in Milton Keynes (Joyce 2006) - was followed. In a similar vein, the non-league AFC Liverpool was setup by supporters of Liverpool F.C. who felt that they could not afford to purchase tickets at EPL football grounds, after F.C. United in 2008. However, despite the establishment of new football clubs being one of the key stories to emerge in football in the twenty-first century, very little research on the matter exists. Brown (2007; 2008) has published qualitatively rich material on F.C. United supporters; however this analysis coalesces around issues of authenticity in fandom and match-day cultures rather than asking questions which pertain to the club as a mobilization with socio-political importance, as discussed in this article.

### **Herbert Blumer, Collective Behavior and The Study of Social Movements**

Although accounts of protest, resistance and pursued action for social change are long-standing, the use of the term 'social movement' is only a relatively recent phenomenon, rising from the late 1960s with the student, environmental and women's mobilizations (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 2). Indeed, the early studies into mass movements grew out of conservative fascinations with revolutionary mobs at the end of the nineteenth century (Leach 1986). The work of Gustav Le Bon (2008 [1895]) typifies such perspectives by offering that physical gatherings generate a contagion of emotions, dissolving personalities into a suggestible and vicious 'crowd mind'. Further, mass society theories of the period argued that a person was likely to join 'extremist' mass movements if s/he felt atomised, insignificant and socially detached (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 5).

Despite the predominance of negative views toward collective behavior, sociologists became interested in understanding different forms of action and discerning whether they were in fact so dangerous and altogether negative. In 1951, Herbert Blumer shed a slightly different light on collective action, even if fundamental presuppositions about their negative or unruly nature remained. By considering phenomena ranging from spontaneous and emotional crowds to more sustained types of collective behavior associated with social movements, Blumer coined the term symbolic interactionism and argued that collective action, even that of crowds, should be understood as purposive, meaningful and potentially creative action capable of introducing new norms, behaviors and skills amongst participants within society (Chesters and Welsh 2011; Crossley 2002). Blumer called this theory 'collective behavior' but while he broke from the conservative traditions that came before him in this area of research, Jasper (1997: 22) argued that the name of the theory still implies 'something less than fully conscious, purposive action' from those involved.

Since Blumer's accounts – and more precisely – in the aftermath of the 1960s when social movements became seen as emancipatory rather than unruly, a plethora of theories and traditions of social movement inquiry have emerged, coalescing around ideas including: rational choice practices (see Gamson 1990 [1975]; Olson 1968), resource mobilization (see McCarthy and Zald 1977), political processes and opportunity structures (see McAdam 1988; Tilly 2009) and 'new' social movements (see

Castells 2004 [1997]; Melucci 1996; Touraine 1981). Some, such as Crossley (2002: 168-191), have tried to bring these theories – including Blumer's – together but this task has proved to be difficult given that social movement theories derive from differing epistemological and methodological positions and therefore lend themselves to different questions that can be asked of mobilizations (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 3; Jasper 1997). Further, a hugely ambitious study by Davies-Delano and Crosset (2008) tried to 'systematically examine the relevance of five bodies of social movement theory to the outcomes of two sport-related social movements' (p115) but struggled to genuinely meet this aim in the context of a single journal article.

Given the plethora of approaches to the study of mobilizations, definitions of social movements are highly contested (see Byrne 1997; Crossley 2002; Della Porta and Diani 1999 for an illustration of such debates). However, Herbert Blumer provided a clear definition of social movements/collective behaviors as:

Collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on the one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new system of living.

Blumer (1951: 99)

Blumer's definition is uncomplicated. However, Crossley (2002: 3) argued that his definition was perhaps too wide to have strong analytical use. While it is unreasonable to argue that Blumer's theory of collective behavior has been forgotten in both European and North American academic thought, it is fair to suggest that it has become less influential since other theoretical tools of explanation rose to the fore (see Della Porta and Diani 1999). We believe that the case of F.C. United provides the opportunity to revisit Blumer's theory with a contemporary empirical study to consider what – if anything – it can tell us about the social processes involved in the establishment and institutionalisation of today's social movements. Blumer's (1969 [1937]) wider sociology of 'symbolic interactionism' is evident in his theorisations around social movements, which he argued are negotiated group responses to perceived inequalities. Thus, Blumer (1951) stated that there are three main types of social movement: the 'general', the 'expressive' and the 'specific' movement, of which he most carefully describes the latter.

Blumer (1951) recognised general social movements as representing a concretisation of cultural drift in social values which jar with the established institutional rules that govern social relations. Therefore, gradual changes in culture create new expectations and the failure to meet these gives rise to general social movements. In the context of football, the anti-racism fans' movements that developed across the 1980s and 1990s in the UK (see Back et. al 2001) and, most clearly, the development of 'fan projects' across Europe (established so that people could watch football in an atmosphere free of prejudice, see Joyce 2011) provide examples of general social movements. Religious movements are the 'ideal type' of expressive mobilizations in that they do not aim to change the institutions which give social order but have profound cultural value in affecting the personalities of those in the movement (Blumer 1951: 214). Blumer (1951: 214) argued that expressive movements may reveal a projection of group culture upon external objects which 'then take on a sacred character'. Those on the inside of the

group see themselves as a 'select group of sacred souls' with those on the outside 'regarded as lost' (Blumer 1951: 215). Football fandom has been regularly compared to religious acts, in the way supporters adopt teams, continue to loyally support them and sees their choice as subjectively superior. This suggests that football fandom in its totality could be considered as an expressive movement.

Blumer (1951) dedicated most of his collective behavior discussion to the emergence and maintenance of 'specific social movements', which tend to be either reform or revolutionary forms of action with well-defined goals. While Blumer (1951: 213) recognised that social class differences exist between reform and revolutionary movements (reform movement exist on behalf of an exploited group, membership of such action groups tend to be middle class, whilst 'the revolutionary movement is usually a lower-class movement operating among the under privileged', Blumer 1951: 213), Crossley (2002: 36) criticised Blumer's theory for failing to take into account issues of social structure. Despite F.C. United and its fans alluding to bygone eras in which they argue that football match attendance was more amenable to the working-classes (with more affordable match-tickets), it is noticeable that nine out of the original eleven F.C. United board members were in group 'A' of Goldthorpe's social class schema.<sup>iv</sup> The board was led by Andy Walsh, a former I.T. worker who was once a member of the Socialist Party and a leading figure in the anti-poll tax movement (Wallis undated), while Dr. Adam Brown, who then worked in the Sociology department at Manchester Metropolitan University and had been both a member of the Football Supporters' Association's national committee and the British government's 'Football Task Force', also played an important role. Blumer (1951: 203) argued that specific social movements have typical 'stages of development' which involve 'social unrest', 'popular excitement', 'formalisation' and 'institutionalisation' and the movement establishes. Whilst this 'career' of a movement has been criticised for being overly mechanistic (see Della Porta and Diani 1999), the social processes involved within and across the stages of development have not been fully discussed. As a result, this article will focus upon these processes, namely of: agitation, spirit de corps, morale, ideology and tactics and discuss them in the context of F.C. United's protest against Glazer's purchase of Manchester United and the commercialisation of football more generally.

## Methodology

This research emerges from two independent research projects. First, in his recent monograph, *Author A* (2011) has analysed some of the recent fan protests connected to English football clubs (but which also often also stretch across the world) by drawing upon some of the established social movement theories. This project involved fieldwork data collection connected to F.C. United and other Manchester United fan protests, as well as those that were ongoing at Liverpool F.C. (see also *Author A* 2012). However, much of the field work presented in this article is drawn from *Author B's* research, which arrives from an Economic and Social Research Council-funded Ph.D in Social Anthropology conducted on F.C. United (for an early publication emerging from this research, see *Author B* 2009). This project used a range of ethnographic techniques that involved *Author B* submerging himself in the field for up to six days per week for a period between July 2009 and December 2010. This research was entirely inductive and involved partaking in supporter practices and talking to both 'lay' fans and key personnel

at the football club. F.C. United also carries out many community projects which aim to use football to tackle broader social problems, and Author B volunteered on these both as a means of directly gaining data and building rapport with other members of the club.<sup>v</sup>

F.C. United has often been unfairly portrayed by supporters of other clubs as an exclusively 'Mancunian' football club (see Author A 2011: 174-177). An initial challenge that Author B faced was that he had no pre-existing personal contacts amongst the club's management or fan-base and hailing from the south of England, worried that gaining access to fan groups may have been a problem. In the field, this concern was largely unfounded as a colleague provided him with contact details of two FC United fans that were her friends, and a sample snowballed. As well as this, two further points of contact were made: first, following King's (2002 [1998]) approach to recruiting Manchester United supporting 'lads', the editor of the club's main 'fanzine' (*Under the Boardwalk*, see Millward 2008 for critical discussions of fanzines) was contacted, as was, second, Adam Brown who is an influential F.C. United fan and founding board member but is also a sociologist who has written extensively about football fan cultures. Adam Brown acted as a 'gatekeeper' in the study, initially contacting around 20 people to ask if they would take part in the doctoral research project. As with many ethnographic projects, interviews took place at a variety of stages during the fieldwork period, with differing levels of formality, recording of data and length of time taken with individuals.

These rich sources of qualitative field data were combined with a plethora of mainstream and independent media data. To elaborate, since F.C. United had been established a number of television documentaries, radio interviews and newspaper/magazine articles had featured the protest club. In many cases, radio/television interviews with key members of the group were fully transcribed and used as either primary data or the basis of future interview questions. Additionally, close examinations of the multiple texts that supporters said were important to the club and its fans were performed. These included: fan diaries/accounts written by Robert Brady (2006), Pete Crowther (2006) and Steven Wood (2008); an analysis of F.C. United's 'unofficial message board'<sup>vi</sup> and fanzines dedicated to Manchester United (1989-2011) and F.C. United (2005-2011). Podcast material from F.C. United's 'Radio FCUM' and Manchester United's fanzine 'United We Stand' audio format was also drawn upon, supplementing and informing the suite of data collected. The selection of the data utilized in this article is, like in much ethnography, part of its analysis. As such, data we include was chosen because we believed it to be broadly illustrative of the sentiments of actors involved with F.C. United while also allowing a critical reflection of the social processes that Blumer argued unfold in specific social movements.

Much of Herbert Blumer's theoretical work may be thought of as more philosophical than empirical<sup>vii</sup> although he followed in the Chicago school traditions in a clear belief that the most valid and desirable social research is conducted through qualitative, ethnographic-based methodologies (Hammersley 2010). The qualitative data that has been collected in this study provides an epistemological fit with Blumer's beliefs about how social research should be conducted. However, the research questions embedded into this article are more deductive than those typically associated with Blumer-inspired



qualitative research. While our approach is unusual, we maintain that if Blumer's approach is to be useful for contemporary research, the effectiveness of its application must be discussed – as it is here – even if the theory is not tested in a wholly deductive manner.

### **Findings: Analysing F.C. United supporter action using Blumer**

The material theft of a Manchester institution, forcibly taken from the people of Manchester, was the tip of a pyramid of destruction, with changing kick off times for the benefit of television, soulless all-seater stadia full of 'new' supporters intent to sit back and watch rather than partake in the occasion, heavy handed stewarding and ridiculously priced tickets propping it all up.

<http://www.fc-utd.co.uk/history.php>, Undated.

F.C. United played its first game on 16 July 2005, and in doing so passed from Blumer's (1951) social movement stage of unrest and popular excitement to the stage of 'formalisation'. It was further signified as being at the 'formalisation' stage by an agreement that it would be controlled by fans who could buy a share in the club for £10. By 8 July, it was claimed that over 4,000 people had pledged money to the club (Books LLC 2010). As Benford and Snow (2000) demonstrated, the way in which activists frame the issue that they are protesting against has some variation even within the same mobilization. This is certainly true at F.C. United, where it has been often claimed that Glazer's purchase of the club provided only the catalyst to start mobilizing but fans have been attracted to the club for a number of reasons. As such, F.C. United has pushed forward an argument that it is 'a broad church' where 'there's a home there for the most rabid anti-Glazer protester who out of principle will not give him a penny of their money; there's a home there for those people who can't afford to go to Old Trafford; there's a home there for people who want to watch Manchester United and just see it as an extension of the United family – first team, reserve team, supporters' team' (F.C. United board member, Jules Spencer on 'Inside Out – North West', BBC, 26 September 2005). Indeed, although distaste for Glazer's ownership of the club provides a uniting force for activists, we have found a number of frames regularly occurred when supporters discussed the reasons why they adopted a support for F.C. United. These have specifically included the volume of debt placed upon the club by the Glazer family, the wide commercialisation of football, the economic exclusion of many 'traditional' supporters, the perception that there is a growing social distance between elite football players and their fans and issues relating to declining atmosphere/match day enjoyment at Old Trafford (see Author A 2011: 97-100 for further details). The F.C. United website sets out a number of these concerns in its account of the origin of the club, as highlighted above.

#### *Agitation*

Given the broad range of reasons why supporters decided to take up F.C. United, the range of agitations needed to establish the club was also large. Blumer (1951) argued that agitation is important in the formation and maintenance of a movement because it taps into potential protestors' levels of unrest. Thus, the agitator's role is vital to a movement's early success. For Blumer, the role of the

agitator is two-fold: first s/he can be excitable because his/her energetic action and spectacular verbal imagery infects people with enthusiasm, thus building upon existing levels of collective restlessness whilst second, the agitator can use his/her words sparingly to 'raise questions about what was previously taken for granted' (Blumer 1951: 205).

Andy Walsh played a key role in agitating supporters but has done so in both distinct ways in different circumstances. For instance, around the time of Glazer's takeover of Manchester United, he and a group of other supporters met 'in the curry house in Rusholme [a district of Manchester, to discuss] where we go next, [and] some people were putting forward the idea that we'd have to establish a new club where we could salvage something' (Andy Walsh, 'Choices' *BBC Radio Four*, 13 December 2005). As a result, supporters who were opposed to the takeover met at Manchester Methodist Hall on 19 May and agreed to organise a further fans' rally to be held at the Apollo Theatre on the fringes of Manchester city centre eleven days later. Brady (2006: 43) reported that the 2,000 supporters who attended the 30 May event were addressed by representatives from all of the Manchester United supporters' groups, as well as Labour M.P. for Manchester Central, Tony Lloyd, Kris Stewart – the chairman of fan-owned breakaway club A.F.C. Wimbledon – and the journalist David Conn who has written extensively on the political economy of football. In the hours leading up to the event, 'groups of fans gathered outside the venue, waving banners and singing anti-Glazer songs' highlighting their pre-existing levels of agitation (*Daily Post* 2005: 4). Inside the theatre, Walsh publicly played the role of the excitable agitator by ending his speech with the declaration that: 'We mean business. You [the absent Malcolm Glazer] won't get a penny off anyone in this room and we will make sure you don't get a penny off any football fan' (quoted in *Daily Post* 2005). By using 'we', Walsh stirred feelings by talking for fans in attendance as well as those he stood next to on the stage, therefore whipping up collective emotion ('we' on the stage and 'you' on the floor 'mean business' together). Andy Walsh's use of verbal imagery continued beyond the initial establishment of F.C. United. For instance, at a rally to promote fan ownership of football clubs in 2010, he publicly proclaimed that: 'in a war – and we are in a war – there's a need to recognise who your enemies are and it's not fans of other clubs. It's not even other clubs, it's the people who run those clubs [who] are the enemies of the fans, the people who regulate the game, the current regulators are the enemies of the game and the enemies of the fans'. However at other times, Walsh has addressed the wider public in a different way. In such circumstances, his words have resembled the second type of agitator Blumer spoke of, by trying to 'force them [the audience] to view things in a different light'. One such example was when Walsh was interviewed on *BBC Radio Four's* 'Choices' programme:

The focus was very much upon football rather than on what Manchester United meant on the stock market, or what Manchester United meant as a business. These are the days prior to replica kits even – you'd go and get yourself a red top from the local market and that'd be your Manchester United top. Those ideals of sporting endeavour and creating something for the community – and create something for the people who took obvious enjoyment from going watching the game and those people who took obvious enjoyment of playing for the team and being proud to wear the shirt. *That* ideal has been ditched. [...] Those are the things that *really* cut me to the core really, in terms of the decision. Because, you couldn't, you can't, buy a season ticket at Old Trafford, for the last few years and the only way I could get my boys to come and sit near me in the ground was by obtaining another ticket and asking one of my mates to go and sit somewhere else, so that my son could come and sit next to

me and paying full adult price for your kids to get in there. It'd cost me 100 quid for the three of us to go to a game together. So that effort and that work or financial investment if you like, was also being thrown away. And you know, my boys are proud to consider themselves United fans and I'm proud that they consider themselves to be United fans because their understanding of what it is to be a United fan is the same as mine. It's not just about some sort of reflected glory from the best players that money can assemble in a team, it's about a connection with their community.

Andy Walsh, 'Choices', 13 December 2005

Whereas Walsh directly identified a known (subjectively defined) enemy in Glazer when addressing an audience of protestors and made bold statements in doing so ('we [as 'we' on stage and 'you' the audience] will make sure you don't get a penny off any football fan'), the argument is framed differently to the wider audience by drawing attention to concerns that 'traditional' football fans have long shared about changes in the game, serving the two faces an agitator can make in attempts to attract activists. However, Blumer recognised that agitation only carries a social movement through its early stages of its development, serving to recruit members, provide impetus and some direction. For movements to gain a level of sustainability and coherence beyond an initial agitation, they have to develop other cultural dimensions, which he terms the '*esprit de corps*', morale and a group ideology. These begin to mature in the second stage of develop, which he labels 'the stage of popular excitement' (Blumer 1951: 203).

### *Esprit de Corps*

Blumer (1951: 206) argued that *esprit de corps* is the sense of belonging that people have to the movement and provides rapport amongst members that is crucial to mobilizations. Therefore the *esprit de corps* is a feeling of comradeship, even if this sense of community is at least partially imagined. This solidarity is created through three main ways: first, through the identification of an outgroup – usually those individuals or the institutions that the movement forms against (Blumer 1951: 206); second, through informal fellowships between members of the movement, facilitated by group 'singing, dancing, picnics, joking, having fun, and informal conversation' (Blumer 1951: 207) and third, ceremonial behavior – particularly large assemblages - in the form of 'mass meetings, rallies, parades, huge demonstrations and commemorative ceremonies' (Blumer 1951: 207). Brown (2008) has focussed upon the meaning of 'community' at F.C. United, which he loosely understands to be the formation of a strong collective supporter identity. Indeed at F.C. United, the strong sense of *esprit de corps* built from a core of fans is evident in the adoption of the 'Our Club, Our Rules' slogan that has emblazoned supporters' homemade flags since the inception of the club (the line has also become a regular tag on individual comments posted on the 'unofficial' F.C. United online messageboard). This feeling of *esprit de corps*, manifest as community, is evident amongst fans:

Author B: What do you enjoy about going to see FC [United]?

Sarah: It's the community, it's the communality of the experience, it's knowing that there are people there for the same reasons as I am

(Interview: 3/8/2009).

Later in the fieldwork, Sarah also reported that the feeling of *esprit de corps* – or community - at FC United drew her back to living in Manchester having moved away twenty years earlier. These feelings

grew into a sense of moral obligation to support the team – and the cause – which became obvious when she stated that ‘you feel obliged to do your bit’ (Sarah, Interview: 3/8/2009). An additional way in esprit de corps can be evidenced is through feeling a sense of commonality with fellow fans, players and officials. Indeed, on this matter Jenny argued:

The players still go in the pub, you can have a drink with a player and they will still give kids autographs, they’re just ordinary guys who happen to play football.

(Interview: 7/7/2009).

This collective spirit is strengthened by the coming together that supporters experienced through communal match-day support for the new team (encompassing new rivalries with non-league clubs as well as retaining old rivalries with many of Manchester United’s opponents), which was performed through supporter chants. Some chants reinforced the political dimension of the club, whereas others emanate from F.C. United and Manchester United’s past achievements. Belonging to a collective are also intrinsically related to the ownership structure of F.C. United where every member of the club has an equal share. The below comment reflects how the co-operative ownership structure and the coming together of the matchday ritual combine to create the esprit de corps:

It was the feeling of ownership and participation, and feeling of we all did that, I felt a bond to all the other people watching the football match that was just far, far stronger than what I had experienced watching another football match. I felt more in common with all the people there than I had ever felt with the people at Old Trafford

Nick (Interview: 2/2/2010).

It is clear that both the ritualistic matchday experience where the rivalries with ‘outgroups’ are performed through collective chants alongside the community ownership scheme have promoted a strong sense of spirit within the movement. Thus, a spirit de corps has developed however Blumer (1951: 207) argued that this sense of enthusiasm must be underpinned by the development a fixed loyalty, which he posited developed through morale.

### *Morale*

Blumer (1951) argued that the development of a collective morale was necessary for the establishment of a social movement. He argued that this was created by three convictions: first, that the success of the movement will eradicate injustices; second, that the ultimate goal of the movement will be, almost inevitably, attained, and third, ‘that the movement is charged with a sacred movement’ (Blumer 1951: 208). Blumer stated that morale is important to the long-term future of a mobilization as its existence means that almost all obstructions and challenges would prompt renewed effort rather than disheartenment. Blumer (1951) argued that those movement leaders who boost morale are often perceived to possess superior intelligence and miraculous powers to others. For some, Andy Walsh – who supporters have nicknamed ‘El Presidente’ – embodies these attributes, as one F.C United fan suggested Andy Walsh was like a ‘religious leader’ because his actions mean that ‘5000 people will follow’ (fieldnotes, 18/01/2010).

The development of morale arguably presented a problem for the long-term success of F.C. United. In the club's inaugural season (2005/6), it had an average match-day attendance of 3,059 (the second highest in non-league football, with a season-long high of 6,023). By 2007/8 season, the average figure had fallen to 2,153 – a figure it has approximately stabilised upon – despite the club having achieved two consecutive promotions. Klandermans (1997) argued that one of the biggest reasons why activists typically defect from action is their loss of belief that the mobilization can achieve its aim. Whilst F.C. United was formed as a 'broad church' of multiple discontents with the elite levels of English football, the leveraged buyout of Manchester United lay at the core of many of its supporters' concerns. Andy Walsh frequently argued that the morale of the group ran deeper than an opposition to Glazer and dealt with wider issues of fans' engagements with elite level football:

Well not surprisingly I quite often get asked the question, you know, 'what happens if the Glazers leave Old Trafford, will F.C. United die?' And the straight answer is that we'll look at the situation when it arises. I think my own personal view is that I stopped going to Old Trafford because I didn't want to support the Glazer regime, it was already becoming increasingly difficult to go and take my kids with me, because I couldn't really afford it for all three of us to go. But, erm, the issues at Old Trafford run much deeper than the Glazers, I think it's to do with the structure of the game at the top – the Premier League in particular. We could just cheer the Glazer's departure, pretty similar to the way that Liverpool fans have cheered Hicks and Gillett in and cheered them out and now they are cheering J.W. Henry as the new saviour. You know, I think people need to look a little bit deeper than the headlines. But I think United fans, football fans in general, need to start putting some demands on owners about support involvement and [ticket] prices. Those are the sort of things that need to be addressed before you can start to say that the troubles of football have been dealt with.

On *United We Stand* podcast 4, 30 October 2010.

These comments find resonance with some lay supporters, as highlighted by Sarah who argued:

I think it is really important that it does [FC United continue for a long time], as it feels to me like it is something that is important for football really, not trying to make it sound to over the top, but it is a great story and it sort of counteracts all of the rubbish about footballers on insane amounts of money and agents and people giving up their season tickets because there is no atmosphere and all of those aspects are countered by what we are doing, so if we fail it is not just disastrous for us but I think it would be disastrous more broadly.

(interview 3/8/2009).

However, these sentiments were not shared by all fans, as evidenced by Ned who stated that he wasn't 'really sure what it [F.C. United] is about anymore, what the aim of the club is, whether it is still about Glazer' (fieldnotes, 24/7/2010). Given that F.C. United formed for a 'broad church' of reasons, it is hardly surprising that fans do not share a universal view about the purpose of the activism, raising questions about the long-term establishment of a moral which will endure the movement. We do not have a comprehensive survey representing the 'typical' F.C. United fans' views, however throughout our research disagreements about the extent of the 'political' value that the club should have regularly unfolded. F.C. United fan [1] provided just one example of this:

I know I have made this point elsewhere but I have had enough and I know many others have to, the politics at fc [F.C. United] are driving fans away and we're not attracting new ones. The figures don't lie. There is a small minority and I mean small but powerful group at fc [F.C. United] who seem to think they run the club and it's their way or no way.

Speak out of turn and your banned, i know some bannings are legit ie racist etc

This club was set up by a REBEL group who wanted to give football back to the man in the street , the average man in the street likes a laugh likes a drink likes some banter like it was in season one but slowly the do gooders are trying to stop anything that is not pc and look at the figures the attendances are going down.

The football at this level is good but most people who started to watch fc went for the crack and if you take that away you take the fun away and its driving fans away.

So come on lets claim OUR club back because if this carries on the club will suffer and attendances will drop even more.

I expect the vocal minority to shoot me down on this post but if you stop and think you will see i am being proved right

22 July 2008 on 'F.C.Unofficial' Internet messageboard

Under the heading of 'too much politics' F.C. United fan [1] made the point that the political positions of F.C. United was driving fans away from the club and ebbing at his enjoyment of supporting the team. The messageboard comment developed into a 'thread' where supporters debated the desirability of the political edge that the club carries but did not agree upon a position that they felt the club should adopt. Similar debates have emerged about the goals the playing team should aspire toward, with some prioritising the team's playing success, whilst others have wanted this to be reconciled with a strong rejection of the commercial practices that they felt slowly pushed them away from Manchester United. In F.C. United's first season, Manchester United did not win either the EPL or UEFA Champions League title, which strengthened many supporters' belief that the Glazer family were having a negative impact upon the parent club. However, in 2006/7 season, Manchester United regained their EPL title, and one year later won both the domestic league and the UEFA Champions League. Although these victories did not alter many F.C. United supporters' views on the Glazer family, others did soften their attitude therefore highlighting further tensions within the movement. However researching those members of F.C United who have become disenchanted with the club is methodologically challenging. This is because it is much more difficult to locate these fans, as opposed to those who are still taking an active part in the club, since they no longer attend games, are unlikely to write in F.C United fanzines or post on its message boards and many of those fans who ceased to regularly attend matches may have taken the decision for non-political reasons. Thus, the long-term development and maintenance of morale at F.C. United is difficult to analyse.

### *Group Ideology*

Blumer suggested that group ideology is a vital ingredient of a social movement because without it the movement 'would grope along in an uncertain fashion and could scarcely maintain itself in the face of pointed opposition from outside groups' (Blumer 1951: 209). Thus, Blumer argued that a movement's

ideology gives it a direction, justification, weapons of attack and defence and, if the mobilization is a success, respectability and prestige. For Blumer (1951), a group's ideology develops through two phases. Initially, much of it is abstract and scholarly, having been developed by intellectuals within the movement; however it soon develops a more popular character, taking on emotional symbols and folk arguments, which appeal to less educated masses and makes them ready for popular consumption. Given the 'broad church' of reasons for supporters to become activists, it is difficult to look for a group ideology at F.C. United beyond the wide rebellion against the commercialising processes and perceived 'loss' of the game that provided the stimulus for collective action.

The club's Industrial Provident Society (IPS) 'Rules for F.C. United' document – which details issues such as the 'objects', 'powers', 'application of profits', terms of membership, 'capital funding share provisions' – provides both the legal framework and 'abstract and scholarly' base upon which the club's ideology is based. On the other hand, the club's 'Manifesto: Who We Are and What We Mean' provides a one page summary of the club's aims in a more populist and accessible manner.<sup>viii</sup> Given the broad foundations upon which F.C. United has drawn fans, protestors and members, there is no single ideology connected to the club, however the idea of community and the club's relationship with local people has proved to be important to many of those who have taken on roles within the club. In the sociological canon, it is recognised that the meaning of 'community' is contested and veers between imagined kinships and shared cultural identities to internal rules of conduct within a group (Delanty 2003). F.C. United's 'Manifesto' and IPS documents both stress the value of community relations in the form of kinship between board members, football players and supporters, the 'bottom-up' membership structure of the club and 'giving something back' to the local area and its people. To this end F.C. United have engaged in a large number of 'football in the community' schemes since 2005. These use football as a way to engage young people and attempt to tackle a wide-range of differing social problems, such as poor health, anti-social behavior and inter-ethnic tensions. Those in a position of leadership at F.C. United saw this 'community' responsibility as being central to F.C. United:

When we established, we established ourselves as a co-op. And part of being established as a co-op is that we offer community benefit. So that means that our board have a responsibility to make sure that everything we do as a club is directly or indirectly for community benefit. Ironically, even before we were successful on the pitch we've got to demonstrate community benefit – it's in our constitution. We've added to that by saying that any assets we have will be locked in for community benefit and we're unique in the country – there's no other football club like that.

Andy Walsh, 'Karen Dalston show', *Manchester's 106.6*, 19 May 2011

Further, Adam Brown also underlined such values by stating that 'FC United has to be a community organisation from top to bottom, from the ways it's owned to its outreach community work and I don't see any of that as an option, it's all part of the core of what FC United is.' (Adam Brown: Interview 18/9/2010). Indeed, during our research we found considerable support for the idea that F.C. United is defined by the way it seeks to benefit the local community. However, in line with the 'broad church' philosophy we have discussed throughout, for others notions of community benefit are less important than matchday experience and as such there is no homogenous singular ideology at F.C. United.

### *Tactics*

In many respects, F.C. United are a tactic against the hyper-commercialisation of football and – for many – the specific leveraged purchase of Manchester United by the Glazer family. Indeed, the club was conceived as one of number of tactics against such actions and processes at the 30 May 2005 fans' meeting held at the Apollo Theatre. This action stood alongside other proposals such as a boycott of the following season's F.A. Cup matches and a boycott of the club's sponsors' products/services (Brennan 2005). Blumer (1951: 203) argued that tactics are important to a movement as it 'becomes more clearly organised.' Blumer recognised that tactics in social movements are context dependent but seem to share three main aims of: increasing the number of movement members; maintaining the number of movement supporters and, most crucially, achieving the movement's aims and goals. The evaluation of this part of Blumer's theory entails a critical reflection of what the aims of F.C. United's 'broad church' are constituted with. The club's 'Manifesto' argues that its 'aim is to create a sustainable club for the long term which is owned and democratically run by its members, which is accessible to all the communities of Manchester and one in which they can participate fully'. Taken on this level, these aims are met by the club being member-owned and the strategy of making ticket prices readily affordable. The club's 'IPS Rules for F.C. United' aims are loosely coherent with these values but stipulate that a further aim is 'to further the development of the game of football nationally and internationally and the upholding of its rules' (p2). The tactics adopted in meeting this aim have altered from those associated with local community engagements, for instance F.C. United have partially met this aim by offering advice to clubs that have been either established or collectively purchased by support-groups:

There are a number of clubs that we have helped to set up using our model. One of my colleagues was at Wrexham this week, talking to Wrexham fans who are trying to rescue their club from disastrous ownership and we helped Chester last year to set up and we'd given them previously and we've given advice and assistance to a number of clubs that set up across the country. We, ourselves, got advised by the likes of AFC Wimbledon, Telford and Enfield Town who'd gone before us and followed the supporter-ownership model.

Andy Walsh, 'Karen Dalston show', *Manchester's 106.6*, 19 May 2011

Further, on Saturday the 27 February 2010, F.C. United hosted the 'Beyond the Debt' rally from the social club within the grounds of Gigg Lane. The press release issued by F.C. United in the run up to the rally noted 'the debate on football finance and club ownership currently in the spotlight in Manchester and across the country' before then arguing there was a need for fans to go beyond concerns about levels of debt and consider that 'supporter ownership is the only way forward' (fieldnotes, 27/2/2010). Thus, the rally formed a key tactic that F.C. United facilitated in the protesting against the reduction of debt in English football – and possibly the promotion of supporter-owned football clubs. Blumer (1951) postulated that 'tactics' are most clearly evident when a movement crystallises into a fixed organisation with clearly defined structures, roles and personnel to execute the goals of the movements. As such, the leader becomes at least semi-permanent and more akin to an administrator, with roles in the movement defined by a division of labour. In February 2006, F.C. United institutionalised when Andy Walsh resigned his role as on the board of directors and took up one of two full-time, a paid positions at the club, become its chief executive/general manager. Effectively, as the



club's leader he had become not just an agitator but also an administrator thus highlighting some dimensions of applicability from Blumer's theory. However in F.C. United's case, the timing of the introduction of tactics does not specifically follow Blumer's theory as they are omnipresent from the conception of the mobilization.

### Conclusions

This article is important to a sociology that is within and extends beyond the boundaries of sport due to the issue at play and the use of the theory to understand it. With respect to the substantive issues raised in this article, the rise of supporter protest movements and the establishment of new football clubs as a means of driving forward mobilizations against a wide range of the manifestations of elite sports' commercialising conditions are important fields for inquiry. Indeed, that both the Conservative and Labour parties pledged to investigate the structural conditions that seemingly created the alienation of supporters from football in the UK clearly testifies the strong socio-cultural power of the collective actions. F.C. United played an important role in the development of protests connected to Manchester United and have explicitly adopted a mobilization tactic of sharing its leaders' – particularly agitator-cum-General Manager Andy Walsh's – expertise. While protest movements connected to individual clubs have not tended to join up into a larger movement, F.C. United submitted evidence to the U.K.'s cross-party 'Football Governance' inquiry on the value of the club's community-centred group ideology. Thus, while it is important to heed Gamson's (1990 [1975]) advice about not overstating the significance of a particular mobilization under review, F.C. United has played an important role in making the British government at least appear to listen to the views of many football fans. In addition, the study of the F.C. United has updated the project of understanding Manchester United in social scientific debate, as led by Andrews (2004).

Theoretically, the discussions in this article are high on the sociological agenda. Herbert Blumer has made decisive contributions to the way in the discipline is theorised and practiced. However, his work has been mysteriously under-appreciated in the sociology of sport and his theorization of social movements/collective behavior has also been largely overlooked in the field of mobilization studies. A long-standing general criticism of his work is that it lacks an empirical focus. By using a suite of qualitative methods in an ethnographic tradition, this article offers that focus in the context of the processes connected to the unfolding of social movements, namely: agitation, spirit de corps, morale, ideology and tactics and discusses them in the context of F.C. United's protests. However, this article is not a blind call to arms to bring Blumer's research to the core of the sociology of sport or to centralise his work on collective behavior in research conducted on contemporary social movements. Jasper's (1997: 19) argues that the field of social movement studies is filled with 'theory bashing' in which one theoretical paradigm is accepted and all others universally rejected. This is not the case here, and other branches of social movement theory would doubtlessly be able to shed light on different dimensions of F.C. United establishment, development and culture. Instead, this article is an empirically-led discussion of the adequacies and inadequacies in discussing social movements in the twenty-first century and understanding sports fans' mobilizations using Blumer's theory of collective

behaviour but to do so, we must closely follow in Blumer's footsteps and appreciate the nuanced complexities of the processes that create, maintain and change social realities such as those under discussion here in order to understand the ways in which people 'fit [...] together their lines of action' (Blumer 1969 [1937]: 53). This leads to answering two research questions: first, what does the case example of F.C. United offer to the critical understanding of Blumer's theory of the social processes involved in collective behavior and second, what his theory can offer to the understanding of popular cultural contemporary protests, such as F.C. United?

To answer the first of these points, at a base level the case study of F.C. United as a social movement/form of collective behavior provides an empirical example from popular culture through which these social processes can be discussed. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that in the six decades since Blumer produced his abstract discussions of collective behavior, the empirical application of his theory has not – to our knowledge - been provided before. While we must accept that our evidence has been gathered together and analysed in the paradigm established through Blumer's approach, we have found that our case study largely supports his argument. However, our critical understanding of Blumer's theory reveals several caveats in our acceptance. First, while it seems that Blumer recognised that the social processes of collective behavior did not always develop in a linear fashion, the case example of F.C. United certainly suggests that this was far from the case. Indeed, the example of F.C. United suggests that Blumer's arguments should have been more concrete as, for instance, in this research the development of tactics is clearly omnipresent and that agitation does not occur only at the beginning of the movement. Thus whilst the social processes are useful in facilitating a discussion about the complex development of a mobilization, evidence from F.C. United shows the constant flow between these in the unfolding of a protest has been under developed by Blumer. Second, Crossley (2002) offered a potential problem with Blumer's theory is lack of application to specific 'fields'. The case of F.C. United provides that application but the division between general, expressive and specific social movements is clearer in theory than it is in practice: F.C. United could be described as: i) a general social movement on account of the broad community-centred principles underlying the club and its founder's beliefs about the way in which football should be consumed; ii) an expressive movement on account its members pseudo-religious beliefs that it is the future of football or iii) a specific movement that is opposed to one manifestation of the commercialisation of football, such as Glazer's purchase of Manchester United. That this article has focussed on F.C. United as a specific movement is indicative of the stress in Blumer's work, as his discussions of 'general' and 'expressive' social movements have also been grossly under developed. Furthermore, the evidence presented from F.C. United suggests that there is no completely unified sense of morale and group ideology across all F.C. United supporters, as suggested in Blumer's work. Thus, these are our conclusions about the way in which F.C. United can stretch understandings of Blumer's theory of collective behavior.

In answering the second research question, readers should be reminded of the dearth of accounts that have discussed social movements in football using theorisations of mobilizations. Above all else, Blumer's work provides a clear way to analyse a story in which a movement – like F.C. United – unfolds and to discuss where moments of social process in mobilization occur. Quite clearly, Blumer's

framework was developed in a bygone era and he was almost certainly not thinking of protest movements like F.C. United when devising it. The aim of sociological theory should be to either to help analyse empirical contexts (perhaps by providing a paradigm to do so) or to be tested by examples from the real world. In our analysis, the apparent disconnect between the context in which Blumer was writing and the application of it to the twenty-first century social movements in football illustrates what the theory can offer in the critical understanding of contemporary protests like F.C. United. There are limits, however, to what the theory directs us to analyse in the context of F.C. United. For instance, in the wider ethnographic study undertaken fans and officials of F.C. United stressed the importance of financing and building the club's own stadium (as opposed to acting as Bury F.C.'s tenants) to its future. Indeed, during the fieldwork period the establishment of the club's 'home' was arguably the key story to emerge and yet there is little room to discuss this when analysis is guided by Blumer's approach. Further, a key story across F.C. United's short history is the attrition of the number of football match attending followers from 3,059 in its inaugural season (2005/6) to 1,954 in 2009/10 season but Blumer's model does not **obviously** guide toward this important issue being analysed.<sup>ix</sup> The conclusions to this research question are therefore that Blumer's model allows some features of the mobilizations establishment to be told but probably offers less than what case example of F.C. United can offer to the understanding of his theory of collective behavior.

Our concluding points are that while Blumer's broad body of work has been criticized for encouraging descriptive rather than critical research, such studies can be important to the understanding of human life in its various cultural contexts. Like many aged theories, Blumer's discussions of the social process that emerge in the patterning of collective behavior is in need of updating and further elaboration but this will only come from its consideration in the light of material from case studies of social movements in the contemporary era. Therefore the underlining argument is that this theory should not be ignored but should be critically engaged with and potentially amended in future projects both within and beyond the context of sport.

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<sup>i</sup> The 'Green and Gold' protest emerged with the support of the *MUST* in 2010 in response to rising levels of debt and loan refinancing at Manchester United and involved supporters displaying decorative scarves as a symbol of dissatisfaction.

<sup>ii</sup> This figure can be evidenced by the fact that just one of the protest vessels connected to the club, the Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST), had 187,314 members on 25 October 2012 (see <http://action.joinmust.org/index.php/blog> for current membership figures).

<sup>iii</sup> Although it must be noted that this potential value has yet to be realised, despite ongoing debates relating to potential outcomes from the 'Football Governance' inquiry.

<sup>iv</sup> The occupations of only 9 of the 11 were announced and included a financial advisor, the founding manager of a multi-million pound I.T. solutions company, an owner of a food manufacturing firm, the manager of the Apollo Theatre in Manchester, a local government officer and a solicitor (see *Manchester Evening News* 2005).

<sup>v</sup> These details are important for methodological context in this article but are not its substantive focus. More on these details will be provided in papers that are currently under development.

<sup>vi</sup> This can be found at: <http://fcumforum.org.uk/mainforum/index.php>. See Millward (2008) for a critical appraisal of the uses of Internet forum-generated data in the context of football fandom.

<sup>vii</sup> This point is tentatively made, given that – much like other members of the Chicago School – Blumer's method was informed by detailed and careful participant observation and ethnographic work (Deegan 2007). Indeed, it must also be pointed out that Blumer et. al's (1990) posthumous *Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change* book made clear a deep and lengthy engagement with labor-management conflicts and disputes and a lead role in hundreds of labor arbitration cases, which surely informed his views on collective behaviour.

<sup>viii</sup> The manifesto can be found at <http://www.fc-utd.co.uk/manifesto.php>

<sup>ix</sup> Of course, an alternative reading of this may suggest that Blumer's theory might guide us to where social processes of mobilization within F.C. United have, for whatever reason, 'failed'. In this reading, the introduction of inappropriate tactics, a failure of leadership, the waning of charisma, might be relevant in the understanding of diminishing matchday attendances. However, we have decided not to pursue this argument in the context of this article as to do this, we would have to empirically focus on those who no longer attend matches.